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Electronic Article

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> *Liminality, marginality, and…inferiority…provide men [sic] with a set of templates,*
> *models, or paradigms which, at one level, [allow for] periodical reclassifications of*
> *reality…and man's relationship to society, nature, and culture. But they are more*
> *than mere cognitive classifications, since they incite men to action as well as thought.*
>   (Turner 1974, 83)

As I consider the challenges that exist in urban school settings, I am drawn to the fact that in the current educational system in the United States, great emphasis is placed on acquisition of knowledge and intellectual understanding as "an initiation into a largely determinate and fixed culture" (Conroy 2004, 68). It is this central culture that has failed to come to terms and deal effectively with difference. While our student populations become increasingly diverse, school music programs remain centered around a Western European art music tradition. In spite of the inclusion of multicultural musics, often superficially implemented (Abril 2009, Goetze 2000), the largely determinate and fixed culture in school music programs, including urban settings, does not typically encourage discourse that ventures into how those programs operate under assumptions generated by the dominant white middle-class culture. Giroux (1996) argues that contemporary education approaches have failed because of the lack of

> . . . any attempt to either critique forms of European and American culture that situate
> difference in the structures of domination or reconstruct discourse of race and
> ethnicity in a theory of difference which highlights questions of equality, justice and
> liberty as part of the ongoing democratic struggle. Multiculturalism is generally about
> otherness, but is written in ways in which the dominating aspects of white culture are
> not called into question and the oppositional potential of difference as a site of
> struggle is muted. (117)

Music classrooms are often the primary locations for the inclusion of multicultural content in the form of world musics. These, however, are often presented in ways that represent "otherness" without raising critical questions concerning equality, social justice, the oppressed, democracy, reciprocity, and the valuing of difference. Legette (2003) examined the attitudes, values, and practices of music educators concerning multicultural music education and concludes that is has become synonymous with repertoire. Even though his

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study centered on "Multicultural Music Education," the survey questions focused on the inclusion of "multicultural" repertoire. The results of the study determined the following: 1) most of the respondents felt prepared and comfortable including multicultural repertoire; 2) 99% of the respondents felt this repertoire should be included; 3) most of the respondents did not include multicultural repertoire in their performances; and 4) there are multiple reasons why music teachers do not include multicultural repertoire.

The author included recommendations for undergraduate programs: "Effective multicultural training at the pre-service level requires an infusion of multicultural content throughout the college curriculum as well as effective teacher modeling for integrating multicultural practices into school classrooms" (59). The outcome of multicultural music education, in this instance, the inclusion of repertoire with no critical discourse, according to the researcher is that "given the extent of the many social problems facing our youth in today's schools, multicultural music education may prove to be a positive step towards offering a viable solution" (59). How can multicultural music education that focuses solely on the repertoire of "others," and allows little opportunity for critical discourse, solve problematic issues?

Charlene Morton (2001) addresses this issue and calls for a more critical approach to multicultural music education: "I am proposing that music educators (and students) could more fully realize the potential of multicultural education in general by attending to the ethical tensions and socio-political contradictions manifested in cultural perspectives and hierarchies" (33). She cites sociologist and educator, Stephen May (1999):

> Over the years, multicultural education has promised much and delivered little. Since its popularization in the late 1960s and early 1970s, proponents have argued that multicultural education, and the associated notion of cultural pluralism, can accomplish all manner of things. A central claim has been that multicultural education can foster greater cultural interaction, interchange and harmony, both in schools and beyond. It has also regularly been touted as the best educational means of addressing and redressing long-standing patterns of differential achievement for minority students. The result has been a proliferating academic debate on multiculturalism over the last 30 years and a burgeoning multicultural education industry in curricular and resource development (although, the two have seldom actually informed each other)… it has had a largely negligible impact . . . on the life *chances* of minority students, the racialized attitudes of majority students, the inherent monoculturalism of school practice, and the wider processes of power relations and inequality which underpin all these. (1)

As Legette's study indicates, many music educators choose to address cultural diversity by including varying repertoire, commonly taking the "form of arrangements based

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on traditional folk tunes or exotic musical fantasies of a foreign land" (Abril 2009, 78). Teachers also endeavor to include historical and cultural contexts. While these experiences might satisfy curricular goals and state multicultural requirements, they typically do not address issues of real cultural understanding, otherness, agency or cultural critique. Can the inclusion of multicultural repertoire, even when placed in historical and cultural contexts, help middle-class, White music instructors and their urban students better understand cultural others and themselves, much less allow for transformation?

If we make the assumption that schools are public places whose function is "to nurture and promote the flourishing of both individual and community" (Conroy 2004, 73), then we must look beyond accountability, assessment, curricular goals and the normative structured existence of schooling in the context of the dominant culture. An approach to education, in Conroy's terms, would recognize the importance of perspectives, ideas, insights, and possibilities, as well as the spaces in which these attributes could be nurtured. The success of this approach would be determined by the ways in which relationships and community could be developed and sustained. Turner's conception of liminal space provides an entry point to look beyond the given and to create opportunities to examine, critique, and challenge the assumptions inherent in many music programs. Building upon his theory of liminality as a place that is "ambiguous, neither here or there, betwixt and between all fixed points of classification" (Turner 1974, 232), we might use this framework to create a place in which differing cultures, ideals, and values could meet, potentially generating relationships and community. Urban settings are often the meeting ground for dramatic cultural clashes given that music teachers often fit the typical profile of White, middle class, and female and often have few commonalities with their urban students.

Difference as the Space Between

Why do urban music classrooms provide unique opportunities for exploring the concept of liminality? As opposed to suburban settings where the music teacher and the students often share commonalities in the context of socio-economic level, cultural norms, vocabulary, modes of communication, and often race and ethnicity, in the urban classroom the teacher and students often share few commonalities. Nonverbal communication differs, backgrounds differ, personal histories differ, often greatly. The music teacher is in a place where what he or she has been taught most likely "does not work;" where student behaviors are often

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misinterpreted and thus create conflicts; where the teacher most often has no concept of students' lives away from school. The students find themselves in a place where they are expected to abide by cultural norms that are different from what they experience outside of school; where their vocabulary or vernacular is considered inappropriate; where they are often viewed as intellectually inferior; and where their values and preferences are not honored by teachers and administrators. In each of these cases, both music teachers and students are in places that are ambiguous, that are unlike their lived worlds. They enter this space every day and then leave it as they retreat to their "normal" lives. This makes music classrooms in urban settings liminal spaces in and of themselves, and ideal locations for thinking about culture and interpersonal interactions in completely different ways. The teacher is considered "other" by the students and the students are considered "other" by the teacher.

Indeed, if we think of the music classroom as a "betwixt and between" space intersecting the teacher's world and the student's world—a space where both teacher and student recognize their commonalities in "otherness"—then music can be the critical catalyst for exploring those commonalities. In practice this might mean to make clear and present, how repertoire chosen from the teacher's sense of what is culturally mainstream can be compared to what music students consider "normal." Presented simply, liminal spaces make available for decoding how, for example, a piece of classical music might be compared to a Tejano or Conjunto piece, when both selections express the against-the-grain-ess of struggle. Or how looking at particular historical, social and political frames can help us to develop understandings that bring coherence to how different traditions come to represent or disrupt norms and musical practices.

In this paper, I explore the concept of liminality in the context of urban music education programs and examine its importance from the standpoint of both the music teacher and the student. Music teachers who work in urban settings often dwell in liminal situations in which their roles are ambiguous and uncertain. Students in urban school settings might exist outside of their normal musical, social and cultural structures. Thus, urban settings provide a particularly powerful place of liminality where teachers and students might discover alternative ways to build relationships and communities.

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Characterizing Urban and Liminality

I acknowledge that the terms urban school and urban musics often result in stereotypical images that can be connected to race and ethnicity, and therefore should be challenged. However significant to any analysis, racial and ethnic demographics in urban schools might vary widely. Class distinction—particularly in the form of poverty—is more often than not a common factor in urban schools. Thus, dramatic differences in socio-economic levels between students and teachers alone create liminal spaces. Naturally, these are amplified by other cultural differences including race, ethnicity, language spoken, family structure and support, parents' levels of education, as well as verbal and non-verbal communication characteristics. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (1996), urban children were more than twice as likely to be living in poverty than students in suburban locations. Consequently, we need to consider the manner in which economic levels impact environmental characteristics and behaviors that might result in less than desirable student outcomes.[1]

Of course, issues of poverty and cultural difference exist in virtually every school, but are often more evident in urban settings. Furthermore, even the use of these and other terms—such as at-risk, inner-city, multicultural, and urban itself—carry with them assumptions based on the misconception that "culture itself is fixed or constant" (Emmanuel 2006, 15). Teachers, students, and schools all have complex cultural underpinnings that are constantly in flux and require negotiation. Each of these terms and the beliefs and attitudes that surround them must be examined critically. The concept of cultural identity, in this case, urban culture, is much too reductionist to be viewed as a given.

Regardless of this complexity, educators in general continue to fit the profile of white, middle-class, and female. Given the large populations of students in urban schools that differ from this profile, it is important that music teachers explore liminal spaces that might exist in order to examine their "otherness." As Benedict (2006) points out,

> were each of us… to take on this task of seeing ourselves as 'other' (or, more importantly, realizing that there is no 'other'), we might begin to see the ways in which we take for granted our ability to move in and out of the urban setting with ease. (5)

Considering the possibility of liminal spaces in our urban music classrooms might provide an opportunity for this to occur.

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Brown (2007) notes music scholars and educators use the word liminality in a variety of ways and in a variety of situations. While these uses have sometimes been contradictory, the tensions produced by differences of thought concerning liminality have resulted in fertile ground for developing new ways of thinking concerning the place of musicians in society as performers and educators.

There is no need in this discussion to describe the complex environment of the urban school setting. From Kozol's *Savage Inequalities* (1991) through Maxine Greene's (2000) call for the release of imagination in marginalized populations to the essays in Anyon's and Dumas' text on critical social theory (2009), the issues, problems, challenges, and rewards present in urban educational contexts have been well documented. Also well explored have been issues of teacher preparation concerning working with culturally diverse populations (Ladson-Billings 2006, Emmanuel 2002). In the field of music education, urban issues have been addressed in Frierson-Campbell's two volumes, *Teaching Music in the Urban Classrooms* (2006). For this paper, I consider urban settings to be culturally complex scenes of ambiguity in which cultural groups collide, intertwine, and merge into new amalgams. I also consider urban settings to be places that are musically rich, providing opportunity for music teachers to learn about musics not necessarily valued in their music educator world. These sites provide opportunities for their students to be the musical expert in sharing their knowledge in what can be a reciprocal exchange of ideas, values, and culture.

Musics, much like economics, politics, and social structures, can serve as concrete elements that are seen as markers of otherness. While many genres might function in such terms, my own experience has been with mariachi music in both public school and university settings. The rapid growth of the Mexican-American population and the vital role of mariachi in those communities might indicate a strong need for mariachi programs in public schools. Regardless, this particular genre continues to serve as an indicator of otherness. Stereotypical perceptions of mariachi exist that often identify the music and musicians as less-than, deficient in musicianship, lacking in formal training, and consequently not acceptable within the traditional structure of band, choir, and orchestra programs. However, as much as mariachi might indicate otherness to a music educator of Anglo background, that teacher's own music might also indicate otherness to his or her Mexican-American students. Exploring the role of liminality in the context of mutual outsider-ness and as a place where social status

and traditional power roles might be leveled is therefore not only appropriate as a pedagogical goal, but significant as a possibility for meaningful classroom interaction.

Liminality

Victor Turner, building on the work of Arnold van Gennep (1960), developed the theory of liminality in the late 1960s by analyzing the rites of passage within tribal systems. Turner (1974) identified liminality as a phase in which an "initiand" experiences an "inbetweenness," a place that is "ambiguous, neither here nor there, betwixt and between all fixed points of classification" (232). Liminality has served as a theoretical basis for numerous studies examining multiple issues: rituals and ceremonies in college and university culture (Manning 2000); dialogue between teacher and students (O'Neill 1989); the liminal dimensions of student resistance to the formal culture of schooling (Anfara 1995); the ambiguities in Balinese dance (Siegel 1991); issues of power in secondary schools (Howard & Kennedy 2006); and the social status of performing musicians (Brown 2007). The use of liminality in educational and musical settings when examining spaces of ambiguity and transition can provide new insights in the context of music teaching and learning education. Researchers have examined liminality in the context of student teaching and beginning teaching where individuals are caught between the acquisition of theories concerning teaching and learning and putting those theories into practice. Pierce (2007), for example, conducted an ethnographic study that explored the perspectives of four beginning teachers caught in the liminal place of induction into a new career. They struggled with their emerging professional identities, their insecurities, their vulnerabilities and longing for community. In much the same way, music educators who have only experienced suburban settings and who have graduated from traditional music education programs find themselves seen as the "outsider" and struggle with the professional identity instilled in them during their degree programs—an identity that seems out of place in an urban setting (Benham 2003).

Liminality as described by Brown (2007) involves a "blurring and crossing of thresholds and boundaries; the breakdown of historically fixed categories; the exposure of ambiguities; the fluidity and hybridity of identities; play and absurdity; and uncertainty" (5). For the context of this paper, I look at the community that might possibly exist within the liminal space of the urban music classroom, whose members include the teacher and students. The formation of this potential community would be dependent on the recognition by both

teacher and the students of how their static perceptions of themselves could begin to morph and blur as they navigate and embrace ambiguity as a reality of any classroom interaction.

I define liminality as Conroy (2004) does, that is, as

a metaphor which points to a space that is neither inside or outside but lies at the threshold of our social, political, cultural and educational spaces…. Liminality may offer the possibility of deliberately displacing our understandings, beliefs and ideals outside the realm of others, or indeed our own, socio-psychological containment in order to view them afresh. (7)

This space for both the teacher and students is often unlike their real, lived worlds. Yet, they enter and exit this liminal space every day. If we think of school as having the capacity to be seen as a liminal space—a juncture between teachers and urban students' worlds—then we might be compelled to think about culture and interpersonal interactions in different ways; focusing not on teacher/students as an incompatible dyad.

But while the urban music classroom might be such a place, both teachers and students often remain attached to their own social and cultural centers; this can create tensions nascent of the political environment of schooling and the cultural differences between members. It becomes vital then to recognize these cultural differences, and in a way, to embrace 'otherness' as a quality that belongs to teachers and students alike. To the urban students, the teacher may seem as "other" and to the music teacher, the students seem as "other." If music educators in urban settings can begin to view themselves also as the "other," then it is possible that perceptions of cultural centrality might be challenged. "The real need" in other words, "is not to see our students or ourselves as outsiders, but rather to 'come to see that everybody is cultural and multicultural' (Erickson in Benedict 2006, 10)."

According to Donnan and Wilson (1999), those "on the border or at the threshold perceive culture, social relations, and politics quite differently from those at the center… border people may share a sense of belonging, and thus have much in common with each other that distinguishes them from the residents of other places…"(79). It is possible, and perhaps common, for the music teacher to feel as an outsider in the urban setting and for the urban student to feel as an outsider in the public school music setting. If both of these groups could recognize their commonality as outsiders, then relationships and community could possibly begin to be re-imagined. As Conroy (2004) states, "awareness of one's own strangeness can emerge through the occupation of the liminal position" (60). Certainly the experience of feeling as an outsider might not manifest itself to all urban teachers. However, I

am operating under the assumption that teachers and students in urban schools, by and large, are culturally bound in diverse and divergent ways, and this can create varied forms of conflict. An example from a public school music setting in urban Detroit exemplifies this concept.

The setting was an elementary public school music classroom in the 'Mexicantown' area of downtown Detroit where residents are mostly of Hispanic background. At the end of every 4th grade class the teacher, a bona fide risk-taker, allowed one student to share musics that were important to him or her, typically bringing a recording to be played for the group. On one occasion, a young girl volunteered to share a piece, which the teacher had not previewed, presenting an African-American gospel song that the student, a biracial African American and Caucasian, sang in her church. As the piece played, she signed the words as she had learned to do for deaf members in her congregation. The Hispanic students, being predominantly Catholic, expressed they had never heard the piece before and had never seen sign language performed with a song. The teacher took this opportunity to talk about differences, how the students celebrated their faith in different ways, how music in churches could be quite diverse, and how wonderful it would be to visit each other's churches to experience that difference.

It did not appear to me at all that this young girl felt like an outsider, but rather considered it a privilege to share her music. The students discussed how they might feel awkward or uncomfortable visiting a church that was unfamiliar, how they might feel like an outsider if they did not know what was the "right thing to do" during the service. Of course, it was not merely the sharing of the music that was pivotal, but the space created so that students could feel free and safe to discuss the music and its use. An environment of trust and the affordance of time in the classroom were key elements in facilitating—indeed making possible—this type of conversation.

We can look at this example in terms of the choices music teachers might make in their urban classrooms. If we accept the assumption that many urban music classrooms are potential liminal spaces, then it is the responsibility of the teacher to navigate those spaces and aid students to do so as well. This means the teacher first has to recognize the potential of a "border" in which both teacher and student can meet and recognize their commonalities as a type of outsider in each other's eyes. The teacher as outsider can create a space in which boundaries might be crossed and re-crossed, a space in which there is "temporary ambiguity,

fluidity, and statuslessness, defined by the brief lifting of normal social rules, and, more significantly, the momentary leveling of social ranks and statuses and the reversal of high–low power relations through ritual and/or play" (Brown 2007, 21). Teachers can then create learning spaces where the ambiguities of who we are can be the stepping stone for careful and critical consideration of that which is foreign; that which I or others define as oppositional to who I am. Conroy (2004) discusses liminality as pedagogy and describes how teachers might introduce their students to that which is marginal, to experiences, insights and perspectives that stand outside the accepted way of seeing the world. The above story demonstrates what he would refer to as the openness of possibility, a pedagogy of spontaneity.

In recognizing their differences, in embracing their mutual sense of "otherness," these students and their teacher created a common bond that resulted in healthy curiosity and mutual respect. It is therefore troublesome that the structured space of the contemporary classroom and the emphasis on accountability and assessment—and in the music world, festival scores and ratings—often prevent teachers from seeing, let alone acting on, the liminal possibilities that exist in the classroom. Even though the students were certainly attached to their own cultural centers, this insightful and open-minded teacher created a liminal space in which they recognized the commonality in their difference. This recognition is key in building relationships and community.

Relationships and the Formation of Community

I would also like to explore other ways to think about liminality, expanding beyond a transitional phase such as the one described by Turner, into a space in which music teachers and students might develop a shared sense of belonging—discovering their possible commonalities, and building relationships and communities as those students did in Detroit. I acknowledge here the difficulties inherent in the use of the word community. It is important, as Froehlich (2009) notes, to identify both the "we" and the "they" concerning building community within urban music programs. Do these participants share enough in common to move toward understanding? The participants in urban school settings represent

> diverse social groups whose lifestyles, expectations, and experiences make it difficult
> to connect to each other, whether because of restraints imposed by time, money, or
> locale. Therefore, finding ways and means to get individuals of different social
> worlds together may pose one of the greatest challenges. (Froehlich 2009, 91)

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The development of relationships and community in urban music classrooms is both challenging and problematic because it, like education in general, "functions as a socially and politically established set of centripetal arrangements designed to hold as many individuals and groups as possible to what is deemed the middle ground or center of public, political and economic life" (Conroy 2004, 20). The pedagogical purpose then becomes to entrain as many individuals as possible to contribute to what is in the best educational interest of the population represented. Anything that would contradict, inhibit, or threaten what is considered to be central to the majority would be suppressed. This typically results in the occlusion of innovation, creativity, invention, differences, and ultimately in suppression of the voice of the "other." Maxine Greene (1988) notes,

> rather than being challenged to attend to the actuality of their lived lives, students are urged to attend to what is 'given' in the outside world—whether in the form of 'high technology' or the information presumably required for what is called 'cultural literacy.' There is, in consequence, an implicit encouragement of the tendency to accede to the given, to view what exists around us as an objective 'reality,' impervious to individual interpretations.
> (7)

In spite of challenges, however, the liminal spaces in music classrooms, particularly in urban settings, provide places for potential expression of lived experiences; especially given this might be a space where cultures can meet without the limiting power of our "normal" social, cultural and politic structures.

It is within the liminal space where socially regulated constraints and normal roles might not apply, where objective "realities" might be set aside, where boundaries become blurred and communities can be nurtured.

> The attributes of liminality or liminal *personae* ("threshold people") are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. (Turner 1969, 95)

When we consider the silenced voices of any student who is marginalized—and urban schools certainly have their numbers of marginalized students—and teachers who enter and exit urban school settings every day to return to their "normal" lives, it becomes vital that we recognize the possibilities that exist within these spaces. While teachers and students maintain largely culturally segregated lives, the music classroom might be a space where they could rub shoulders and effect a suspended normality, a coming together. This would mean that schooling in urban locations could be a place where what happens at the center of the

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teacher's world and what happens at the center of the students' world might possibly be minimized, and assumptions regarding what is "normal" examined.

For example, I might consider the "normal" ways that I express myself musically as a middle-class, white female, brought up in the Western European Art Music tradition. I might also consider the "normal" ways of musical expression that were taught in my formal educative experiences, particularly as they were focused on expressions that would result in aesthetic experiences based upon listening to music that has been deemed great and of value. As a consequence, when I as a young music teacher I encountered students that were predominantly African-American, I was brought to recognize that my sense of normal was quite different from theirs. Later, as a sojourner into the world of mariachi, I continually encountered performance practices that challenged my concept of normality.

In a mariachi performance the audience is expected to participate by joining in singing familiar lyrics, by shouting exclamations (gritos) showing their approval, and by singing solos with the ensemble. The members are expected to interact with the audience, encouraging the audience behavior, and performing in accordance with audience responses. After initially experiencing an uncomfortable ambiguity, I slowly realized the need to suspend my "normality"—to enter a space of liminality—redirecting my views of myself as the expert and allowing my Mexican-American students to educate me as to what is appropriate within the context of mariachi. This setting created a space for mutual respect as we acknowledged our differences.

The exploration of liminal spaces and their possibilities are both challenging and problematic. The relationships and communities that are possible in liminal settings cannot begin to emerge unless the members move toward reciprocity and mutual respect. Self-examination and an understanding of how we impact our students—even if unknowingly—are necessary elements for building relationships and community. Froehlich's concept of "webs of interaction" can be applied here, for the network that is formed in urban music classrooms by the teacher and the students is made up of many empirical selves that beg to be explored in order to understand our place in the whole:

> Each of us is a cog in such a system, our presence in one wheel essential to all other wheels even if we are unaware of all those connections. Thus a seeming disconnectedness of individuals in a "society of individuals" may basically be the result of unawareness of the ways our own roles in society may impact others. (Froehlich 2009, 100)

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Ultimately, this initial responsibility lies with the teacher. As with the music instructor in Detroit, one might often encounter many opportunities for examining otherness in oneself and other participants in the music classroom. It is when we can place our values side-by-side with those of our students in nonjudgmental ways that we can work toward mutual understanding, build relationships, and move toward community in the liminal space. When we engage in self-exploration and self-reflection, it is possible that "reaching out to the community becomes living purposefully and consciously in the community…" (Froehlich 2009, 104). Developing such a community would depend largely on promoting a sense of belonging which would be predicated on mutual respect, empathy and reciprocity in which all participants benefit, learning from one another in spite of holding different viewpoints and having other life experiences. It is in the movement toward this common ground that the normal structures and taken for granted perceptions begin to blur.

Loss of Status, Developing Communitas

For most of us, our lives in this "normal," structured society are routine and predictable because our social categories and our institutions are fixed with boundaries that create distinctions (Kamau 2002). These distinctions can often cause constraints:

> In differentiated normal society, people occupy statuses and play roles. Roles, in turn, require masks. The individual is not free to do as he or she wishes, because the social script has already been written. Sometimes a person may not even be free to think as he or she wishes. People are constrained by social regulations and segmented by statuses, and even leisure activities are predetermined by the individual's position in society. Because of such constrictions, no individual is able to make full use of the capacities he or she may have. (18)

However, in liminal spaces, the constraints that exist in our comfortable, predictable lives might be set aside, distinctions might present less weight and the possibility for community can emerge. In Conroy's (2004) words, "in this non-state, one cannot have authority over another or see oneself as superior—all are equally stripped of their badges and labels" (56).

> Turner and others have explored this loss of status. Conroy (2004) states

> accordingly, all traditional denominations of status disappear and those in the liminal state are equal in a manner unimaginable in that structured life, which, on either side, hems in the liminal. Further, in this state the standard laws and modes of conduct no longer pertain and the liminal personae are hedged around with ambiguity… what we get then from Turner is a conception of an ontological space where the normal rules of structure and status do not apply and where those in such a space may be drawn

together, for their time there, through a congruity of interest certainly but, more importantly, through their equality as people shorn of power, position and location. (55)

According to Turner, this loss of status often happens spontaneously in tribal ritual, but in the urban music setting, a liminal space would more than likely need to be intentionally directed, for as stated previously, the school setting—in any situation—is not one that typically allows for equality, shared power, and ambiguity.

This is not to say that the music classroom should be without any structure and that the teacher should give up all aspects of leadership or authority. In *I and Thou,* Martin Buber (1923) focuses on liminality as a way of *being* in the world in which interactions in this space are different from other kinds of actions that happen in day-to-day encounters with others and which occur in most of our normal lives. The intensity and lack of structure that exist in the liminal space would be impossible to sustain over time as it would, "fail to support some fairly basic features of survival and social engagement" (Conroy 2004, 56). However, these moments in and out of time, these liminal spaces that can occur in the midst of everyday life in the music classroom can inform that everyday life. If a music teacher is able to recognize a sense of strangeness in being in a liminal space, there is then the possibility of building upon the commonality of feeling like an outsider:

In this liminal space there arises the possibility that I might be able to acknowledge that I am always, to some extent, a stranger, even to myself. If I am, so to speak, a pilgrim—a stranger in a strange land—then there is always a bit left over, either that of which I am not aware, or to which in the normal course of my everyday transactions, I do not have access. If this strangeness is authentic then I have no difficulty in that knowledge and that of the other since it is the same condition within which I myself live. (Conroy 2004, 57)

Communitas is the word adopted by Turner (1969) in order to differentiate between a community of individuals and the glue that holds them together. When communitas is made manifest individuals drop their normal roles and statuses and social leveling might occur. This is not a utopian transformation, but concrete moments where equitable relations can be scaffolded and expanded. Although communitas might emerge spontaneously, as in tribal rites of passage, it cannot last for long periods without some kind of sustaining structure. Communitas can only occur when there is an equalization, a setting aside of the normal structure. But it must also be considered that to be without the security of one's status and usual structure might not always result in a comfortable space. Both the teacher and the students might be at risk in multiple contexts because each of them comes to this space

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without the protective layer of their normal social structure and status. Nevertheless, risk-taking is a necessary attribute for innovation, imagination, and challenging the status quo.

In my own career as a music educator in urban centers, I learned the value of taking such risks—often only after accidentally falling into them. I have experienced the benefits and challenges of setting aside my own *a priories* and the predetermined perspective of my status and expertise as an educator when, in desperation, I had to admit I was at a loss. After replacing a beloved long-term music teacher who had passed, I was faced with bringing together, in one month's time, a performance in an all-district choral concert. Never had I been more uncertain of who I was as an educator. My own preconceived categories of what should be taught and how were in the process of crumbling. What I knew to work before was not working in this setting. What I was taught to value musically in the context of elementary education had blurred to the point of being unrecognizable; I was "betwixt and between" cultural, social and musical worlds.

There was no established choir at this school, 98% of the student population was on free or reduced lunch, and certainly the repertoire I had access to was resisted and disputed by the students. Because I knew nothing else to do, I went to a teacher in the school who had been there a number of years and asked her help in choosing a piece. The normal rules and structure to which I was accustomed no longer applied, and I entered into a liminal space—albeit without being able to name the concept. I realized how strange I must have appeared in the eyes of my students and I opened myself up to alternative possibilities, even though those possibilities would not have been my first choice!

What transpired, not merely by the adaptation of repertoire but through the different pedagogy that accompanied it, was a choral experience where text and music expanded, if momentarily, the students' understanding of the importance of friendship and how it can be sustained. While the performance was certainly not in the Western European art music tradition, it received a standing ovation and I made the initial step toward being accepted by my students and colleagues. This particular moment was an example of the recognition of strangeness on all our parts: my discomfort at being in a setting for which I felt completely unprepared, my lack of knowledge of what my students valued, my students distrust of me as a young white middle class woman who knew nothing about their music, and my colleagues speculating on how long I would last.

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This particular liminal experience certainly lead to the structuring of communitas in which both myself and the students felt the first emerging bonds of developing relationships. There are other situations in which the setting aside of normal structures creates relationships based on the members' equality. Pamela Bettis conducted a qualitative case study that explored how urban working-class high school students viewed themselves in the context of school, work, and the future when their worlds were economically and socially unstable. Through interviews and observation, Bettis (1996) found a diminished sense of a social hierarchy and group antagonism. The students rarely mentioned their individual statuses or those of any group in the school.

> Consistently, the students could not respond to my request to describe the various peer groups at the school. Although they were familiar with the categories of nerds, preps, and headbangers, they still denied the existence of these types of cliques or others at [their school].… none of the students alluded to a hierarchy that organized social relations in the school at large. (117)

She argued that this lack of social hierarchy and the existence of positive interpersonal relationships were related to the uncertain economic and social transition that cities which had depended on manufacturing were undergoing in the 1990s. "With a majority of the interviewed students concerned or confused about their future lives, it is not surprising that normal peer relations, which usually include a social hierarchy, were changed" (Bettis 1996, 106). This setting-aside of traditionally perceived social status, however, is often difficult from the teacher's perspective because of entrenched behaviors and attitudes that are reinforced through personal history and formal education. It must be an intentional effort based on a developing self-awareness of that status.

What Turner and others are suggesting is that the existence of perceived status on the part of the teacher is a significant barrier to the cultivation of communitas and that in a truly liminal space, the normal rules do not apply. Communitas thus arises because those in liminal spaces have—at least temporarily—equal status that then draws them together. This means that from the very beginning the music teacher has to be willing to set aside his or her status, to set aside what is normally at the center of his or her world, and show the students how to do the same. And in order to set aside that status, the teacher has to first be conscious of that status and how it is perceived not only by others but by him or herself.

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Conclusions

This paper provides a beginning foray into the concept of liminality and its possible use as a framework when considering music programs in urban settings. Because of the complex cultural and social networks that exist particularly in urban schools, and the disparity between the states of norm for teachers and their urban students, I believe liminality serves as a useful lens through which to view these transitional moments. Also certainly at issue are questions of power relations and whose knowledge is privileged or marginalized. Becoming aware of liminal states and places would be an initial step necessary in being able to negotiate them, valuing them rather than fearing them.

Considering liminality and communitas and their places in urban music education has implications for all levels of music teaching and learning. For practicing music educators in urban programs, being made aware of the concept of liminality could possibly enable them, like myself, to place, name and conceptualize an experience. Few music teachers are prepared to be successful in working with the diverse students who populate urban music programs, and have certainly received little educational experience on how to build community in a place where values and cultures can be so different from their own. Knowing how to name something as disconcerting as what they are experiencing can possibly allay fears and concerns, and at the very least, move teachers from a sense of failure to action toward adaptability and change.

It is also important for practicing teachers to engage in self-examination and reflection, to examine their own beliefs and values, how those have developed through their personal experiences, and the impact they might have on the students they encounter. It is almost impossible to understand someone who is different from ourselves without being willing to disassemble who we think ourselves to be. This would also provide opportunities for examining what one considers "normal" both in one's own world and also what is normal in the student's world.

Being willing to explore liminal spaces means that a music teacher must be a risk-taker, someone who is not afraid to go against the grain, who is willing to let go of preconceived ideas about power, status, and the taken-for-granted. Part of this risk comes into play in admitting vulnerability, letting go of the barriers that traditional education has put into place, and admitting there are things not known, not accessible.

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For myself, I continue to challenge my beliefs and attitudes about what is musically acceptable for me as a music educator, and what role I play when interacting with university and public school mariachi programs. In recognizing my outsider status as an Anglo that promotes a Mexican-American genre, I have set aside my academic musical "expert" persona, allowing my students and their families to educate me. I have come to be accepted in Mexican-American communities whose parents now trust me enough to send their children to a summer camp. For most of these high school campers, they have never before spent a night away from home. In taking the risk to engage with mariachi ensembles at a conservatory-minded university, I have seen this cultural expression become accepted as a valid part of our program – in part because of its musical sophistication and excellence and in part because of the connections we have made with our Mexican-American community. Music provides the path for me to move in and out of this liminal space.

In music teacher education programs in colleges and universities, faculty can introduce undergraduates to the concept of liminality, helping them explore that space by examining their current liminal state, that of transitioning from member of the ensemble to leader of the ensemble, from high school to college, from family-dependent to independent, and ultimately from student to teacher. In order to do this, however, individual faculty members must model behaviors that occur in the exploration of liminal space. Borrowing from Froehlich's model of "communities of practice", there are multiple elements that music education faculty need to consider: 1) willingness to examine one's own beliefs, attitudes, and values in a critical way; 2) willingness to nurture attitudes of mutual respect coming from the perspective of reciprocity in which they learn as much from the students as the students learn from them; 3) willingness to accept that the "normal" structures of schooling are hierarchical and might not be in the best interest of creating community in the classroom; 4) willingness to recognize that differences bring richness and are to be valued rather than feared; 5) willingness to take risks in exploring the roles of status in the classroom and the impact that perceived status has on teaching and learning; and 6) willingness to take the time necessary in the day-to-day curricula to allow opportunities for all of this to happen.

Reshaping our thinking about what music classrooms in urban settings might look like, and allowing ourselves the freedom to consider what needs to happen in undergraduate music education programs is no easy task. Creating the time to allow ourselves to reflect on

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these possibilities is perhaps the biggest challenge; one that starts with a personal and pedagogical framework that allows for the cultivation of difference as beneficial.

I freely admit my own struggles with letting go of the fear that someone might see I am deficient, that I do not know everything I really need to know when it comes to teaching music. I am afraid that I am somehow less if I cannot fix everything, take care of everything, teach everything in my classroom. I find it difficult myself to drop those barriers I have worked so hard to keep in place. Because of this, I have limited my engagement with my students and missed out on making those vital connections that might move toward greater community, the community we all crave and need. There is a richness that comes with being truly vulnerable, that comes with being part of something greater and a trust that grows from being part of that whole. If by looking at music programs in urban settings as liminal spaces that are ambiguous, full of potential and novelty, if by seeing myself as much of an "other" as my students, if these result in even a slight transcendence of the stifling structure that is schooling, then it is certainly worth the risk of losing my "expert" status. It is this possibility that, in Turner's words, incites me to action.

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Notes

[1] Economic stability is also an indicator pointing to how urban students are less likely to belong to traditional family structures, have difficulty using standard English, and present other health and safety risks as significant challenges to them and their educators.

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About the Author

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