



Institutional Belonging, Pedagogic Discourse and Music Teacher Education: The Paradox of Routinization

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In my writings over the past eight years, I have placed my professional experiences as a university employee in both Germany and the United States under the lens of interaction theory as first conceptualized by George Herbert Mead, later articulated by Blumer (1986, 2004), and most recently redefined by Layder (e.g., 1981, 1998, 2006). My purpose has been to critically examine the microcosm of my own occupational socialization and professional identity construction in view of the macro-structures of institutional belonging (Froehlich, 1999, 2000a & b, 2002, 2004, 2006a & b). Behind these self-reflecting efforts lies what I would describe as the systemic conflict between my role as institutional gatekeeper on the one hand and my desire to instill significant change in institutional traditions on the other.

For example, taking seriously the individual worth and learning habits of each of my students runs counter to the institutional demand of ranking, through grades, each student's performance according to a standard that is tenuous at best. Or, encouraged by a corporate mindset, my academic institution (as most other universities across the United States) hails large classroom instruction as a cost-effective way of teaching while the pedagogue in me knows the difference between cost efficiency and effective teaching. Even such innovative efforts as online courses and chat rooms require an individual relationship between teacher and student if what is to be learned is "to stick." Establishing that relationship takes time and trust, two commodities official instructional outlines and curricular guides seldom list as essential course ingredients.

Knowledge about discrepancies between institutional demands and pedagogical choices creates conflicts that are familiar to most experienced teacher educators. The reasons behind such discrepancies and their philosophical underpinnings have been addressed systematically in several disciplines (e.g., Argyris, 1993; Baldrige, 1971; Filion & Rudolph, 1999; Graff, 2003; Regenspan, 2002; Rogers, 1982; Wortham, 2006). With a few notable exceptions, scholarship in music education has not done the same.

I believe it is necessary, for instance, to articulate to what extent our role as institutional gatekeepers bars us from a truly individualized form of instruction that allows us to reach and teach *anyone* who wishes to learn, a creed more easily paid lip service than acted upon. Do we really want the gates of academia open to all who ask for entry, or are we more comfortable teaching only those who fit into the academic world that we have helped to conceptualize and frame? Couched more philosophically and in broader terms, can we be *transformers* of cultural values and traditions when our role as gatekeepers lies in representing and transmitting agreed-upon educational and musical values that have shaped the institution of which we, the teachers, are an integral and contributing part?

This question might appear rhetorical, since its answer seems irresolvable. To me, however, pointing to and examining professional paradoxes and conflicts are important steps in shedding light on our work as music educators at the collegiate level. Understanding paradoxes and conflicts in our work provides the basis for asking how pedagogical changes can lead to changed behavior and, ultimately, to institutional change. In fact, I share the view expressed by Quinn and Cameron (1988) that understanding paradoxes and ironies in and of life is the first step in dealing with them constructively.

In Froehlich (2006a), I pointed to at least five paradoxes music educators face when advocating change in a system that, seeking stability, intentionally resists change (see Figure 1 below). The purpose there was to examine in some detail how exclusionary and inclusionary practices in school music exist side by side and may lead to message inconsistency. The purpose of this article is to look more closely at the paradox of routinization because of its importance in defining what one means by expert labor or professional work.

Figure 1

Froehlich's (2005) Summary of Paradoxes Impacting Curricular Change in MusicEducation

- It always is easier to talk about change in others than in oneself
- Inclusionary practices in school music *are* possible, but the music itself often leads to exclusionary practices due to the roles associated with standard procedures common to music performance itself: Hegemonial power structures among musicians are the norm rather than the exception, and those structures are readily imitated even in school music settings.
- Music education policies as espoused by the MENC Standards call for reaching *all* students through music education but school music practices themselves do not necessarily embrace such policies uniformly and consistently.
- There seems to be little agreement even among music professionals at the tertiary level of music schooling as to how to best solve the challenges we face as musician-performers and musician-educators, testimony to the fact that there are several universes of discourse in a profession we would like to think of as *one* profession.
- Undergraduate music education programs focus on the teaching of recipes while many graduate programs as well as music education scholars want the students to re-think those practices.

Since the late 1980s the field of organizational management has embraced doubt, conflict, and paradoxes as important forces in achieving synthesis for the benefit of the whole (e.g., The Price Waterhouse Change Integration® Team, 1996; Quinn, 1988; and Quinn & Cameron, 1988). As Quinn and Cameron (1988) state:

When someone points out the presence of ... a paradox, we have been required to think more carefully because the statement invariably entails some ... insight that implies understanding beyond the obvious. Becoming aware of paradoxes in organizations has led us to insights that have enriched, and often exceeded, our previous understanding. (p. xiii)

Surveying the organizational management literature through the mid-1980s, the authors continue:

The literature in organizational studies ... seldom contains examples or explanations of paradoxes. Even though organizations are complex, dynamic

systems, our descriptions and models of them are often superficial. Our explanations of complicated phenomena are sometimes limited by assumptions of linearity ... and equilibrium. They tend to ignore contradictions, oppositions, and incongruities or quickly resolve them by labeling one side of the contradictions good and the other bad. The literature reveals difficulty accepting simultaneous opposites that are positively defined, mutually-causal relationships, functional incongruities, and paradigm shifts. In short, authors have often not successfully tolerated paradoxical thinking. (p. xiii)

I suggest that the same observations might also hold true for research in music education. For example, studies that examine the relative effectiveness of specific music instructional methods rarely take into account the organizational structure of a particular school or of the broader school system in which it is located: the larger contexts that shape interactions between teachers and their students. Similarly, when we look at research on music teacher education, we rarely scrutinize the system of higher education as the context within which and by which nearly all details of teacher education are articulated. Such scrutiny however might aid in understanding our own work better, especially if we were to (1) examine the contradictions in value systems and policies that affect us, and (2) identify the normative notions of what is “right” or “wrong” for the particular groups with which we are associated. If we fulfilled both tasks, we might find that music educators at the university level work with similar paradox principles as those outlined by The Price Waterhouse Change Integration® Team in 1996.

The first and fifth paradox in Figure 2 form a sixth paradox worth exploring. It is what has been called the paradox of professional routinization, a term that I define as the occupational mandate to follow stable patterns of actions and thought that are accepted and agreed upon by acknowledged experts in the field. Clearly, one expects professionals to exhibit routinized behavior; otherwise our trust in them would not be warranted. The paradox I am interested in lies in the fact that to be called professional also means one must be willing to question and let go of routinized behavior when the situation calls for it. In other words, shifting freely between routinized and non-routine actions makes the truly professional decision-maker. This fact was first brought to my attention by Andrew Abbott, a sociologist who has addressed what it means to engage in expert labor.

Figure 2

The Five Paradox Principles Articulated by The Price Waterhouse Change
Integration® Team (1996)²

1. Positive Change Requires Significant Stability
2. To Build an Enterprise, Focus on the Individual
3. Focus Directly on Culture, Indirectly
4. True Empowerment Requires Forceful Leadership
5. In Order to Build, You Must Tear Down

Abbott's (1988) concepts of (a) expert labor and of (b) the place of routinization within such labor apply directly to what music educators do. Both warrant our attention. After a brief description of the place of routinization within Abbott's concept of expert labor in one community of practice, I will discuss ramifications for music teacher training in institutional settings that typically encompass at least two different communities of practice: those of education and of music.

THE PLACE OF ROUTINIZATION IN ABBOTT'S CONCEPT OF EXPERT LABOR

Abbott suggests that expert labor involves three interrelated tasks: (1) diagnosing a problem, (2) drawing inferences about possible causes for the problem, and (3) indicating treatment. All three tasks are inherent in what performing musicians (music teachers included) do. In fact, I liken the three tasks to what good *practicing* should be about, a gesture familiar to music education majors and performance majors alike: We hear or do "something" that needs attention; we try to find out what caused "that something" to happen; and then we choose

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from several options the one action that we believe can change “the something” to the musical sound or behavior we have in our ears and minds (Froehlich, 2002).

According to Abbott, only the making of inferences—that is, choosing the best suitable action from several options—is under the control of the professional. The other two tasks simply present themselves as part of the circumstances at hand. Abbott calls these latter tasks “mediating acts” because they are not under the control of the professional. The definitive professional act, then, involves inference: choosing the correct option from several possibilities. ‘Correct’ in this context means the option that is best for a particular situation and/or individual; it does not signify an absolute right, once and for all.

Choosing from several options requires knowledge of the potential influence of each on one’s desired results. If there were only one known option, then—according to Abbott’s definition of *professional*—there would be no truly professional act, only a routine.

Take, for instance, a visit to the doctor’s office. You are suffering from a persistent and, for you, unexplainable lightheadedness. This is a given to which the doctor responds (she mediates). She also mediates when she reflects on the possible causes behind your troubles because you give her the information necessary to eventually select one cause out of several possibilities. The doctor does not have that information: you do. But knowing many potential causes is a requisite for selecting the one cause that is most likely responsible for your particular problem, as opposed to someone else’s. If lightheadedness is usually or always associated with the same cause, the doctor’s choice of treatment will not involve inference: it amounts to a routinized action. The truly professional act lies in being able to detect when such action (routine selection of a particular diagnosis and its associated treatment) is inappropriate to the symptoms at hand: when the routine treatment is likely to be ineffective, perhaps even harmful. Making that determination requires (1) detailed knowledge of the patient’s history, (2) knowledge of the options (treatments) the professional field accepts as potentially appropriate, and (3) willingness and ability to look beyond the canon of professionally agreed-upon options.

Making this example relevant for music teaching, I suggest that music teachers are mediators of learning when they respond to a musical situation or to their pupils’ behaviors in a routine manner. Only an informed and mindful choice of what best fits a particular musical or behavioral circumstance in a given moment—that is, *knowingly* and *purposefully* choosing one response from among multiple options—is a truly professional act. This is what I

understand Lee S. Shulman (president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching) to be saying when he describes professional action as making decisions “under conditions of unavoidable uncertainty” (Shulman, 1998, p. 9).

The paradox of routinization

If the key to professional practice as opposed to menial labor is that actions involve deliberate and purposeful choice, the paradox of routinization lies in the fact that, on the one hand, Shulman’s “unavoidable uncertainty” must not become obvious: If it did, confidence in the professional could be compromised. On the other hand, there *is* professional integrity in acknowledging uncertainty.

Making diagnostic choices appropriate for individual students in their particular contexts requires not only willingness and ability to choose, but also recognition of a range of potential options. Take, for instance a basic task like teaching children to sing “in tune.” Such a seemingly simple task begins to look quite complex when one considers the many reasons that can cause “out-of-tune-ness” in a child: poor breath control, poor hearing or other specific physical problems, boredom, lack of sleep, regarding singing as “sissy”, or perhaps an inclination to behave contrary to teacher-given instructions. Only if music teachers are familiar with all of these and other possible causes for out-of-tune singing are they equipped to act professionally. That knowledge is provided through experience as well as research, and is part of what constitutes the boundaries of our professional field.

Abbott refers to the boundaries of a field as “ties of jurisdiction.” Each profession is bound to those ties through the traditions in which the tasks of diagnosing, inferring, and taking action have been carried out over time. These three acts, often executed simultaneously, legitimize what a given profession does. Although it is expected that these be executed deliberately and purposefully, they can still be executed in ways that appear routinized—instilling confidence that one is acting according to established professional standards and conventions.

In music education, established standards and conventions from at least two disciplines converge to form the philosophical foundation for pedagogical action: those of music and those of education. As teachers, we know that if our students to have confidence in us, our actions must appear routinized: thus the admonition to inexperienced teachers to come across as rule enforcers and strict authoritarians rather than their pupils’ friends!

Indeed, one result of too little routinization is perceived inefficiency (Abbott, 1988, p. 51). Conversely, however, too much routinization “makes the work seem not worth professionalizing” (p. 51). Routinized labor happens when the step of inference making is taken out of the sequence of diagnosis and, subsequently, treatment.

The result is what Abbott calls jurisdictional vulnerability (1988, p.51). It occurs when one follows prescribed actions uncritically and without making case-by-case judgments as to the appropriateness of the actions taken. Any pedagogy, no matter how innovative at one point, can fall prey to jurisdictional vulnerability, thereby weakening the music educator’s professional status. I believe this to be at the root of what Regelski and others have referred to as “methodolotry”: following a particular teaching sequence without having thought through the reasons the steps are taken, or without having considered alternative potential causes for the instructional problem at hand.

RAMIFICATIONS FOR MUSIC TEACHER TRAINING

Because music teachers are expected to be experts in at least two fields, they may be especially (doubly?) susceptible to the dangers of jurisdictional vulnerability. Both fields, music and education, are situated in larger institutional settings—independent conservatories or comprehensive universities—and both have established expectations as to the behaviors that constitute desirable routines (in Abbott’s terms, ties of jurisdiction). Those desirable routines shape each world as a *community of practice*. Both communities have various, differing, and sometimes conflicting means of signifying these expectations within their larger, institutional frameworks. And both constitute real as well as symbolic communities (e.g., Cohen, 1985; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992; Lovekin, 1991).

The communities are ‘real’ or physical in that the universities where faculties of music and education are usually housed assign them to geographically different locations where they each pursue with students their own distinctive expectations and requirements as to instructional interactions. The communities are symbolic because (1) their respective members have different professional and personal norms and values, and (2) they are at different places in the hierarchy of established academic and professional programs as well as institutional core values. When we ask music education students to be members of both

communities during their training, they encounter *two* different pedagogic discourses with differing, sometimes divergent, behavioral expectations and practices.

College or university teachers often make the assumption that music education students can shift easily from one type of discourse to the other (from one discursive community to the other). In fact, the way we articulate course content and sequence for aspiring music teachers reflects this assumption. But moving from one social context to another is difficult. It is not surprising, therefore, that young music teachers often bring to their first job the routines accepted by the music community rather than those that define the community of educationists. This conflict is one of which most university-level music educators are aware, and one most have experienced. However, in my experience, it is a conflict they have done little to articulate, much less to solve.

Our task as music education teachers is therefore twofold. First, we need to provide explicit guidance to our students about the ways to negotiate the worlds of music and education. Second, we need to equip them with knowledge of the many diverse causes that can underlie given musical and social behaviors. And third, we need to convey to them that the truly professional instructional act involves recognizing and embracing unavoidable uncertainties. This third objective is one to which college and university teachers have paid insufficient attention. It is also key to changing our role from gate-keepers to *gate-openers*. In addition to providing our students with routinized answers to instructional problems, we should also emphasize the many instances when teaching music requires not simply engaging in routine responses to musical challenges, but finding unorthodox solutions to unique and deceptively complex problems. To be successful in that regard, we college and university teachers should recognize and embrace the unavoidable uncertainties in our own teaching.

Embracing and working with “unavoidable uncertainties”

What might it mean to work under conditions of unavoidable uncertainty? First of all, it would require that we distinguish routine actions from non-routine decision making, and systematically provide learning opportunities for both. This would involve (a) learning to recognize as well as to engage in clearly routinized action, (b) learning to recognize situations where such action needs to be questioned, and (c) being willing to find and apply alternative actions to those situations. Second, we need to show aspiring music teachers the significance of the diagnostic act as the definitively professional component, both in their musical and in

their educational actions. A crucial prerequisite for achieving this awareness is familiarity with the broad range of psychological, sociological, and other concerns potentially associated with musical and instructional issues, so that it becomes clear to our students that there are always choices to be made in addressing such issues. It is especially urgent that the presence of options be recognized in instructional situations that seem to implicate routine actions.

It has been my observation that the skill (and the challenge) of knowingly choosing one particular action from several options is rarely shared by supervising teachers or mentors when they work with their protégés. Lack of instructional time may be to blame, but perhaps we need to *make* time for such reflection. When experienced teachers are asked why they choose certain actions to reach specific students, they often simply attribute the choice to their many years of experience. The potential options from which the chosen action is selected remain, as a result, unarticulated. Our student teachers or first-year teachers thus see *routine action* in their supervisors or mentors *rather than reasoned or deliberative action*. They see certainty where “unavoidable uncertainty” could and should have been made apparent.

We need to share with our students when and where we, their teachers, face conditions of uncertainty in instructional situations, and how they influence our diagnostic actions. If students do not see us wrestle with philosophical and pedagogical uncertainties openly and deliberately, we cease to be the good role models for them as the future professionals we want them to be. Neither we nor our students should be afraid of working with pedagogical uncertainties. It takes courage to embrace uncertainty in the teaching act, a message that perhaps has been neglected in our pursuit of “fool-proof” teaching methods and step-by-step instructional sequences that promise inevitable success.

Our success in helping students become true professionals may therefore lie in how well we articulate and demonstrate to them (1) how to balance routinized behavior with going out on a limb; (2) when to take risks rather than going with the “tried and proven;” and (3) that it takes courage to admit uncertainty. In short, we need to help our students distinguish instructional situations where there are options from which to choose from situations in which there are none. Such recognition begins by exploring strategic options to routinized action.

Becoming gate-openers: Turning routines into critical incidents

When we begin to look for the reasons behind the musical and social behaviors we encounter daily and seemingly routinely, we create opportunities to transform routines into critical incidents, incidents that invite analysis. Because even the most routinized actions occur in *real* and *specific* instructional environments and realities, their analysis shows that behaviors and actions are functions of context. For example, just as the work realities of music teachers and professional performers differ, so do the professional actions that comprise each music teacher's respective community of practice. A small school setting differs from a large one; and a suburban school can differ dramatically from the inner-city school just 45 miles down the road. The non-routinized ability to select the "best fit" action from several options therefore requires contextual knowledge that cannot and should not be generalized across either teaching communities or groups of individuals. This fact, while commonly accepted, has concrete implications that may be less widely acknowledged: implications both for teachers of prospective teachers and for institutionalized music teacher education programs in general.

One of those implications or consequences is accepting *the field of music itself* as a multiple of different communities of practice, with varied rather than uniform institutional realities. As much as it is politically correct to affirm in our university-affiliated music schools that "we are all musicians," it is my belief that serious reform of the ways individual musicians are prepared for the realities of their work must begin by embracing the diversity of those realities, along with their different routines and uncertainties. This is as true for the aspiring musician-performer as it is for the music teacher who wants to teach young children in an inner-city school or an affluent suburb. Acknowledging and working with diverse work realities therefore entails far greater degree plan diversity than currently exists.

As I have suggested elsewhere, such a change would suggest more focus on work experience in specific settings, and fewer generic courses designed for and required of the entire student body (Froehlich, 2007). We also need to assure that our own teaching practices reflect that we college and university instructors (1) know about and work with our students' backgrounds and personal motivations for becoming musician-teachers, (2) are aware of both the power and limitations associated with our roles as institutional gate-keepers, and (3) understand that actively engaging our students in analyzing both routinized and non-

routinized behaviors associated with those roles is crucial to their professional identity formation.

Experienced teachers know that no universe of discourse is like another, and that no two students are alike. However, placing that knowledge at the center of our own professional actions takes courage and the willingness to analyze rigorously routinized instructional practices wherever they may occur—outside the academy or within it. We music educators must examine the ties of jurisdiction in our own field and ask ourselves (1) when, whether, and how we have engaged in truly diagnostic acts in our teaching; (2) to what extent we have engaged in routine acts of dispensing pat solutions to problems simply because we were unaware of, or did not think to look for, alternative options; (3) whether our body of professional knowledge offers those alternatives; and (4) if not, how such a knowledge base might be produced. The answers to these questions might actually be the tools I need to become a gate-opener rather than a gatekeeper in the academy.

Notes

¹ This article is an extensive revision of the paper given during the MDG colloquium, June 22-25, 2006, Westminster Choir College, Rider University, Princeton, NJ.

² From: The Price Waterhouse Change Integration® Team (1996). *The paradox principles. How high-performance companies manage chaos, complexity, and contradiction to achieve superior results* (pp. 19-21).

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