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“Mirror, Mirror on the Wall...” or The Challenge of Jumping Over Our Own Shadows

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“Mirror, Mirror on the Wall...”
Or
The Challenge of Jumping Over Our Own Shadows¹


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With this article I am not asking, as the title might suggest, who is the fairest of us all. Rather, I allude to Brian Roberts’ 2004 article “Who’s in the mirror? Issues surrounding the identity construction of music educators,”² and the “looking glass self” famously described by Charles Horton Cooley a little more than 100 years ago (Cooley, 1902, 1964). Both authors speak to the notion that our identities are as much constructed by how we think those around us want us to act, as by our own choice. This means that my actions reflect my perception of others and what I perceive to be their expectations of me. These expectations, in turn, are based upon a multitude of perceived or assumed “givens.”

Foremost among the many “givens” in the everyday interactions I have with others is the question of where they place me, my family, peer group(s), neighborhood, community, and country in the pyramid of socio-political, economic, and cultural hierarchies that make up what generically is referred to as society. Such positioning in the make-up of society impacts my private self as much as it does my public, professional self—in my case, a person who has spent her childhood and early adulthood in Germany but came to the United States to pursue her career as a college-level music educator, which also resulted in my becoming a taxpaying U.S. citizen. Clearly, any and all of these experiences have shaped my teaching and continue to have an effect on the way I look at the world and, consequently, how others see me. To examine structures of hegemony, power, and exclusion where they are perceived as negative forces in the script called music education, in what follows I suggest analyzing the part each of us has played in the complexity of power structures of which we are or were an integral part.

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Knowledge of the close connection between one's life story and how one sees the world has caused *social interactionists* to argue for the inclusion of autobiographical references as an important contributor to any sociological analysis that takes seriously the researcher's own role and position in describing observed social interactions. While such biographical information belongs to the micro-level of sociological analysis, one's nationality, race, and socio-economic position, issues that are part of a macro-analysis, add to the "looking glass self" as well. The core of the theory of social interactionism therefore is the inevitable link between micro- and macro-sociological analyses, a theory that combines social psychological with sociological ways of thinking and favors participant observations in action-research settings over so-called value-free observations in controlled research designs.³ Therefore, what I, a self declared interactionist, write in this article is drawn from three sets of experiences: My personal story, my professional knowledge, and references to teaching situations either encountered by me in the college environment, in K-12 settings, or reported to me by public school teachers over many years of contacts with them.

From the moment I began to reflect on the themes of hegemony, power, and exclusion (and their interaction) in the realm of music teaching, I immediately focused on exclusionary practices in music education rather than considering the etymological and conceptual differences between the terms themselves. From the beginning, therefore, I asked myself what new and bold insights I could contribute to a topic that has permeated our professional conversations for as long as I can remember. Indeed, has not the theme of exclusionary practices in music schooling been addressed at different times and in different words ever since education, democracies, and the arts have reflected upon themselves?

How far have we come in music education since James Mursell and Max Kaplan, beginning in the 1940s and 1950s, called for inclusionary teaching practices that would allow *all* pupils in compulsory education the benefit of musical instruction and that would bring music schooling and the making of music in the community itself closer together? How much has changed since then? Did more recent efforts by critical theorists, constructivists, feminists, and others in music education yield results that earlier pleas did not? Also, has the music profession

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at the collegiate level changed significantly in response to what educationists call the ‘democratization’ of education and some of us in music call the ‘democratization’ of the arts?

Under the broad heading of “democratizing compulsory educational practices,” recent authors write of (a) the diversification of learning environments, (b) inclusionary teaching practices, (3) educational equity, (4) teacher empowerment and student ownership of learning, and (5) the teacher as diagnostician of a student’s learning needs. In reviewing those key terms, I asked myself whether music educators, both in compulsory schooling and at the collegiate level, have begun to embrace those terms as well. Has the term “diagnostic teacher” (Solomon, 1999) become a household name in music education? Should it? Are school music teachers empowered decision-makers in matters of educational objectives? Do they hold ownership in the schooling process itself (Dirkswager, 2002)? And, finally, do collegiate music teacher training programs advocate full ownership in student learning and educational equity?

If one can answer those questions in the affirmative, one might be able to say that, collectively, music educators are on the way to exercising inclusionary practices in their work. And, if the majority of us subscribed to such practices consistently and with full awareness of their consequences for musical learning, we might be able to assert that music education is in step with much of current thoughts in educational scholarship.

In looking for examples in music instructional practices that confirm the inclusionary nature of our work, a concert during a regional music education conference comes to mind where several high school and middle school ensembles presented absolutely intriguing performances, ranging anywhere from Latin big bands to jazz bands, and mariachi bands to fiddle groups. Those bands were inclusionary in that they had almost equal numbers of boys and girls in most of them; all skin colors were represented; some of the groups included dancers as well as instrumentalists and singers, and the music was varied and exciting to those who performed and those who listened. The teachers clearly had found ways to reach beyond dividing boundaries by igniting a spark and contagious enthusiasm among the students and the audience alike.

The inclusionary practices I observed were necessitated as much by the music selected for performance as by the seemingly diverse student body. But the music itself also dictated any discernible power structures among the ensembles—from the director to the lead player, down to

the side “persons.” Hegemony? Yes, but, in those instances, perhaps not the kind we think of in negative terms. Or should we be weary of the hierarchical relationships created by the way nearly all music making takes place? Judging by some of the negative goings-on in large professional ensembles, I believe so. On the other hand, what type of music making does not rely on role hierarchies and, thus, hegemony if it is to function in the cultural institutions of today?

As I look for examples in print that suggest ways by which music educators might engage in inclusionary teaching practices, there is most certainly among them Regelski’s (2004) *Teaching General Music In Grades 4-8*. Steeped in a praxial musicianship concept, the text is guided by an action learning paradigm that seeks to give each pupil ownership in the music learning process. While it is a goal many of us strive for, we also might want to ask whether individual efforts in this direction have resulted in profession-wide policy: Do music educators embrace such notions as (1) individualizing music lessons in schools; (2) involving students of varying ability levels, including so-called musical “mis-fits,” in worthwhile music educational experiences; and (3) allowing for evaluative procedures that not only tolerate such diversity of students and abilities but also celebrate them?

Positive Alternatives to Exclusion (Cooper et al, 2000) contains case descriptions of school communities in the United Kingdom where special efforts have been made to individualize learning and allow students’ personal experiences as the starting point of where learning begins rather than following a pre-established sequence of instruction. I believe that music educators in the U.S. would benefit from similar research projects. I also applaud MENC for its efforts to locate model music education programs in which different cultural, geographic, and economic conditions of the students are taken into consideration when seeking to reach an increasingly diverse student body.⁴



THE PROBLEM

Positive examples of inclusionary teaching practices in music notwithstanding, it is a truism among many music educators that we should attempt to reach more students than we currently do, embrace yet a greater diversity of learning styles, and/or exercise the power given to us as

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teachers with caution. But it is also true that exclusion is not always bad and inclusion not always good. Indeed, from an interactionist point of view, the usage of such value-laden terms as “good” and “bad” or “desirable” and “undesirable” are less than effective descriptors because they imply taking sides, thereby making it difficult to truly *understand* the reasons for why people act the way they do. Because of this tendency of avoiding to take sides, social interactionists have at times been criticized for being ineffective in proposing actions for change.

In response to such criticism, Meighan (Meighan & Siraj-Blatchford, 2003) suggests that all interactionists can do is to create “constructive doubt and review [rather than establish] certainties.”⁵ This conclusion is reached because one key concept in the interactionist perspective is “that of [revealing] the contradictions and ironies in social life.”⁶ Those contradictions are paradoxes; experiences, observations or statements which contain “apparently opposing or incongruous elements that, when read together, turn out to make sense.”⁷ I argue that awareness of those paradoxes in our lives may help us to avoid inertia, at least some of the time. Thus, while interactionists may at times appear to “ride the fence” when it comes to proposing action, probing the nature of power relationships and the paradoxes that form them should be considered a necessary and requisite action for inducing any desired change.

Understanding the paradox of inclusionary and exclusionary practices in music education

When proposing change of any sort, one overriding paradox is that one tends to find it easier to call for change in others than in oneself as it is usually much easier to say than to do. For example, as a collegiate-level music educator I find myself proposing inclusionary practices in my undergraduate and graduate courses while allowing (more often than I would like) my own actions as a “gatekeeper” of the academy to contradict my words. The academy asks me to ‘weed out’ students because their learning curve does not fit into the model that works best for academic insiders; I accept competitive models of grading as indicators of “ways of knowing” and “meaning-making”; and I find myself more time and schedule driven than propelled by individual, positive learning outcomes. It is an instructional paradox which is passed on to those students who, when they embark on their own careers, seek to emulate us, their teachers.

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A second paradox is of particular interest to me. Due to reasons too many to list, many undergraduate music education programs I know of tend to provide methodological recipes while the graduate programs in the same institutions often engage their students in questioning those recipes. In effect, we are asking returning teachers as well as students who move directly from the undergraduate experience to graduate school to change who they have become. Thus the sub-title of this article: We are asking our music education majors to “jump over their own shadows,” something not even college professors can do.

There are other instances in higher education where the topic of "exclusion" results in paradoxes in the practices of the academy: (1) Music education curricula in the U.S. more or less ignore sociology as a valuable source of knowledge even though the work of musician-teachers and performers depends so very much upon their interactions with groups of people unlike them. (2) Conservatories rely heavily on the teaching of a performance repertoire that only a small number of people in our society actually enjoy. (3) Music academies limit the choice of instruments suitable for formal study even though many more choices are available outside of the academy. (4) Pedagogies continue to be behind the times when learning theories abound that advocate sequences of instruction based on how learners actually perceive music at any given age.⁸ Or, (5) while the call for individualizing instruction has been sounded for many years, getting serious about it in our classrooms, be it at the collegiate or school level, appears to be blocked by financial and logistic difficulties on the one hand, and personal reasons on the other. But, if it is perhaps one of the most exclusionary acts of all not to reach *all* school-aged youth through education, why is this goal not shared by all musician-teachers or performers? Where do we draw the line between an *educational* goal and a *musical* one? Is one more important than the other? Do music educators feel the need for “getting out of line” or “redefining ... [the] profession” (Black, 1997)? Is such a call for redefinition, made by a professional in the field of education, shared by music teachers? I find it difficult to answer that question in the affirmative in light of current realities.

For example, I recently mentioned the problem of exclusionary practices in “school music” that result from stringent auditioning processes common in Texas school music programs, to a musician-colleague. She immediately assumed that I meant by “exclusionary

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practices” the exclusion of the most talented students from school music settings by not catering to their special needs (which does occur). While my thinking was oriented to the less gifted and talented students (the below-average musical achievers), she referred me to a book on the perils that gifted children face in school.⁹ I realized then that despite being colleagues and friends, we nonetheless had vastly different starting points of reference when thinking about our work and the purpose of formal music schooling: I thought in terms of life-long learning opportunities in music for all students while she worried about the possible neglect of students who are musically and academically already at the upper end of the normal curve of learning. For her, school music served as a stepping stone for professional music training in college, a view shared by many classically trained, performing musicians: Allow conservatories to spend more time on the gifted and talented instead of expending too many resources on average and musically weaker students. Thus, while proclaiming to be one profession, that of being well-trained musicians, as teachers we have fundamental differences in viewpoint on what music education should be about. It is a paradox not unique to the music profession but one that, for reasons not subject of this article, has thus far received surprisingly little attention by sociologists and music education professionals alike.

SOCIAL INTERACTIONISM: A THEORY FOR RESEARCHING PARADOXES IN MUSIC EDUCATION PRACTICES

As indicated earlier, of all sociological theories, analyzing music education from an interactionist perspective is perhaps the most complex because it also is the most elusive. Meighan (2003) quotes J.A. Wankowski who, in 1981, claimed the following for the field of education:

Neither learning nor teaching is a process, nor can they ever be fully controlled. They are, if they can ever be defined, a continuous social interaction between individuals, who are themselves a product of interactions with the world around them. Even a relationship with an object, a problem, or a subject of study has a strong element of interaction. The objects, the problems, or the subjects of study act on the learner, or an observer, no less than the living beings. *Whatever we do, the doing does something to us!* This is an inescapable, instantaneous relationship ... [Learning and teaching involve] an inter-reaction. For apart from interacting with the outside world, the individual interacts within himself as to how he interacted in the past, interacts now and hopes or fears to interact in the future.¹⁰

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Seen from this perspective, the sum of all such “inter-reactions” between everyone involved in learning and teaching in a space set aside for that purpose becomes what we call “school”.

Therefore, as Meighan also points out, there is no one meaning that can be attached to the entity called “school”; only “overlapping and varying accounts can be obtained.”¹¹ Those overlapping and varying accounts of what occurs in the name of schooling become the “layers of meaning” interactionists describe, examine, and analyze. Thus, to grasp the complexities and paradoxes inherent in compulsory education, interactionists would need to uncover the multiple layers of meaning that emerge when learning about the individuals who make up a particular school community:

- the pupils in a school building, rehearsal room, or gym;
- the teachers and teacher aids with whom the students interact daily;
- the administrative and support staff members who influence the teaching staff; and
- those parents and guardians who are involved in the school community and those who cannot or choose not to be involved.

In all cases, whoever someone “is” derives from a personal biography and life story. An interactionist therefore uses each individual story as a means of understanding why there is more than one perceived ‘reality’, even within one school community.

As with so many other social institutions, schools are “loose network[s] of related parts in a constant state of flux.”¹² Such flux makes empirical generalizations nearly impossible and prescriptions for action rather suspect. What one can do, however, is (1) to describe carefully what one sees in each system, and (2) to acknowledge that the description is flawed if those who do the describing are not integral to the system itself, i.e., act as participant observers.

With that *caveat* in mind, each school music setting, be it public or private, compulsory or higher education, requires its own analysis of: (1) how the parts of the music instruction context are viewed by all those who participate; (2) who views whom as exclusionary or inclusionary in their practices; (3) whether one sees oneself at the helm of decision-making power or as a victim of such power; and (4) whether one is considered by others part of the problem or part of the solution. Also, let us not forget that one person’s inclusion can lead to another person’s exclusion; what is seen as a solution to a curricular need by one group of

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educators is a problem to another group. This, however, is a paradox that may be a major inertia-inducing factor in curriculum reform!

Today, public school music teachers as well as many college music professors see themselves as victims rather than decision-makers. Administrators blame legislators and the public, both political powers outside their control, for policies that need implementation. Students, once considered to be entirely at the receiving end of the instructional channel, have now become (by way of their parents and/or the tax-paying public) “clients” to be served by what seems to be an increasingly market-driven educational enterprise.

Indeed, who does and who does not hold control over the system called “school”? Who is responsible for exclusionary practices that marginalize certain students, teachers, and even subject matters and affirm others? And within the subject matter of music itself, can we even agree on what constitutes exclusionary and inclusionary practice? Can we separate one from the other?

While careful philosophical analysis may conclude that both types of practice are inseparable, becoming aware of their connectedness may explain why it is so difficult to make curricular changes that are embraced by all music educators as professional policy. For example, as O’Toole (1995) pointed out, boys with average vocal abilities gets accepted into a select choir while girls with similar abilities do not, a practice very common in nearly all high schools, colleges, and conservatories because of the lack of men in most mixed choral ensembles. For men, the auditioning process leads to *inclusion* whereas the rejection of a perfectly adequate woman singer leads to *exclusion* with at times far-reaching consequences. Similar examples, of course, can be found in instrumental ensembles, the very heart also of most conservatories and music schools. In that scenario, is it not usually the case that the instrumentation required by large ensembles often determines recruitment and enrollment policies? Are all deserving students accepted regardless of the instrument they play? Should they be? If so, how many fine future music teachers or therapists might be turned away because they play flute, while students who audition on less popular instruments are accepted even though they are clearly less accomplished musicians?

These questions do not necessarily imply blame for unfair conditions that, according to O'Toole, should be eliminated altogether. Instead, I would suggest being honest and upfront about what auditions are intended to do: (1) to find musicians who have the greatest potential, and (2) to assure that we have the performers we need in light of the music we wish to perform.¹³ Presently, the second intention remains unknown to many students and their parents; they often assume that ability and effort alone are the criteria that count in separating those who will become music *insiders* from the *outsiders*. Thus, while principles of musical excellence certainly play an important role in the selection of students, the issue of supply and demand is equally relevant and should be exposed as a deciding factor in excluding some students and including others.

Questions of supply and demand can also dictate music instructional practices in non-competitive school music settings. For example, the band program in a small, rural high school in central Texas is so small that auditioning procedures would become self-defeating; the band director would audition herself out of a job by excluding so many. Beyond that, by the teacher's and even her students' own admission the band is in no shape to play for the school's annual graduation ceremony. The teacher therefore opts to have three or four students perform with their guitars, complete with a most enthusiastic drummer. While the little combo is probably not much better than the band would have been, matters of exclusion and inclusion become intertwined as the result of school size, student availability, and making the most of a somewhat tenuous situation. This example illustrates how the social context (a) does constrain, if not totally prescribe, the role(s) we can assume in that context; and (b) does constrain how we shape those role(s).

Elementary general music, too, often seen as perhaps the most inclusionary part of formal music schooling, may be perceived as exclusionary by those students who do not like to sing, or who want to play an instrument that the program does not own or include. Also, losing student interest in the name of accepted and often celebrated teaching methodologies excludes some students more than others. In most cases, perhaps because of the reliance on singing that boys too often see as stereotypical for girls, boys lose interest in what goes on in general music

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class. Of course, girls who are not as given to 'acting out' also lose interest but may not show it as readily through disruptive behavior.

Thus, even though many teachers intend to include all students in daily class activities, it may well be that those very activities exclude easily half of the students in a music classroom. I believe this fact deserves greater scrutiny than it has in the past as it affirms another educational paradox that concern not only music educators but educators in other disciplines: instruction intended to contribute to students being “generally well-educated” too often ‘turns them off’ to the very content of that education, resulting in major gaps in knowledge and skills that later can have important personal and social consequences.¹⁴



Head (1996) has shown that particular teaching techniques prominently in use today are geared more toward girls’ than to boys’ styles of learning. These techniques put heavy emphasis on language skills through active verbal participation in classroom discussions and team projects at the expense of learning strategies that include the application of clear rules to very specific and well defined tasks. This fact, Head suggests, has led to an increasing risk of losing the boys’ interest in school at an early age because the brain areas responsible for language develop much later in boys than in girls. Other developmental differences are at stake as well and may be the reason for the preponderance of learning disabilities, autism, ADHD, and the like, in boys. Because the music teaching profession is a dominantly female profession, I cannot help but wonder whether boys are not too often excluded from types of learning that suits *them*. It is time for researchers in music education to tackle this issue more rigorously than appears to have been the case. We may also learn something we currently hear in medical news: Certain treatments are more suitable for men than for women and certain medicines may work better for one race than another. So it may be for the teaching of music: Certain instructional methods may be more suitable for boys than for girls and teachers may need to become more flexible not only in adjusting their teaching to different socio-economic settings, geographical regions, and demographic as well as racial and ethnic “givens” but also to their students’ gender. As seemingly simple as such a recommendation sounds, it would call for a rather different approach toward imparting professional knowledge and skills in music education than is currently the practice in many university music education programs.

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The above points demonstrate, then, that one size does not fit all! In the name of being inclusionary through “equal access and opportunity for all,” more rather than fewer learning inequalities among the student body may result. Similarly, nationalizing the curriculum as a measure of being educationally inclusive cannot be a viable answer as it implies centralizing rather than decentralizing power. Such a move asks for greater, not less homogenization of instructional goals and learning styles, thereby running the risk of being once again exclusionary. Thus, for example, “No Child Left Behind” cannot work as a governmental policy if it gets confused with “no child left untested”—especially if the tests are standardized and mandate a passing rate of 75%!

Our own biographies as guides for learning to understand others

As we become sensitized toward recognizing hegemony, power, and exclusionary practices in music curricula for the purpose of strengthening our educational goals, it appears that all three terms, while related, may need to be examined separately. Exclusionary practices may indicate power relationships but also reflect economic givens. Power relationships may be hegemonic but also necessary and expected in the instructional process because different “players” in that process view the relationships in different ways due to the positions they hold as teachers, students of varying abilities, parents with varying degrees of interest in music schooling, administrators, staff members, and the tax paying public.

From an interactionist perspective, I again stress that our actions are reactions to whom and with what we ‘inter-react’ in light of (1) each actor’s biography as analyzed at the micro-level, and (2) the specific economic, cultural and societal circumstances that help shape those biographies. To understand hegemony, power, and exclusion in music education we therefore might want to examine *what kind of instructional actions by what type of teacher, may have what impact on what kind of learner, under what conditions*—both in general education and in music. Due to the link between our own biographies and the political, socio-cultural, and economic conditions of which we are part, we might then recognize that our biographies can contribute to exclusionary practices in our own teaching.

My biography is a case in point. Classical music was the air my family breathed. While pursuing it as an avocation, my father and mother made considerable financial sacrifices to let all of their children take recorder, flute, piano, violin, and ballet lessons. Music listening at home meant listening to opera with score in hand, singing the arias by heart, and being involved in church, oratorio, and madrigal choirs from an early age. Do I regret these experiences? Of course not! But did they skew my viewpoint of what makes a person “wholesome?” You bet they did.

Indeed, as a young music teacher I had no problem with arts advocates who claimed that music made you good and whole. I even understood those who implied that the more classical music you surrounded yourself with, the “(w)holier” (or “gooder” as my friend and colleague Peggy Bennett would say) you became. After all, the music conservatory I attended confirmed and solidified what had been familiar to me since early childhood. No wonder, then, that I was comfortable in a training environment that was not nearly as comfortable to some of my classmates. In other words, I did not realize that I was an insider of a statistical minority in society because the music conservatory affirmed my own musical belief system. Any efforts to familiarize myself with the music of “the others” remained half-hearted at best. The safety as well as the demands of the conservatory appeared to justify and even reward my predisposed focus.

I never examined my reasons for becoming a music teacher until late into my studies as a music education major. This was due, in part, because whenever I said I wanted to be a teacher, everybody around me seemed to applaud this choice—my teachers, parents, grandfather, you name it. Of course, they applauded my choice because it not only implied financial security but also stayed within what was considered appropriate for a woman. Therefore, a choice was solidified that I did not fully explore until much later—deep into my career as a teacher. By that time I also had learned that excluding oneself from accepted practices leads to marginalization, a status acceptable only if one is prepared to bear the consequences in terms of fewer rewards, such as lack of recognition by one’s peers—a lack that has financial implications.

Meighan and Siraj-Blatchford (2003) use the analogy of a television script to explain the process of becoming part of accepted social practices. The script dictates the *roles* each of us

assumes in life and in our work but the roles are linked to each other, as well. This is so because the script defines

the setting, the action, varying audiences both in the studio and outside in their homes. The script also has a history behind it, exists alongside alternative scripts and is subject to various kinds of scrutiny as regards its suitability. The teacher may be seen as appearing in a variety of roles, including producer, actor-producer, producer-manager, or director. (p. 30)

Understanding the script called music education

While the roles listed by Meighan contain a certain degree of decision-making power and autonomy, it is also important to note that music faculty in schools and colleges do not generally write the script. Instead, the script is presented to them as part of a larger social institution that faces them upon arrival. As Peter Berger suggested over 40 years ago, each such situation is not only defined “by our contemporaries but predefined by our predecessors.”¹⁵ And, “since one cannot possibly talk back to one’s ancestors, their ill-conceived constructions are commonly more difficult to get rid of than those built in our own life-time.”¹⁶ Thus, while music faculty are confronted with baggage not of their making, they also deal with it by actively (1) rejecting it altogether, (2) placing it into its appropriate historical context, (3) critiquing it as wasteful and dysfunctional, or (4) knowingly carrying it along, all the while seeking to replace it with more useful tools and contents. Thus, while music teachers anywhere want to reform what they inherited, they must work within its “givens.” This creates a reality full of contradictions and complexities that all professionals face.

Thomas Kuhn (1970) pointed out that certain fields are more prone than others to holding on to old practices when they either stick to old paradigms or do not agree on any one in particular. Music and music education are among those fields, something music educators have in common with many other areas in the humanities. But I also believe, along with Paul Woodford (2005), that among the humanities and fine arts, music teachers represent a particularly conservative workforce.

There are many explanations for this conservatism. One reason, I suggest, hails from the fact that as music students we have been taught from early on in life to revere the musical repertoire of the past almost like a religion. Our conservatory training, too, espouses the message that to like classical music means to be a good person. Listening to other types of music makes one perhaps a little less good?

When I chose music as the subject matter of specialization, I expected to share what I knew, not unlike a Christian missionary wanting to share the gospel. This, I believe, is crucial in understanding why real change in the script of music education is so hard to come by: teachers share what is *meaningful* to them. What is meaningful, however, has grown (or has been constructed) over years of socialization, not in a four- or five-year course sequence!

Arthur Costa writes in his Foreword to *The Diagnostic Teacher. Constructing New Approaches to Professional Development* (Solomon, 1999), meaning-making

is not a spectator sport. Knowledge is a constructive process rather than a finding; it is not the content stored in memory but the processes of constructing it that gets stored. Humans don't *get* ideas; they *make* ideas. And those ideas, once constructed, are robust, enduring, and not easily extinguished. (Costa, in Solomon, 1999, p. viii)

Later in the *Foreword*, Costa adds:

A great paradox about humans is that we confront learning opportunities with fear rather than mystery and wonder. We seem to feel better when we know rather than when we learn. We defend our biases, beliefs, storehouses of knowledge, rather than inventing the unknown, the creative, the inspirational. Being certain and closed gives us comfort, while being doubtful and open gives us fear. (p. xii)

Looking at my own early stages of taking on the role of music teacher, I believe Costa's observations have merit: As a novice music teacher, I faced my teaching appointment with fear, not with excitement. Uncertainty made me eagerly embrace what had been handed to me as "ready-made set of recipes."¹⁷ The recipes represented the very norms that had shaped the profession before me and I found it difficult to work outside their confines. As a result, what were at first taken for granted normative behaviors became routinized practices and, later, internalized values. I worked in a closed system and felt comfortable in it as long as my students were willing to go along. Once that changed, I had to change as well and, I might add, change quickly and thus with little time for preparation.

Froehlich, H. (2006) "Mirror, mirror on the wall . . . Or the challenge of jumping over our own shadows" *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education*, 5/2: http://act.maydaygroup.org/articles/Froehlich5_2.pdf

This confinement within inherited norms existed because, as a student, I hardly ever had truly questioned the standards that governed my own musical belief system or the one offered by my teachers. Of course, I had heard lectures on the subject and even had written required essays entitled, “My Philosophy of Music Education.” But hardly ever had I critically examined my own socialization experiences for the purpose of comparing them to the pupils with whom I, as a future music teacher, might be asked to interact. Nor had I seriously and consciously dealt with the differences in *meaning-making* among my students and between them and me; that is, meaning-making as it manifests itself in different life styles, role behaviors, learning styles, language usage, dress code, and musical as well as non-musical socialization experiences.

Of course, I had wanted to be a teacher from second grade on. Why? Because I thought it would be cool to be allowed to stand in front of an entire class and write on the blackboard without having to ask for permission! It was the power of chalk in my hand that sucked me into a script that eventually was to make me an insider of a powerful social institution called higher education in which I acted the part and did what college professors are supposed to do: (1) to help maintain barriers called proficiency exams; (2) to control students’ progress in what is probably one of the greatest hurdles in academic life, the dissertation; and (3) to justify such controls by arguing that quality control is essential to being accepted in the professoriate. In doing so, I participated, many times knowingly, in hegemony, power, and exclusion in music education while, at the same time, I argued against them in my classes. Only with growing experience as a college music teacher did I find the courage to bring the two roles, that of gatekeeper and that of enabler, into better balance.

Today I know that the meaning I read into the script also influences my role in it. And so does what the students bring to the script: Their socialization experiences yield perspectives and perceptions that shape mine and, thus, the script. In fact, the more diverse the meaning-making is among my students and me, the more interesting the script itself turns out to be. I may not write the script, but I am allowed to take liberties with the part assigned to me.

One such liberty may be in seeing the benefits rather than the shortcomings when recognizing differences between me, my colleagues, and my students. What I once perceived as a musical deficiency in a student may actually be a future asset in the student’s work as a school

music teacher. Indeed, as the student body in colleges and high schools grows in racial and socio-cultural diversity, a similarly diverse body of teachers may be needed to bring to the instructional process the openness, understanding, and familiarity with musical and cultural upbringings that construct the next generation's identities. To encourage such diversity in future music teachers, we may actually want to consider widening rather than tightening admission criteria commonly used in professional music schools. Imagine, for instance, a college-level scenario where music education students may receive credit for life and work experiences that are part of the skills and knowledge needed as future music teachers. Such skills and knowledge might include the ability to play instrument(s) not generally accepted in the canon of traditionally auditioned instruments and/or versatility on many instruments rather than above-average ability on just one.

CONCLUSION

Self-analysis is an important step in identifying sources of hegemony, power, and exclusion that can be perceived as negative forces in music education. I suggest that each of us has contributed to those forces, playing an integral part in the complexity of power structures that define our work realities. Our biographies tell us much about the "inter-reactions" not only within those realities but also with contemporaries and ancestors who made us who we are as teachers, scholars, spouses, colleagues, human beings.

Reflecting on our role as music teachers, then, may be guided by three related questions: (1) "What has shaped me musically as the individual I perceive myself to be?"; (2) "How do I believe others around me would answer that question for me?"; and, (3) "How do I inter-react in the musical situations I encounter daily?" We should ask and find answers to similar questions for each of our students and invite them to answer them in their own terms. Engaging in such a process of discovery is a matter of building trust and openness that may then lead toward changes in the way we inter-react with those entrusted to us.

Trust in our students' own knowledge base and ability of musical meaning-making may be one of the most essential building blocks toward a culture in music education in which there is a balance between (a) the concerns of gatekeepers, and (b) the needs of those who seek entry into

the academy. Indeed, I would consider trust as one of the most important factors in changing problematic patterns of dominance, power structures, and exclusionary practices.

In summary:

- Seeing our actions both from macro-level and micro-level point of view makes us accept the strong link between political realities (“givens”) and individual decision-making.
- Seeing ourselves as limited in our own perspectives, preferences, and abilities actually can empower us to allow for differences in learning needs and teaching realities across institutions and programs.
- Understanding ourselves and our place in society—as individuals, professionals, groups—may lead to truly accepting individual differences—not just in our students but also in us, our faculty colleagues, and the administrative staff.
- Accepting differences between us and others as potentially creative rather than disruptive forces can act as a liberating and empowering force in itself.

Finally, I want to emphasize that, while I have talked much about we, us, and ours, it always comes back to the “I,” or what Cooley calls the “self.” Change comes about as the result of how I do or do not choose to act, one “inter-reaction” at a time. It may be an old message but it is one that I consider worth reiterating.

Notes

¹ This article is a revised version of the keynote address for the MayDay Group Colloquium, “*Hegemony, power, and exclusion in music education*,” University of Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, July 17, 2005. The revision occurred thanks to the input of those present at the colloquium as well as the results of blind peer review.

² Retrieved August 2004 from: <http://www.siue.edu/MUSIC/ACTPAPERS/v3/Roberts04b.htm>

³ It is beyond the scope of this paper to outline the history of interactionism as a way of thinking that has equal roots in psychology, philosophy, and sociology. Scholars in these disciplines have embraced what is stated here to varying degrees. I derive my thinking primarily from Charles Cooley, George Herbert Mead, Georg Simmel, Howard S. Becker, and their intellectual successors.

⁴ For details. see <http://www.menc.org/connect/doi/glossary.html>

⁵ Meighan in “Preface to second edition,” p. xii, of Meighan, Roland, and Siraj-Blatchford, Iram (2003). *A Sociology of educating*, 4th ed. With contributions by Len Barton and Stephen Walker. London and New York: Continuum.

⁶ “Preface to the first edition” of Meighan and Siraj-Blatchford, quoted from *op.cit.*, p. ix.

⁷ theliterarylink.com/definitions.html

⁸ Here, in the discussion of this paper, Wayne Bowman asked about the puzzle of music education dealing with instructional “methods” while conservatory instruction is referred to as “pedagogy.” A good question indeed!

⁹ Miller, Alice (1981). *The drama of the gifted child. The search for the true self*. Originally published as *Prisoners of childhood*. New York: Basic Books, Inc.

¹⁰ Cited in Meighan and Siraj-Blatchford, *op cit.*, p. xii.

¹¹ Introduction to Meighan and Siraj-Blatchford, *op. cit.* Part One, Familiarization, n.p.

¹² Meighan and Siraj-Blatchford, *op cit.*, p. xii

¹³ An editing comment by Regelski is worth mentioning here. He observed “the large % of Sibelius Academy music education majors who don't play (or play well) standard orchestral instruments. Thus many play accordion, jazz guitar, a folk instrument, etc., (though all tend to have some background in classical, as well, even though they don't audition on that basis). So by excluding students on a priori criteria favoring classical music already ‘excludes’ the largest portion of ‘music’ from ‘music education’ and the latter becomes a misleading code word for ‘classical music education’ in the minds of university and conservatory music faculty, at least.”

¹⁴ One such consequence that comes to mind is the ignorance on the part of the typical graduate about what constitutes a scientific theory and how such theories work in practice, an issue of great importance in the current ‘debate’ about evolution vs. creationism (intelligent design). It is a dispute that reflects many misconceptions on what happens to or with theories.

¹⁵ Berger, 1963, cited in Meighan and Siraj-Blatchford, 2003, p.30.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

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