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Seeking Aporia: Experiences with Teaching Social Justice in the Undergraduate Music Education Program

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Maxine Greene's (1995) concept of "wide awakeness" challenges educators to think outside routine and comfort. She asserts that morality in education depends upon educators' commitment to problematize transparent and oppressive norms by calling into question long held beliefs. Socrates referred to this process as aporia, a state of confusion that occurs when previously held assumptions are challenged and new understandings are formed. What role can aporia play in the undergraduate music education program? How can we encourage undergraduate music education students to identify and question Western, hetero-centric, masculine norms that go undetected in the name of job training? In response to these questions, this paper will focus on the experience of engaging undergraduate music education students in social justice based, aporia-triggering experiences designed to broaden students' ideas about what constitutes a meaningful and valuable music education experience.

Keywords: music education, social justice, equity, music teacher education

Maxine Greene's concept of "wide awakeness" challenges educators to think outside routine, monotony, and comfort to engage with the conflicts, challenges, and dilemmas that characterize a lived experience. She states, "Teaching and learning are matters of breaking through barriers of expectation, of boredom, of predefinition" (Greene 1995, 15). Greene asserts that morality and ethics in education depends upon educators' commitment to challenge, problematize, and question.

How can music teacher educators respond to Greene's challenge of breaking the barriers of expectation, boredom, and predefinition in the undergraduate music education program? How can we encourage our undergraduate music edu-

cation students (and ourselves) to notice and question transparent (heterocentric, masculine, Western) norms that often go undetected in the name of job training, concert preparation, and career readiness? How can a social justice infused curriculum in the undergraduate music education program engage students in aporia, a disorienting, unsettled feeling triggered when long held beliefs are challenged?

Awakenings

Greene (1978) states, “We are all familiar with the number of individuals who live their lives immersed, as it were, in daily life, in the mechanical round of habitual activities. Most people, in fact, are likely to go on in that fashion, unless—or until—one day the ‘why’ arises.” (42–3). She goes on to say, “if teachers today are to initiate young people into an ethical existence, they themselves must attend more fully than they normally have to their own lives and its requirements; they have to break with the mechanical life, to overcome their own submergence in the habitual, even in what they conceive to be the virtuous, and ask the “why” with which learning and moral reasoning begin” (46).

The more we engage with “why,” the more awake we become. According to Greene (1978), “the “why” may accompany a sudden perception of the insufficiencies in ordinary life, of inequities and injustices in the world, of oppression and brutality and control” (43)? For Greene and for myself, the concept of social justice is an essential part of the “why” that prompts wide-awakeness. What Greene refers to as “sudden perception of inequities in the world,” aligns with Allsup and Shieh’s (2012) definition of social justice: “at the heart of teaching others is the moral imperative to care. It is the imperative to perceive and act, and to not look away ... social justice, understood as a principled, even public, response to a perceived hurt or act of injustice. Notice inequity. Name inequity” (48).

My own “why” or awakening happened gradually at first, like a faint glimmer of sunlight that stirs one from a deep sleep. As an undergraduate music education major, I blindly engaged in the “habitual activities” that Greene described. My days were filled with music theory, aural skills, music history, keyboard, studio lessons, and ensembles. I spent up to five hours a day in a four foot by five-foot

practice room, playing endless scales, etudes, and solo flute repertoire. I took my education and liberal learning courses. And I excelled. I excelled at ordinary, daily life. And then, the “why” arose.

It happened in a class entitled *School in American Culture* that I took when I was a junior undergraduate student. As a socio-economically and racially privileged student, it was the first time I had ever been exposed to and subsequently grappled with concepts of privilege and inequity as they related to race and class. We read Freire’s (1968) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and Kozol’s (1991) *Savage Inequalities* and for the first time, I realized that deep, systemic inequities are powerful forces in society and in education. Why then, did this content seem completely disconnected from my music studies? Not once had the words equity, race, or class—let alone gender or sexuality—been uttered in a single one of my music courses. My undergraduate music education studies seemed to intentionally look away from, gaze past, and deny the existence of these dynamics in our field.

As brief as that first awakening experience was for me, it was significant. It prompted me to keep stretching, to keep opening the door, to let more light in, to become more awake to the often hidden and silenced realities of lived experiences. As a graduate student I studied world musics, multicultural music education practices, and played in a Balinese Gamelan. I elected to take courses in gender, race, class, and disability. I attended a LGBT film festival and viewed *Jake in Transition*, a photo exhibition by artist Clarissa Sligh about a transgender woman’s journey of physical gender transformation. With each of these experiences, particularly those that arose from engagement with the arts, I awoke a bit more and became conscious of the way that power, privilege, and oppression intertwined to shape a range of human experiences that I had never considered or acknowledged before.

Name, Question, Explore

I earned my Master’s Degree in music education and began interviewing for high school band director positions. It was during these interviews that I started to detect something strange. On one occasion, the principal and vice principal who were interviewing me had a ten-minute discussion about coffee flavors as I sat in

front of them. They eventually asked me a few basic questions, and my interview was over. On another occasion, a principal stated that he “really learned something” from my responses. I never heard back from him. Why wasn’t I being seriously considered?

I was never offered a high school position. I took a middle school band job and found that I enjoyed teaching this age group as well. And yet, that strange feeling that I experienced during the high school band director interviews returned from time to time. It returned when I took my jazz band to competitive festivals and I was the only female director there. It returned at region band audition days when groups of male colleagues would huddle together and discuss who could “really blow” on their primary instrument. And it returned when I met my predecessor for the first time. He shook my hand and said, “Wow. I just can’t get used to these female band directors.” There it was. The feeling that had haunted me for so long had finally been named. I became fully awake when I suddenly perceived inequity and finally named it; when I realized that my gender rendered me invisible, marginalized, and silenced in the world of secondary music education. I found myself fully jolted into wide awakeness when I was on the receiving end of Greene’s “why.” Suddenly, I was a victim “of inequities and injustices in the world” (Greene 1978, 43). I began to see the profession with new eyes; everything was filtered. I questioned how the dynamics of gender, race, class, and sexuality shaped everything from classroom management techniques to student recruitment strategies to hiring practices. Now, as a music teacher educator, I want my students to awaken to the inequities and injustices in our field by considering how traditional teaching practices in music education often contribute to the marginalization and exclusion of particular populations, musics, and ways of making, teaching, and learning music. If music education is to support the goal of public schooling, where “all children, regardless of their socioeconomic background, are entitled to quality education” (and I would add regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion, exceptionality, or citizenship), then it is crucial for them to be able to work towards music education practices that are “in the service of improving society by making it more just, preparing students to use the knowledge and skills they develop in the music classroom to identify ways in which society and societal institutions can treat people more fairly and more humanely” (Westheimer 2015, 109–10).

Aporia

“I want to be a high school band director because at that level, you know, you can play serious music,” one of my music education students once declared in class. As products of a K-12 system that values the large ensemble, product-based method of “delivering” music education, it is difficult to fault students for entering their undergraduate music education career with a narrow, habitual, even sleepy view of the profession. How can music teacher educators help move the profession forward, when our students arrive as products of a field that has largely been lulled to sleep by the comforting, insulating, and repetitive “practice, perform, compete” mantra that characterizes much of K-12 music education in the United States?

Just as waking from a deep and peaceful sleep causes discomfort, awakening from or calling into question long held beliefs can also be an uncomfortable, even painful process. Engaging with Greene’s “why” can be frustrating, disorienting, and messy. Socrates referred to this experience as *aporia*, a state of confusion that occurs when previously held assumptions are challenged and rejected and new knowledge or understandings are formed. Charteris (2014) points out that this state of confusion goes by several names: critical incident, ah-ha moments, disorienting dilemmas, or her preference, “epistemological shudders.” She states, “Epistemological shudders can enable teachers and researchers to decontextualise what is ‘taken for granted’ and illuminate new understandings to enhance practice. Initially these shudders can cause a period of confusion or anxiety (aporia) when what has been taken for granted no longer makes sense,” but ultimately, these experiences “can evoke a new way of looking at things” (105, 107). Bradley (2007) speaks of the risks associated with intentionally avoiding aporia in the classroom:

When we as teachers ignore issues because we fear “uncomfortable conversations,” we unintentionally marginalize both the issues and the students who experience racism and other oppressions in material ways. However, the job of educator carries an obligation to help our students make sense of the world around them, including the positive, the negative, and the perplexing. Music education places us in a unique position to deal head-on with such issues. Music as a human endeavor, emerging as it does from the realities of life, provides a natural opening for conversations from which students make meanings and construct understandings. (155)

What role can aporia play in the process of awakening in the undergraduate music education program? Challenging undergraduate music education students to engage in social justice based, aporia-triggering experiences can foster and encourage critical thinking, questioning, and innovation rather than replication in their teaching. As an example, we can challenge our students to consider how traditional music education practices promote racism, sexism, and homophobia or think about how the privileging of certain musics and ways of music making in the curricula alienate, discourage, and devalue groups of students. If we can help guide undergraduate music students towards wide awakeness with aporia-triggering experiences it may be possible for them to continue “unmasking taken-for-granted assumptions and practices and forging more humane and civil approaches” as practicing music educators, by promoting kinder, more inclusive types of music education experiences for their students (Jorgensen 2015, 11).

What follows in this paper are examples of aporia-triggering experiences that have occurred in my Contemporary Issues in Music Education class, taken by junior music education students. What I present here are not prescriptions for a problem or specific lesson plans of any kind, but rather snapshots of dialogues and student work that reflect an effort to engage students in Greene’s “why” through an examination of social justice issues in music education. These snapshots capture the “epistemological shudders” and awakenings that my students and I experienced as we delved into difficult dialogues.

Contemporary Issues in Music Education

Contemporary Issues in Music Education is a course that is taken by all junior music education students and focuses on challenging their pre-existing beliefs about what music education can and should be by engaging with issues that they may not have considered prior to taking the course. Topics include discussions about what an education in music is good for, the notion of what constitutes “serious music,” ethical issues related to the teaching of musics beyond the Western, classical canon, popular music pedagogy, and issues surrounding gender, race, class, and sexuality in music education. The goal of involving students in this content is not to arrive at a particular conclusion, consensus, or solution to any of these complex and multifaceted issues, but rather to guide students to question

the status quo, and encourage them to awaken, to understand how many traditional teaching and performance practices actually alienate and exclude groups of students from participation in K-12 music education. Once students experience an awakening, or epistemological shudder, they cannot “unsee.” While this course may be the first time that many of my students examine issues of equity within music, their awakenings have often shaped the way that they process and discuss future coursework and field experiences. The following “shudder snapshots” illustrate significant “ah-ha” moments that stemmed from various Contemporary Issues in Music Education class activities and assignments. These snapshots are presented with permission and have been taken from reflection assignments based on class activities, final paper projects, and informal e-mail exchanges. In order to obtain permission to use the following examples of student work, I contacted the students and shared with them the exact quotation and context in which the quotation would be used in this paper. It should be noted that my experience teaching Contemporary Issues in Music Education did not begin with the intent to conduct a formal research study. I was surprised and deeply moved by the extent to which students engaged with topics of social justice during the course. Their work reminded me of my own journey towards wide awakesness and I am honored that my students have allowed me to share their words in this way.

Shudder Snapshot One

Students read portions of Christopher Small’s (1998), *Musicking* and discussed the notion of “serious music” and “serious music making” in a variety of contexts including K-12 settings, higher education, and lived experiences. The class then viewed two videos, a Lady Gaga mash up by the Eastman School of Music’s all female bassoon quartet, *The Breaking Winds* (2011) and a YouTube video of Lady Gaga’s *Edge of Glory* sung by the PS22 choir (2012). After watching the PS22 choir performance, one student commented, “I don’t care what music my students want to sing. If it makes them that happy and that connected, it doesn’t matter.” While the students generally agreed that connecting music education and repertoire selection to lived experience was meaningful and valuable, one student identified a disconnect between this approach and the admissions expect-

tations for college level music education programs. In a personal e-mail that I received after this class he wrote:

Hello!

I was hoping that maybe I could ask you a few questions that have been buzzing around in my head after today's class discussion in order to get more insight and some personal peace of mind. When asked "What is serious music," it seemed that most of the class felt as if all music could be considered "serious" music depending on the individual experience, environment, setting, situation, and enjoyment derived by the student ...etc. But it seems to me that by these standards all music is viewed as a whole with no distinct line being drawn in the sand so to speak and that anyone is able to deem any music "serious" based on their personal emotions. Does this mean that no music can be deemed as serious? Or is all music serious under the correct circumstances? While [I] am completely in favor of including popular music in today's education, I just feel as if an individual's emotional attachment to a particular form of music doesn't necessarily deem that music as "serious." What happens if students start to see popular music as serious music but society does not? What if higher institutions of music education do not? What if a student who is never fully exposed to anything but the music they enjoy (e.g.: popular music) wants to follow a career path in music education? Sorry for the extensiveness of this email but I would love to get some feedback from you whenever you get the chance.

This student experienced aporia because they immediately recognized and articulated a significant disconnect between relating music education to students' lived experiences (while challenging classical, Western norms), and implementing a more traditional curriculum so that students can be prepared to pursue music education as a career. His comments align with Koza's (2008) articulation of this dilemma:

Stringent and restrictive notions of what constitutes musical competence, together with narrow definitions of legitimate musical knowledge, shut out potential teachers from already underrepresented culture groups and are tying the hands of teacher educators at a time when greater diversity, both perspectival and corporeal, is needed in the music teaching pool (146).

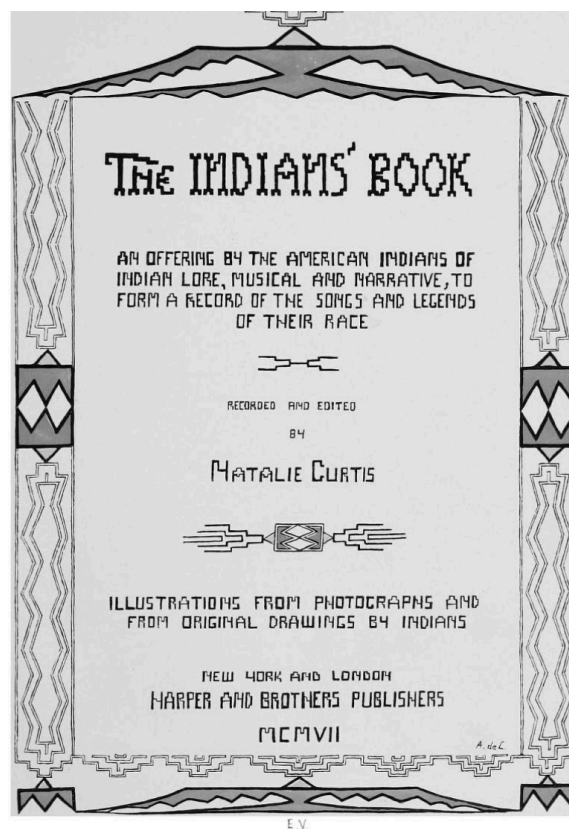
I felt a pit in my stomach when I received this e-mail because I didn't have an answer for the dilemma articulated by this student. How can we hope to create a more inclusive field if undergraduate music education programs (which lead to a music teaching certification) in the United States will only admit students based on standards driven by the Western, classical canon?

Shudder Snapshot Two

As a class, we listened to a concert band piece entitled *Native American Homage* by composer Kevin Mixon (2007). I recall that one student said, “That’s kind of offensive” after the initial listening of the piece. We then read the *Notes to the Conductor* section of the score which included the following quotation:

The night sounds used at the beginning and end of the piece are important as the ethnomusicologist Natalie Curtis writes: “[in Native American music] [h]armony is lacking; but the life and art of the Indian are so linked with nature that it is to be questioned whether the sounds of the nature-world do not supply to these singers of the open a certain unconscious sense of harmonic background.” Please balance the sound of the recording so that it properly accompanies the flute soloist and percussion.

In keeping with the course theme of questioning and troubling, we asked, “Who is Natalie Curtis?” A quick Google search yielded the following source of the quotation that was referenced in the conductor’s notes:



This discovery led to a class discussion about marginalization, trivialization, and museum mentality when teaching about or performing Native American musics. Students suddenly recognized that their seemingly innocuous preschool “First Thanksgiving” reenactments (which involved dressing as pilgrims and “Indians”) were stark examples of these dynamics. As Vaugeios (2007) states, “the ways we come to study and ‘know’ Others are not innocent. It is not so much understandings of Others that we require as understandings of how we have constructed the Other and the hierarchical relationships that derive from these constructions” (184). To contrast, challenge, and resist pervasive Native American musical stereotypes and to better understand the way in which the construction of this “Other” is rooted in marginalization and racism, we listened to *Hear My Cry* by Native American hip-hop artist, Frank Waln featuring Cody Blackbird (2011). This is the first verse:

*Musical vigilante, I pray they understand me
I took my pain and then I turned that shit into a NAMMY
I do this for my momma, I'm rapping for my granny
I'll take a Native story, turn that shit into a GRAMMY
Musical alchemy, I see the world in panoramic
Young, educated Native make a White Man panic Lakota lead a white?
The Government would shot me
They treated our chiefs the same way that they treat Gaddafi*

One student reflected on the awakening that took place as a result of these activities:

Prior to our discussion, I had always assumed that there had been culturally insensitive music published, but I had personally never been exposed to it. Thanks to our discussion, I was indeed exposed, and my eyes were opened to the way that some people handled the teaching of music from other cultures. I'm sure that many other students in the class felt as shocked as I did, as was evident in their contributions to the discussion. I think many people were somewhat knocked off-balance by the music. We were all just stunned at the ignorance that people so outwardly showed in their compositions and arrangements of supposed Native American music.

While students recognized the prevalence of Native American cultural stereotypes in their music education experiences, this activity awakened them to a viable alternative. The use of Native American hip-hop served as an example of

social justice inspired music education because it served as a starting point for challenging pervasive cultural trivialization and marginalization.

Shudder Snapshot Three: Awakening

For a final paper project, students explored an issue of social justice in music education through scholarly literature and a real life application of their choice. The real life application portion of this project featured mini auto-ethnographies, small case studies, surveys, an examination of class themes through the lens of various media, etc. Not surprisingly, many students who experienced marginalization and oppression as K-12 music students chose to share their personal stories. What follows are segments of my students' final papers which highlight their experiences with inequality and injustice in K-12 music education.

English Language Learning as an Issue of Social Justice

The reason I have chosen to explore this topic stems from personal experience. Coming to the US without speaking any English was one of the most impacting experiences I have ever lived—both negatively and positively. I was one of those kids ticketed as ESL and seen as remedial. This took away many opportunities for me, especially in the area of my elective courses. I was denied the opportunity to participate in music classes because I was required to take extra “core curriculum” classes (English and math) to make up for the fact that I had the equivalent of a learning deficiency—a language barrier.

Gendered Expectations in Music Education

The day finally came. To this very excited, very musical fourth grader, it was one of the most important days in his life; the day he selects instruments for band. On the top of the form was a line that read: “INSTRUMENT_____” His first instinct was to write down the flute. He had always been intrigued by the flute, with its almost mystical sound. But, the flute was a *girl* instrument. That is what everyone told him. If you play the flute, that's *gay*. So, wanting to prove his heterosexuality even at a young age, he wrote down “saxophone” in his neatest fourth grade handwriting, and handed in the form.

LGBTQ Issues in Music Education

From my own experiences in K-12 education, I know that it is not the most welcoming environment for LGBT identifying youth. Starting from the beginning of middle school I was not only verbally harassed due to my perceived (and then verified) sexual orientation, but I was also physically assaulted. It is a common stereotype that music is somehow free of prejudice for students of different orientation or gender identity, although through research it is obvious that there is

no subject that is safe from this pervasive mentality. Upon really thinking about the issue, I tried to remember how many LGBT figures were brought up in my own K-12 education. Even reading Walt Whitman, who had blatant homoerotic undertones in his poetry, we did not allude to the fact of his homosexuality. The fact that I cannot recall ever acknowledging a person's sexuality, even when it was a major factor in their life and work, is astounding to me.

Race in Music Education

I distinctly felt the effects of racism within the context of my high school drama club. During the casting process, after several years of successful auditions and callbacks, I never received a role of any substance until my senior year of high school during which I was cast as a wardrobe. I noticed that during callbacks, the director of the musical had a distinct racial profile he seemed to be looking for...The educators running the musical clearly valued my abilities as a musician as they would put me in as many numbers as possible and went as far as to have me sing for other leading actors who fit the racial profile they were looking for. Furthermore, the racism I experienced was extremely hurtful, frustrating, and made me feel isolated. This experience made me feel that I was looked down upon because of my race and that I was not respected and was a sort of second-class citizen. My entire life my peers would ridicule me for wanting to be "white" but not quite fitting in. Whether it was my usage of proper grammar, striving for academic success, and my enjoyment of Classical music in particular, I felt like a social outcast due to my race for the majority of my K-12 experience.

Class in Music Education

Coming from a low income home that did not also align with race stereotypes, I received criticism on more than one occasion. My situation did not allow for me to take lessons during middle and high school. During middle school, I played the flute. During this time, I could already tell I was falling behind. It wasn't until later that I realized it was because my peers were taking lessons. When I mentioned this to my parents, I was told that the only reason I was able to continue the activities I was in was because I was working to pay off fees. My parents told me if it wasn't for this, I would have stopped this activity by now because we couldn't afford to pay it out of pocket. Transportation to extracurricular activities also hindered my music education. My freshman year, I chose not to join [marching band] because the rehearsal schedule seemed unrealistic with my parent's job and car arrangements at that time. This [socio economic factor] continued to affect my education. It caused a disconnect between my teachers and I on more than one occasion. I felt that this judgment was misguided, but was never able to voice a reasoning to them behind this. Things like clothing, school supplies, and other things were questioned by my peers and teachers without a reason I wanted to share with them. The more important part is that I did not want to speak up about it.

Perhaps the most powerful aspect of this project occurred during the students' presentations of their research. Students were provided with the time and

space to talk about their experiences and share their findings. Students who were privileged in some way (by race, language, gender, sexuality) were clearly shocked by some of the stories relayed by their peers. This experience provided a safe space for silenced voices to be heard. Hearing the stories of marginalized peers personalized many issues of social justice for students in the class. These stories weren't about "things" that were "happening" to "other people" but rather deeply painful experiences that their friends bravely shared. The accounts of homophobia, racism, sexism, and classism were all instances that had happened in the recent past. These experiences challenged the frequently espoused and clichéd notion that music education is for everyone and that injustices magically self-correct over time. Ballantyne and Mills (2015) state that "immersion or "real life" experiences of diversity challenges or social justice issues, combined with guided reflection, enable preservice teachers to confront their own predispositions, which can provide the impetus for changing dispositions. This can result in ongoing change" (655). Engaging preservice music teacher educators in sharing their personal experiences with marginalization is one way to awaken to, challenge, and resist inequities in the field and strive toward a socially just type of music education that is grounded in "collective action, civil discourse, and hope" (Barrett 2015, 659).

Shudder Snapshot Four: New Understandings

While aporia is a necessary step in the process of breaking through barriers and engaging in the "why" that Greene describes, the goal is for aporia to give way to the formation of new understandings. Only when this final step occurs can real progress towards a more inclusive, humane, and just profession be achieved. I recently facilitated a class discussion where a white student felt that music scholarship opportunities designated for people of color were unfair. The student couldn't understand why financial assistance should be offered based on any other criteria besides academic success or musical talent. The class atmosphere immediately became tense and I could see my students physically shift and become rigid in their seats. A feeling of panic slowly crept into my body as my brain raced to construct a response. Before I could react, one of my students of color validated the student's statement as an honorable long term goal, but kindly and patiently challenged their classmate to understand how some students, particularly

those of color, might not have the “same starting point” in music as racially and socioeconomically privileged students. The student gently stressed that a scholarship could be the only chance for such a student to gain entry to the profession. From that point on, the class engaged in a challenging and honest discussion about race, class, and music education. Later that evening I received this e-mail from the student who began the discussion. It reveals that aporia can lead to new understandings.

I just wanted to thank you for being so understanding in class yesterday and for maintaining the friendly environment. I am truly sorry if I offended anyone with my part of the discussion and for my ignorance during it. I recognize that we all come from different backgrounds and our discussion, especially at the end, helped me further understand everything. I realize that part of why I have/had different viewpoints from most people in the class was partly because my parents are very conservative and a lot of my classmates are more liberal. Ever since I began coming to school here, especially wanting to become a teacher, I realize that I do not completely agree with everything that my parents think, and discussions, such as yesterday's, help me further understand these gray areas. Again, I'm sorry if I offended anyone but I am also really happy we had that discussion.

Conclusion

While the initial confusion involved in awakening (through the questioning of long held beliefs or simply an awareness of something new) is necessary to the experience of aporia, two questions remain. First, how can educators design aporia-triggering experiences in a way that yields progress rather than paralysis? According to Jonas (2015), “As some have rightly claimed, Socrates’s interlocutors frequently end up confused and discouraged, sometimes they end up angry; and at other times they end up seemingly *less* curious and *less* willing to engage in the back-and-forth of dialogue” (39). Clearly, this is not a desirable outcome of engaging in aporia triggering experiences in our classrooms. Students need to be supported as they engage in courageous conversations and difficult dialogues. They need to be given time and space to both think through and talk through their ideas. In my own teaching experience, a common statement uttered when we explore the nitty gritty of social justice topics is, “Okay, I’m going to stop talking now before I get into trouble.” That is the *exact* moment when the talking needs to continue. Bradley (2007) stated, “Talking self-consciously about race

talk and its dilemmas permits us to acknowledge that we all face difficulties in talking about race, and that we will all make mistakes from time to time” (152).

We ALL face difficulties and we will ALL make mistakes. This includes us, music teacher educators. Taking the leap and engaging in these issues with our students can be just as difficult for us as it can be for them because it is “unsettling to work in the realm of entrenched beliefs with the intent of examining, dislodging, and confronting small-mindedness and narrowness of thought. Contentious rifts are unavoidable. Unmasking deeply rooted prejudices strikes close to the heart” (Barrett 2015, 667). I am learning to accept the unsettled feeling that occurs each time I engage my students in difficult dialogues. For hours and sometimes days after, I am plagued with doubts about whether I brought these topics into my classroom in the “right” way. Perhaps I didn’t frame the discussion properly. Did I do more harm than good? Did I further marginalize someone’s experience by failing to recognize or emphasize the interconnectedness between class, race, gender, or sexuality? Did my students of color feel put on the spot or obligated to speak during our conversations about race? Despite feeling physically ill from the tension of these discussions, I am always proud of my students for taking the risk of vulnerability as we delve into these topics together. These conversations help us discover “who we are and how we can better relate to and interact with others within and outside our communities,” skills that music educators will surely need as they work with diverse populations of students. (Benedict et al. 2015, xv)

Music teacher educators can help students in taking that brave step, to continue talking through these difficult topics by establishing a culture of honesty, humbleness, generosity and respect in our classrooms. As Greene stated:

All we can do is speak with others as passionately and eloquently as we can: all we can do is to look into each other’s eyes and urge each other on to new beginnings. Our classrooms ought to be nurturing and thoughtful and just all at once; they ought to pulsate with multiple conceptions of what it is to be human and alive. They ought to resound with the voices of articulate young people in dialogues always incomplete because there is always more to be discovered and more to be said. We must want our students to achieve friendship as each one stirs to wide-awakeness, to imaginative action, and to renewed consciousness of possibility. (Greene 1995, 43)

Without the supportive environment that Greene (1995) described, aporia-triggered paralysis can set in, where students “not only realize the inadequacy of

their previous answers to questions, but also experience extreme doubt about their ability to find answers that are *more* adequate” (Jonas 2015, 40). In such an instance, the temptation to be lulled back to sleep will be strong, the pull of “practice, perform, repeat” which marginalizes and silences so many will be enticing because it is widely accepted, and a return to the status quo is likely. Properly structured and appropriately supported aporia-triggering experiences give students “the scaffolding necessary for the acquisition of truth, but then are expected to take ownership for constructing a life lived in light of that truth” (Jonas 2015, 51). And so, a final question. If aporia triggered paralysis is avoidable with proper support, how can we help our students to stay awake when the pull of the nuts and bolts, the daily grind of teaching will surely be strong? What role can we play in making sustainable progress towards a more socially just profession?

To keep our students awake, we must constantly strive to model what a socially just music education can look like. We must continue to question, trouble, and problematize in our classes and in our own work. And perhaps most significantly, we must provide continued support for students once they have graduated and entered the workforce, when the risk of being lulled back to sleep is the greatest. As a result, our jobs as music teacher educators must continue past commencement. Both in-person mentoring and the use of online social media platforms to establish first year teacher support groups for recent graduates are just a few ways that music teacher educators can support early career teachers through the first years of teaching and may help them filter their experiences with a socially conscious lens.

Imagine the possibilities for our profession should newly minted music educators enter the workforce with a social justice agenda, one that “emphasizes the worth, dignity, and preciousness of individual human beings” (Jorgensen 2015, 7). Wide awake music educators will be able to see, truly *see* their students, especially those who have often been marginalized and silenced in music classrooms due to race, class, gender, sexuality, citizenship, religion, ability, or primary language. While “social justice is a complicated endeavor involving, among other things, adjudication of conflicting values and interests, political action, and a concern for the welfare of the public,” music educators with such an agenda have the potential to forge the path for a kinder and more inclusive kind of music education that honors the depth of musical experience that all students bring to our

classrooms. (Benedict et al. 2015, vi). I think back to my own experiences with awakening and am grateful for each teacher, peer, colleague, student, or stranger who challenged my own long held beliefs, enabled me to recognize systemic oppression and injustice, and gently urged me on to new beginnings. Examining my own positions of privilege and marginalization within music education resulted in aporia which gave way to new understandings, a vision for what music education can be, a quest to know more, and a desire to urge my own students towards wide awakesness. We must remain diligent in the effort to infuse aporia triggering social justice content in undergraduate music education curricula so that graduates of our music teacher preparation programs will remain awake and encourage their own students to engage in aporia. If this occurs, the process of awakening can begin again and the “enrichment of the “I” may become an overcoming of silence and a quest for tomorrow, for what is not yet” (Greene 1978, 181).

About the Author

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