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MayDay Colloquium 24: The Aims of Music Education



David J. Elliott
Editor

On June 20, 2012, Professor John Kratus welcomed the MayDay Group to Michigan State University for **Colloquium 24: The Aims of Music Education**. On behalf of all members of the Mayday Group, I wish to extend my deepest gratitude to Professor Kratus and his colleagues at Michigan State for their extremely gracious and thoughtful hospitality and for the very hard work they invested in preparing this outstanding event.

In his Call for Papers, Professor Kratus wrote:

In recent years music educators have reexamined their curricula and teaching practices to adjust to the current needs of a diverse population of students living in a digital world. As such, questions of “what” should music educators teach and “how” should they teach it have been the focus of healthy debate. A more fundamental question that has received little attention of late is: “why” is music education of value? Do changing times necessitate changing aims for music education? Is the music education profession smarter than “music makes you smarter”? Taking the long view, what is it that music educators are trying to accomplish?

Based on the Call for Papers, Colloquium presentations pivoted on four themes:

- The musical aims of music education (e.g., new and emerging definitions of musicianship; music engagements across the lifespan; types of musical knowledge; development of musical skills, knowledge, and dispositions);
- The intrapersonal aims of music education (e.g., musical identity; self-efficacy; flow; joy; enhancement of intelligence and other academic/personal traits);
- The interpersonal aims of music education (e.g., connection to others; connection to culture(s); artistic citizenship); and
- The social aims of music education (e.g. social justice; inclusion; democratic practices; cross-cultural understanding).

As Kratus noted in his CFP, questions concerning “the whys” of music and music education are at the heart of what we must conceptualize and operationalize. However, many obstructions block our path to formulating logical and justifiable answers.

One of the most pernicious obstructions to thinking critically, pragmatically, and proactively about the natures and values of music and music education in today's world is the neoliberal "educational reform" movement. Among the many destructive consequences of neoliberalist policies during the last twenty years are the demise of "public and community good" and the rise of virulent individualism and frenzied capitalism. As Philip Mirowski (2013) explains, neoliberals have largely succeeded in camouflaging their agenda as "progress" and a "natural and inexorable state of mankind." Clearly, however, neoliberal reform is actually a right-wing movement driven by economic and political fundamentalists who aim to erase "distinctions among the state, society, and the market" and subordinate society to the market (Mirowski 2013).

As a result, says Henry Giroux (2012), "the democratic mission of public education is under assault by a conservative right-wing reform culture in which students are viewed as human capital in schools that are to be administered by market-driven forces." Schools and universities are being reconceived, reconfigured, and branded as businesses and corporations. In fact, corporate leaders, local business leaders, and hedge fund managers in the United States "now sit on school boards across the country doing everything in their power to eliminate public schools and punish unionized teachers who do not support" the privatization of public schools, evaluation processes, curriculum development, and so forth. Michael Apple (2001) encapsulates the problem: "For all too many of the pundits, politicians, corporate leaders, and others, education is a business and should be treated no differently than any other business" (1-2).

Thus, "managers" trained in accordance with "best business practices" are taking over the administration of American public schools. Educative school administrators are an endangered species. The egregious neoliberal premise is that education can only be "improved" by adopting and imposing on schools the corporate aims, techniques, and profit-driven measurements that dominate American business, which, of course, place no value on arts education because the arts are not financially valuable. In business-speak, music education has no "currency." School music cannot "turn a profit" in the long run; it's a bad "investment"; it won't produce "monetary dividends."

Suffice it to say that although it's reasonable to argue that education-via-schooling should prepare a nation's citizens to make a living, the serious deficit of the neoliberalist ideology is its one-dimensional perspective on education and human flourishing. Persons

desire and deserve opportunities to “make a life” as well as a living. As studies of the origins, evolution, and history of music demonstrate clearly, one of the primary ways people can and do “make a life” is by inter-subjectively making and listening (in a vast number of ways) to “their musics” and others’ musics. And among the primary ways music and educative music teaching and learning serve humanity is by empowering students’ personhood. By this I mean enabling the development of students’ character, identities, empathy, happiness, health and well-being, personal and social agency, and ethical dispositions to oppose all forms of oppression and injustice with and through critically reflective and creative music making.

But perhaps I’m wrong. Perhaps my proposals about the aims and values of music and music education are wrong-headed or outdated. Perhaps music education should conceive, shape, and align itself with 21st-century technological values and practices and/or corporate ideals. Perhaps the time has come to surrender to neoliberalism and music education advocates who aim to “re-form” and reframe music as an “academic subject” that can be measured in the same ways American schools test math and reading. For, as the realities of contemporary neoliberal schooling make clear, what gets tested is what gets taught.

Personally, I’m not willing to surrender. Having witnessed and “taught under” the oppressions of various ill-conceived psychological, philosophical, and political “reform” movements during the last fifty years, my gut tells me school-based neoliberalism is doomed to die its own death, sooner or later. In the meantime, and to follow Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner (1969), I argue that educative and ethical music educators should embrace “music teaching and teaching as a *subversive* activity,” which, to me, should aim to empower students’ full flourishing *in and through* music making and listening of all kinds. Of course I’m not alone in my unwillingness to surrender and my commitment to resist and subvert the forces of neoliberalist education. The brilliant books, articles, blogs, and online lectures of (for example) Diane Ravitch, Nel Noddings, Deborah Meier, Alfie Kohn, Henry Giroux, Peter McLaren, and, in music education, Thomas Regelski, Wayne Bowman, Paul Woodford, Scott Goble and many others are at the forefront of this resistance.

As well as reinforcing Kratus’s call to continuously probe, penetrate, problematize, and debate why we do what we do, the preceding thoughts serve as a preface to another facet of Colloquium 24: namely, The MayDay Group’s efforts to redefine the mission of its membership and of music education and community music overall. More specifically, the last phase of Colloquium 24 was a continuation of discussions and debates that began in 2011, in

Salt Lake City, Utah. At Colloquium 23, a committee was formed to revisit The MayDay Group's "Action Ideals." The charge of Colloquium 23 was to re-think and revise the fundamental premises and pragmatic recommendations of the action ideals in relation to the educational and social realities of the 21st-century.

Of course this was not the first time the MayDay Group has reflected critically on and re-formulated its action ideals. In the case of Colloquium 23, however, a new committee and a new generation of music educators and scholars—Brent Talbot, Thomas Malone, Vincent Cee, and Ben Hawkins—volunteered to assume this responsibility. Months later, the first draft of the revised action ideals was sent to the MayDay membership for consideration. Deborah Bradley, David Elliott, Hildegard Froelich, Terry Gates, Marie McCarthy, and Thomas Regelski offered further suggestions and revisions. The MayDay Group Steering Committee and individual members worldwide provided further input and assistance.

At our Michigan State Colloquium, paper presenters, music educators, and graduate students came together to discuss and workshop the final draft of the new action ideals. This conversation and workshop led to fine-tuning answers to many fundamental questions, including variations on conceptions of the who, why, what, how, where, when, "and more" of music education and community music. Additionally, Danny Bakan, Richard Colwell, William Pinar, Karen Salvador, and Aaron Wolf further contributed important concepts to the project.

In addition to the cogency of the revised action ideals that resulted from the hard work and debates within the main committee, and between the committee and a very broad range of MayDay members worldwide, one of the most heartening outcomes of these efforts is the fact that a whole new generation of brilliant and committed young scholars and teachers have stepped forward to join, continue, and amend the efforts and premises of the original founders and foundations of The Mayday Group. Thus, I urge you to consider the results of our members' two-year, global dialogue, which is available at this site:

<http://www.maydaygroup.org/php/resources/general/actionforchange2.pdf>

This issue of *ACT* includes five papers from Colloquium 24 as presented by J. Scott Goble, Marissa Silverman, Lauren Kapalka Richerme, Brent Talbot, and Vincent Bates. Each author addresses different aspects of contemporary "aims debates" in music education and offers creative perspectives on why, what, how, and where we do what we do. I wish to express my gratitude to each author for investing the considerable time and effort required to

prepare, present, and discuss their paper for/with colleagues at Colloquium 24.

J. Scott Goble focuses on “What music?” is appropriate in/for school music programs. Goble’s motivation for confronting this topic lies in the numerous personal, social, musical, and curricular challenges this question raises for music educators on a daily basis.

As most readers know, Christopher Small addressed this topic in a presentation he delivered at the 1990 MENC conference: “Whose music do we teach, anyway?” Unlike Small, however, Goble addresses the issue by considering “When human beings sing, what do we sing about?” Through a consideration of the various factors that influence musicking, past and present, Goble suggests musicking is best understood in relation to its social worlds. Given that teachers and students engage in the musicking of particular musical practices at particular times and in specific places, the meanings and appropriations of different musical practices shift with shifts in who, when, and where different students make and listen to different musics. Thus, curricular decisions should be related to the social worlds of musicking as they fit in the communities of the people teachers seek to instruct.

Also, Goble suggests that teachers help students understand the stories of different forms of musicking: “Where did it come from? For whom is it meaningful? What is it for?” For Goble, music education is not about musical skill development for the sake of skill development. Instead, music education is for welcoming teachers and students into musical worlds where musical meaning-making emerges. He writes: “Pragmatist philosophy-based educational practices expand instruction in music education to include *not only* the development of musical performance skills ... *but also* include instruction and experiences foregrounding the personal, social and political *effects* of particular musical practices in their respective historical and cultural contexts that can serve to raise students’ understanding (and audiences’ awareness) of the vital importance of musical engagement in human life.”

Marissa Silverman considers the aims of music education from a completely different perspective. She steps back from curricular issues to develop a detailed perspective on a key aspect of personhood that often gets lost in the theory and practice of music education: the nature of “meaningfulness.” Although meaningfulness is a topic that has drawn the attention of mainstream philosophers for centuries, music education philosophers have rarely given the topic full consideration, let alone made connections between meaningfulness and the aims of music education. Thus, Silverman re-examines the nature of “meaningfulness” in life and why it matters. In doing so, she draws extensively on the recent

work of philosopher Susan Wolf, among others. The upshot of her analyses is Silverman's proposal that we expand the ways in which we conceive our mission(s) and enrich the meaningfulness of student music making and listeners.

To **Lauren Kapalka Richerme**, music education is lost. For Richerme, being lost is both a metaphor and a reality. Through the lenses of Deleuze and Guattari, Richerme asks music educators to take notice of how lost we really are. She explains that because we are simultaneously parts of local and global worlds (i.e., due to technological advances that connect everyone everywhere), we are actually nomads who are not really connected to much of anything. Richerme believes that music education is in a "glocalized" (glocalized being a combination of two words: global and localized) world that may require us to embrace Deleuze and Guattari's notions of striated space and smooth space, global structures and local variations, authorship and being authored. She suggests that music educators might begin to remedy their disorientation by mapping and then connecting to their own local and global musical surroundings.

Notably, while Richerme adapts Robertson's (1995) "glocalized" terminology, she carefully and rightfully avoids its origins in Japanese business practices and corporate commerce overall. Indeed, one root of "glocalized" is connected to the Japanese word "dochauka," which originally referred to processes of shaping farming techniques in relation to local circumstances. When Japanese businesses extended the practices associated with this term, the meaning of glocalize expanded to include marketing strategies that branded and targeted products in ways that were both global, and local in their appeal.

As Richerme notes, Robertson modified the term glocalize for use in sociology. Robertson explains that glocalization is "the tailoring and advertising of goods and services on a global or near global basis to increasingly differentiated local and particular markets" (28). The term took on new life when Canadian sociologists Barry Wellman and Keith Hampton (1999) reinforced its import:

Most are wired into the home and the workplace. This physically roots computer users to sit in front of their computers in their households, neighborhoods, and workplaces. We are now investigating if the rooted nature of net surfing actually encourages people to spend more time in their homes, reorganize their lives to be more involved with household members, and become more invested in their neighborhoods. It is the possibility of a "glocalization" of community that encourages the reappearance of the civic society that has been argued to be in decline throughout the western world. We call this process "*glocalization*": the combination of global connectivity and local activity. (651)

When Zygmunt Bauman addressed this concept, the globalized business world was in full swing and the internet was central to most global business transactions. Thus, Bauman (1998) writes that “Glocalization is first and foremost a redistribution of privileges and deprivations, of wealth and poverty, of resources and impotence, of power and powerlessness, of freedom and constraint. It is, one may say, a process of world-wide *restratification*, in the course of which a new world-wide socio-cultural self-reproducing hierarchy is put together ... What is free choice for some is cruel fate for some others” (43). Again, while Richerme is careful to reformulate and reapply positively the meanings and implications of glocalization, the potential dangers of this concept (as identified by Bauman) must not be forgotten.

Interestingly, Richerme’s approach to and reconceptualization of glocalization foreshadows some aspects of Bates’s paper (see below). That is, Richerme suggests that glocalized understandings may yield a sense of sustainability, but only if music educators are willing to ensure the integrity of local “goods” (i.e. musicking).

Brent Talbot addresses the intrapersonal aims of music education with specific emphasis on musical identity. For Talbot, “Who am I?” is engrained, shaped, and experienced by the “contexts, relationships, and activities in which people are most deeply invested.” Thus, he believes that music education should have mechanisms and activities in place that can: explore the intersecting identities found in sites for music learning; consider and expand upon on students and teachers individual and collective experiences; and encourage students to challenge stereotypes of musical and personal differences and similarities. Talbot reports on his classroom investigations of preservice teachers’ musical identities, as well as the mechanisms and activities that enabled him to garner deeper understandings of students at the secondary and collegiate levels. As Talbot says, knowing, embracing, and sharing in our students’ musical identities “helps foster an environment where knowledge is co-constructed and shared, and active dialogue and inquiry are encouraged.”

In “Music Education Unplugged,” **Vincent Bates** proposes an agrarian vision of music education that underscores fundamental, “down-to-earth” principles for human actions and interactions. For Bates, an agrarian world-view encourages mass participation (“y’all come”)—musicing is free and available to all and it is not treated as a commodity—rather than the notion that “only the talented” are invited or permitted to participate. Additionally,

Bates highlights the ways in which musical agrarianism promotes the values of musical actions in everyday living.

In an agrarian-minded society, says Bates, local musical traditions and practices are central and, typically, small, informal gatherings in natural settings. In keeping with agrarian do-it-yourself traditions, popular musics are appropriated for local and individual performances and participation. Music teaching and learning activities aim to facilitate the everyday musical lives and overall well-being of individuals, families, and communities.

In addition to the above, and at the heart of Bates's vision, is the concept of *sustainability*. Sustainability is of utmost importance in agrarianism. How do we create a sustainable vision for music education? Compare the words of Wendell Berry (2012) with Bates's concept of musical-agrarian sustainability:

No doubt there always will be some people willing to do anything at all that is economically or technologically possible, who look upon the world and its creatures without affection and therefore as exploitable without limit. Against that limitlessness, in which we foresee assuredly our ruin, we have only our ancient effort to define ourselves as human and humane. But this ages-long, imperfect, unendable attempt, with its magnificent record, we have virtually disowned by assigning it to the ever more subordinate set of school subjects we call "arts and humanities" or, for short, "culture." Culture, so isolated, is seen either as a dead-end academic profession or as a mainly useless acquisition to be displayed and appreciated "for its own sake." This definition of culture as "high culture" actually debases it, as it debases also the presumably low culture that is excluded: the arts, for example, of land use, life support, healing, housekeeping, homemaking.

How could/would music teaching and learning shift if we re-viewed it through the lens of down-to-earth, agrarian sustainability and community-oriented values such as mass participation, well-being, and home-making?

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