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## **The Social Construction of Music as a School Subject**

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*Keynote Address***The Social Construction Of Music As A School Subject**

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It gives me enormous pleasure to be here today to talk with you a little and share some ideas that have had me thinking recently. Yet I am aware of George Bernard Shaw's lovely little ditty when he writes,

A man is like a phonograph with half-a-dozen records. You soon get tired of them all; and yet you have to sit at table whilst he reels them off to every new visitor. (1911, *Getting Married*)

I have been caught up for nearly two decades now with the process that revolves around the identity construction of a music teacher. This remains a hugely important topic (for me at least) and one which is still being studied both in short and long term research agendas. I think of the wonderful recent work by Christer Bouij and Stephan Bladh in Sweden and in the UK with the TIME project (Teacher Identity in Music education) led by David Hargreaves and Graham Welch which has already produced some interesting results, (albeit more in the psychological tradition).

Another obvious advance is the recent 2002 publication of *Musical Identities* edited by MacDonald and Hargreaves. While interesting, this book is limited to the psychological traditions of identity which in my view are not nearly as far along in processing this dynamic area as are the sociologists who have been struggling for much longer with these questions. What is interesting, is that many of the same sorts of discoveries are appearing in this psychological version as have been previously documented in the sociological tradition. It is clear that scholars from both traditions must now come together and move forward with a common front.

Why would we even focus on sociological traditions for music education research? I think that we need to at least puzzle our way through that issue before it

makes much sense to look at any issue that arises from the tradition in any detail. My students who find themselves in my courses obligated to write foundational papers in this tradition regularly ask just this sort of question. In fact, it is the question that they find difficult to create because they don't fully comprehend the nature of the sociological enterprise. In fact, I'm not sure that many of us fully appreciate the scope of the sociological theater in which there is so much opportunity. So I will try to limit my discussion to a reasonably narrow point of interest and if you forgive me in advance, I shall take comfort in the words of Faure' giving advice to his students when he says, "Do not try not to be a genius in every bar."(quoted in Honegger's *I am a composer*, 1951). Little fear of that here. And in deference to Shaw, I have never thought out loud about this before. A new phonograph record!

So where to begin? First a word about sociology, I don't have to think much about this because my friend and colleague here with us, Tom Regelski, recently set Bob Walker straight on this very point. So with his permission, I offer you a reason for the sociological enterprise.

Sociology alerts us to the value of music 'in action' in people's lives, as opposed to the metaphysical claims of analytic philosophers. It gives a perspective concerning what music 'is' that is simply different and often at odds with philosophical and traditional musicological assumptions. It also warns us of a lot of class-based political and economic assumptions about the purposes of schooling in general and music education in particular, 'traditional' assumptions we are otherwise too likely to take for granted as 'natural' and that, importantly, impact instruction and its results. Sociology also will have us focus on the tangible personal and social results of curriculum and instruction, especially in terms of philosophical claims for music education and the different practices bequeathed by history. (mail to Dr. RobertWalker from Dr. Tom Regelski, used with permission).

I couldn't have said it better myself.

Over the many years I have been involved with music education, I have had the opportunity to work along side many fine scholars and teachers who remind me what a precious commodity school music is, or at least can be. I also note that after so many

years of school music flourishing in the schools that, as a school subject it remains under threat. I also notice that music education has recently become much more challenged with alternate ideologies as to what should count as the best sort of school music. In fact, the description of sociological merit from Dr. Regelski I just recited was in response to Bob Walker's claim that true school music must cling to the classics of the Western world. I want to explore that issue a little bit further later but I would like to just throw in the idea that I believe the definition of school music has broadened significantly in recent years. Part of the responsibility for this (or blame if you like) rests upon the shoulders of those of us writing in the sociological tradition who have made rather loud noises about what music really is. One of the biggest challenges altogether comes from the fact that school music is not one thing. The first time I saw that in print was from Wayne Bowman (1994) who was trying to convince his audience at the Paul Green Symposium at the University of Western Ontario that a single philosophical position to support music education was impossible despite claims by other eminent writers such as Colwell who was looking for his holy grail.

Sociologists have confounded this single purpose even more. I have witnessed a shift recently as more and more of my students are writing essays on topics in this area that the sociological basis for music education has become much more focused on cultural studies rather than studies as we might have traditionally described it. The sociologist's call for a broader inclusionary repertoire of world musics, including often under-represented genres of Western music in the form of folk, pop, rock, musical theater and others, has left a taste of school music being stretched beyond the point where it is centered on the study of music, certainly as artefact what Chris Small (1987) says over and over when he writes about great symphonies, great tone poems and great operas. The new sociological vision would have us study music more in context of society and culture. It is really a rather radical view of the place and obligation for school music.

I am also struck by the fact that while school music has been flourishing in North America for many years and certainly the last fifty or so in a format driven by the kind of

educated professional that we now have in our classrooms, music education remains under threat. We hear of school districts across North America cutting (or trimming) music programs usually in their quest to expand curricular time for math or science or language or all three. Typically these math for music exchanges do little or nothing for the improvement of math scores yet the myth remains that isolated attention to these subjects will improve performance. I wonder after more than half a century how music could still be vulnerable to such thinking. Could we not expect that so long and distinguished service to our children that our place in the curriculum would be secure and even more than that, promoted and exalted?

I worry even more because I studied Latin in school. Hard to find a school any longer that has a Latin teacher on staff. The relevance of Latin study to improvement in English language skill development is well documented, yet it is gone, a distant reminder of what once was. Stories that are accessible now only through translation. *I sing of arms and a man*. I dug out my very old Latin tutor (1948) last weekend and was surprised (well I haven't looked at it in nearly forty years) to find about eighteen pages given over entirely to musical notation in the section on lyric rhythms. It would appear that even back then there was a need for learning music and that was to take to Latin class to read the Latin textbook.

Subjects come and go. I am reminded of a little saying by Christopher Morley (1890/1957) "If you have to keep reminding yourself of a thing, perhaps it isn't" (*Thunder on the Left*, 1925, Chapter 5). Is all the rhetoric about the importance of music in schools just a constant reminder of an untruth? Another favorite of mine, this time by Pareto (1848/1923) reads like this, "Give me a fruitful error any time, full of seeds, bursting with its own corrections. You can keep your sterile truth for yourself."

Indeed there is room for speculation and for musing outside the box. I came to discover a paper published some time ago, originally in 1981 in *the British Journal of Sociology of Education* and subsequently reprinted in a book titled *The Making of Curriculum* (1988) when I visited the author, Ivor Goodson, at the Faculty of Education

at the University of Western Ontario in London, Canada. At the time I was very interested in the earliest stages of my investigations into music teacher identity and also into the relationship of nationalism in music education to influences of nationality in the post-secondary music teaching faculty in Canadian universities. Dr. Goodson had studied and written an abundance of material that was relevant to my work and I was pleased to be able to pick his brain for some considerable time. Goodson's paper is called *Becoming a school subject* (1988, 160-183) and is the sociological analysis of the birth and transformation of geography into a full curricular member of the school. For some time I have wanted to explore his analysis to see if there are hints to an explanation as to why music remains under attack or perhaps, more aggressively put, why after such a very long time has music not matured into the core of the educational enterprise.

From a sociological perspective of schooling, one of the most significant writings remains the collection of papers published under the editor's pen of M. F. D. Young (1971) and titled *Knowledge and Control*. Among those papers was one by Basil Bernstein called "Classification of and framing of educational knowledge" in which he writes,

How a society selects, classifies, distributes, transmits and evaluates the educational knowledge it considers to be public, reflects both the distribution of power and the principles of social control. From this point of view, differences within and change in the organization, transmission and evaluation of educational knowledge should be a major area of sociological interest. (1971 p.47)

Goodson goes on to write that academic curricula involve assumptions that some kinds and areas of knowledge are much more worthwhile than others (1988 p.161) He continues,

...further, that as we assume some patterns of social relations associated with any curriculum, these changes will be resisted insofar as they are perceived to undermine the values, relative power and privileges of the dominant groups involved.

We also learn that schools are not entirely free to decide curricular matters themselves. As long as the universities can set their own entrance requirements, then schools and the teachers working in them are constrained to offer a school curriculum that will match the requirements as set out for higher education. In music we can see this plainly when we look at the entrance protocols for music school which require all students to appear before a panel of faculty to present an audition of prescribed literature on the appropriate instruments. No matter how well you might play harmonica, most music schools in North America would not admit you to their programs, even if you played Bach. So the ritual of auditions plays an important role in the construction of a school curriculum in music even though the majority of entrance seekers will have already sought out private instruction beyond the walls of their school and its program.

Student admission success rates play a reciprocal benefit to school (and or private) teachers whose students succeed in encouraging the continuation of the kind and quality of teaching that made their students successful in the first place. A program in a school which offered a view of music and an alternative performance base in any forms of music not sanctioned by the entrance jury would soon be seen as suspect as fewer and fewer students were successful at gaining admission, even if their experience in other forms of music made them less likely to even apply.

Therefore schools and curriculum builders are not totally free agents. If we tread ever so briefly into the world of philosophy we can read that Hirst argues, for example, “that the intellectual discipline is created and systematically defined by a community of scholars, normally working in a university department and is then translated for use as a school subject” (Goodson, 1988 p.163). Phenix (1964, p.317) suggests that

...the general test for a discipline is that it should be the characteristic activity of an identifiable organized tradition of men of knowledge, that is, of persons who are skilled in certain specified functions that they are able to justify by a set of intelligible standards.

Now here is a definition that a musician can relate to. Do we not have a set of

identifiable organized traditions? We call it performance practice and we know of the specialists that carry on this performing tradition.

It has been argued, therefore, that to become a school subject which is explained and legitimized as academic tradition one needs to conceive of the curriculum as an academic process. Bennett Reimer has often claimed that music curricula need to look more like those of “real subjects.”

In 1985, the Getty Centre for Education in the Arts launched a nationwide effort to make art education more academic, with the thought that increased rigor and a broader curriculum encompassing aesthetics, art history, and art criticism as well as the development of the skills of production, would alter perceptions of art education and establish it as basic. (Fowler, 1992, p.31) As Goodson puts it,

Once a discipline has established an academic base it is persuasively self-fulfilling to argue that here is a field of knowledge from which an academic school subject can receive inputs and general direction.” (p.164)

Left out of such a discussion is a sense of the evolution of events that help explain the process by which this claim can be substantiated. It is, as Goodson reminds us, necessary to analyze the strategies employed in their construction and promotion (p.164).

There results from this a number of paradoxes because schools are different than universities. Goodson claims for example that in the translation of a discipline to a school subject that school subjects are barely disciplines let alone forms of thought. (p.164) School subjects are, therefore, often divorced from discipline base or do not have one. Many school subjects represent autonomous communities. (p.164)

Historically speaking, this does create some challenges for school music education since the rapid growth performance-based music education in post-war North America reflected a starkly different focus in the universities which had based their claim on a musical education in the humanities, mostly tied to musicology and then to theoretical pursuits. In other words the academic disciplines had left the performance training to conservatories. It was quite clear at the University of Western Ontario in the

1960's and a generation later at Memorial University that school music education programs were responsible for the growth of the music school as we know it today despite the growing conflicts created in the music school with respect to high status streams.

Teachers in schools therefore became models representing both the organization of knowledge as well as the expected role to fulfill and for universities to base their educational machine in motion to produce. In other words, the cloning of music teachers seen at the time as representing the appropriate body of knowledge became the universities first priority. At least some teachers were accredited with making official statements and became in some jurisdictions inspectors of teachers in many of the same ways in which OFSTED operates in Great Britain today. Teachers careers and promotions and even their departments survived and flourished (or not!) on the basis of the reports of government inspectors. Since these inspectors operated outside the jurisdiction of the universities, it was clear that to some extent the universities could only promote changes in the respected body of knowledge by putting teachers in the field who were so successful in areas that bordered on changing the status quo of the respected body of knowledge that an inspector would have to see the success and embrace the new ideology.

In many ways, chronologically speaking, school music preceded its parent disciplines of music education in the universities. As this was complementary process, the need for music teachers to fill the schools with kind of evolving practice led the majority of students to enter music schools to become these very teachers. It was not uncommon in those days for the student population of university schools of music to have ninety percent or more registered in music education programs.

After the Second World War, a new kind of music teacher appeared on the scene in Canada as well. These were veterans whose musical life had been tied to military bands as performers. In Ontario, for example, the teacher certification legislation allowed for certification of trades as well as for those whose background was more academic.

This is how the metal and woodworking shops got their teachers. Because former military bandmen had the prerequisite requirements of their trade they qualified for a teaching certificate in the same way as a plumber or carpenter. There was a huge need for teachers at the time and there was a tremendous will to re-integrate these veterans into society as well. All sides were served.

However, their sort of music education was often at odds with the more academic approaches being promoted by the inspectors and in many cases curricular guidelines. In the end, these teachers had a huge influence in the growing acceptance of performance-based programs in the schools and subsequently in the universities. Layton (1972) who studies the growth of school subjects writes that these sorts of teachers were rarely trained specialists but brought the missionary enthusiasm to the learners in the schools and this is his first stage development of a school subject in the secondary school.

Layton's second stage reflects on the developing tradition of scholarly work in the discipline. As the universities trained specialists, these new teachers produced new students who came to study at the universities within an increasingly prescribed body of knowledge.

Layton's last and final stage of acceptance of a discipline as a school subject reflects on the teachers who now constitute a professional body with established social rules and values. They support the doctrines in which they had been socialized within the teacher education programs and carried these values into the teaching profession where the replication of these values could be promoted.

When compared to the development of geography in the schools, music has many points of similarity which provides, as a result, some degree of validity in the theoretical position presented as a more universal construct.

Geography began in schools as something of interest offered by teachers who happened to have some knowledge of the area. It was promoted in the early days as affording utilitarian and pedagogic possibilities in the education of children. (Goodson, 1988 p.167) This is not an uncommon description of pre-World War II music where

instruction was seen to be linked to patriotism or learning the appropriate religious music in church schools. It was seen to foster a healthy and noble upbringing. There were few music teachers and as this small body of specialists emerged they, like their geography teachers before them, began to draw up plans for a subject association. (Goodson, 1988, p.167) Hence we have the establishment of the MENC in the USA as well as the CMEA in Canada. These groups became a strong vocal lobby for the discipline in their respective countries through various means, both face-to-face and also in print media, these organizations began to shape the thinking about the of a musical education in schools.

In geography, with the emergence of external examinations, a higher status was achieved quickly. In Newfoundland, we have gone full circle now from having province-wide school leaving examinations to a period without them and now they are gradually reappearing to promote accountability. I have not always been a strong supporter of our provincial public examination system because, in the past, it was more a matter of what was possible to actually put on a paper and pencil test in music which I didn't see as striking at the core of what I thought music education was all about. I became somewhat notorious at the government department of education for coining the phrase "*not testable but detestable*" when referring to these public examinations. Public examinations such as this have a tremendous ability to define the area of knowledge that is considered appropriate. Teachers teach to these tests because they can be held accountable for the outcomes when all students must undertake to write these tests. In fact, this is one of the stated reasons for the National Curriculum test in the UK right now. Results are made public and parents are encouraged to hold school's accountable by moving their children to school with better results.

The issue around the music teachers' table in Newfoundland about public examinations was less about the issues of test content and much more about the impressions that public examinations in music made music a real subject along with the likes of science and math and English language. There was a tremendous outpouring of

desire to have the exams simply because many teachers felt that the exam, alone, afforded music with a kind of superior status that it otherwise would lose if the public exam in music were eliminated. I must point out that the early stages of the removal of the public examinations was not a broad stroke but a kind of selective removal based on the ideology of saving money not tampering with the view of the authenticity of the subject. My music-teaching colleagues were, for the most part, not in agreement with me to abolish the examination because it would selectively remove music from the list of really important subjects, such as math and science, which were the last exams to go when the total cancellation of the provincial examinations finally occurred. In that respect I did agree with them however, I was more concerned that the public examinations were skewing the perception of what was actually going on in the school music room. To undertake the kind of public examination that would respect the current practice would have been beyond the resources of the department of education.

For those familiar with the International Baccalaureate program, the world-wide testing of scholarly work in music along with composition and performance has flourished in a model that allows for teacher assessments to be reviewed through sample work submitted to moderators who in turn have their moderations reviewed by senior examiners. This is a very labor-intensive process but allows for the fair representation of the school program within the examination structure.

MacKinder (1903) outlines a four-point strategy for establishing geography as a school subject. Firstly, we should encourage university schools of geography, where geographers can be made. (in 'Goodson', 1988 p.167) I have already discussed this point but would like to reiterate only that as music education grew in the schools, so did both the number of universities with music schools as well as the number of university students taking that music education option. Secondly writes MacKinder that we need to persuade secondary schools to place the teaching "...in the hands of one trained master...." (in Goodson, 1988 p.167).

Earlier I mentioned the bandsmen who entered the teaching force on the basis of

their military musicianship. As the university graduate population grew and began to overwhelm the professional organizations, they began to use the fine print in the schooling law to promote their own graduate status within the system. In Ontario, as it turned out, teachers certified under the tradesman qualification were licenced to teach only to Grade twelve. This was an adequate allowance since the vocational high schools in which metal shop and woodworking were seriously taught only went to Grade twelve. But, high schools established for college entrance had Grade thirteen as well. Since these tradesman-certified teachers were legally not allowed to teach Grade thirteen, and since most music programs had only one or two music teachers in any case, these tradesman teachers were systematically pushed out of music teaching or into the lower grades where they were least interested in teaching with heads of departments taken from young inexperienced upstarts as teachers who had degrees in music education. The university hegemony was nearly complete by the early 1970's in Ontario.

MacKinder's third stage calls for a progressive method for common acceptance and the content that could be agreed to for the purposes of examination and his last point was that these examinations must be set by practical geography teachers. Goodson is quick to point out this monopoly right for this closed shop. (1988 p.168)

As this model was working its magic, geography was still being promoted as a utilitarian and pedagogic subject but slowly the problems in this approach surfaced and geographers began to mount more academic arguments. (Goodson 1988, p.168) As this was happening geography began a phase of expansiveness where many saw the boundary around geography to widen so that the definition of purpose was lost. This depth vs. breadth argument has surfaced in music in recent years to include the discussions about "multicultural" inclusion and certainly in the popularization of music in school music programs About this Goodson writes, that geography had to become "more worldly" and that "all education must be related to the everyday experience of children." (1988 p.169)

This is a mainstay of the themes in the sociological literature about music education and the inclusion of the students' music as a valuable and worthwhile content.

This debate rages on the web between people such as Bob Walker who maintains the pre-eminent position of Western art music over largely all other forms of musical material and others who are quick to defend the usefulness and even the quality of music more typically aligned with the students in the schools. In any case, it is clear that this move toward a curricular content that is related to the clients of schooling has been visited by other school disciplines as well as music. What we need to consider is geography's outcome of this debate where, according to Goodson, geography became "out of balance," the geographical synthesis had become abandoned and the unique educational value of the subject lost in a flurry of social and economic generalizations. (Goodson, 1988, p.169). Many have argued that music lacks a solid support amongst educational power groups because it does not seem able to present a clear and unified reason for its inclusion in schools in the first place. Because music education is not a single coordinated activity with a single clear goal for children, this lack of solidarity is likely to continue but it is interesting to note that this diffusion of purpose was seen in becoming of geography as a strong indicator of trouble. Geography's answer was to push for a stronger university presence where geography teachers could be made in a common mold. It is interesting to note that the original place of music in universities was secured on the basis of musicological studies followed by other academic pursuits such as theory and analysis. It is clear that these core disciplines in music have been totally overtaken by performance studies in nearly every institution despite the fact that they remain in a supportive role to the musical traditions of university schools of music.

Cunningham writes (1988) that, at this time, music is at a critical point in its development. As it becomes progressively more academic in nature and content, it risks losing the basis for its acceptance as a school subject. As performance became the mainstay of music schools and the identity complex of teachers in training was fostered within the performer role model, it is understandable that performance in school music became more and more central to the enterprise. As many in the music education arena were calling for a more academic approach to support and cement our place in the

curriculum, making us look like a subject, the day to day expansion of school music became more and more based on performance alone. Since it is difficult, David Elliott's *Music Matters* notwithstanding, to make performance seem like a real academic discipline, the "cause celebre" people pushing this agenda seems doomed.

As the universities promoted their own vision of what is important in performance, (Bach, Beethoven and the Boys, with apologies to David Barber) the great Western cultural hegemonic process gradually divorced the university reality from the school students' reality, again leaving many students considering music in the way they are reported to have felt about geography, "at best apathetic, at worse resentful and rebellious." (Goodson, 1988 p. 171). The report (1967) on *Society and the Young School Leaver* adds

A frequent cause of failure seems to be that the course is often based on the traditional belief that there is a body of content for each separate subject which every school leaver should know. In the least successful curriculum courses this body of knowledge is written into the curriculum without any real consideration of the needs of the boys and girls and without any question of its relevance. (1967 p.3)

It was not uncommon for similar charges to be made against the music curriculum (see Witkin's *The Intelligence of Feeling*, for example) or for other British writings to claim that it is not music that students dislike, its just school music. As Goodson writes about geography, "pupils feel that present curricula have little relevance to their needs and so their level of motivation and understanding is low." (p.171) Geography was reinvented as "new geography" that was to embrace new paradigms which might be analogous to music's almost- accepted notion of including a broader range of "musics" into the structure of the music curriculum. I think that rests in what Goodson writes about the "new geography" when he describes it as a battle with major clashes between traditions.

Chorley and Haggett (1965 in Goodson, 1988, p.173) argue that it is "better that geography should explode in an excess of reform than bask in the watery sunset of its

former glories.” About the same time the Geographical Association argued that this new geography was

...creating a problem that will increase in acuteness over the decades ahead for it leads towards subject fragmentation as fringe specialisms in systematic fields proliferate and are pursued independently to the neglect of the very core of our discipline, a core that largely justified its existence.

Here we are again. Our challenge to broaden the definition of acceptable and worthwhile music for our schools will inevitably have the effect of diffusing our focus which is held by many to be in the grip of a hegemonic relationship with a single genre of music, a music conceived for the purposes of art alone, a purpose not overtly confined by social considerations or relevance to the commercial musical “utterings” so embraced by our teenage clients.

Universities were encouraged by the Geographical Association as follows:

University departments have a duty to ensure that, at least at the first degree level, the core of our subject is neither forgotten nor neglected and that the synthesis of the specialist fields and their relevance to the core are clearly appreciated by our undergraduate students. (In Goodson, 1988, p.175).

Little likelihood of that point being missed by our music schools. Despite heroic efforts on many fronts, Western classical traditions remain the bulwark of music school’s acceptable musical traditions. It remains a worry that the gulf between the music school’s reality and the broader base of musical allowance in the school classrooms will further destabilize the vision of music educators and further divide an already multifaceted subject. Like geography, many of the really formidable changes in the profession have been led by the schools with the universities gradually embracing those changes and converting themselves into a different social world. Today, music education does not represent the kind of force in the university music school that it once did. The predominant role of music education that once was, is no longer so powerful in shaping

today's modern university music department. This makes the influence that the school music world might have been even less likely to achieve the necessary ends that it has historically been able to exert. It remains a sociological truth, if such can be asserted, that the socialization of teachers of music within the current music school reality will continue to challenge new teachers to find a voice in the changing world of school music in which they will ultimately find a career.

It has been an interesting journey to see how geography came to become a school subject and to compare many of the issues raised in that account with the growth and challenges found in music education. It is clear to me that we will need to find a new "core" that can be promoted as an acceptable academic basis for the inclusion of music in the curriculum. Music's inclusion will hover between Layton's stage two and three until we can figure out a way to make praxis an acceptable academic discipline because without praxis, there is no music in music education. If it were possible, school music would continue to evolve quickly as our worldview of multiplicity of cultural imperatives drives our schools into curricular models as yet unexplored.

It has been a pleasure to think out loud with you today. I doubt that there are any conclusions that might arise from this dialogue but I do hope that you, like I, have found some interest in seeing how the evolution of music has many parallels in other academic areas. Certainly, I find that our consideration of other parts of the schooling process to be more than slightly ignored in the rhetoric of music education. As Cunningham writes,

The gradual abandonment of the utilitarian status of the subject is especially important consideration in music since it was that aspect of the subject that tended to attract school administrators in the first place. The attainment of academic status, if that pattern is occurring, would signal a fundamental change in the subject. To the degree that academic elements of the course of study theory, history, and appreciation dominate, the subject may lose its base of both student support (assuming that it is instrumental performance that attracts students) and administrative support. This would ultimately jeopardize its place in schools. It is for this very reason that music as a school subject is at a critical point in its development. (Cunningham, 1988 p.17)

I find it interesting to test the schema presented by Goodson and, to some extent, Layton in evaluating the construction of music as a school subject. I hope that you will find some reflection in some of these musings as we go about strengthening the place of music education in the schools of the world.

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