Religion-Blind Policies: Anti-Democratic Consequences

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Tensions between authoritarianism, pluralism, sectarianism, inclusion, diversity, and religious and national identity pervade and construct the possibilities of global discourse. In many ways, these tensions signal a retreat from reforms that require discomfort, reflexive engagements, courage. This retreat manifests in policies, both real and those we imagine to be real, that seek to neutralize public educational pedagogies and curriculum. We reside now in a perfect storm, the nexus between ideologies of politics, class, race, gender, and religion, wherein authoritarian populist movements (including those of religious factions) are reshaping society. In this article, I argue the falseness of pedagogical neutrality and explore the need for pedagogical spaces that recognize manifold layers of pluralism. I suggest that a structural blindness to values that are incommensurate with those each of us hold, particularly those that pertain to being religion-blind, furthered by democratic and secular religious "neutrality," has had a reproductive effect enabling and furthering an agenda that serves to sanction and "demarcate the intolerable" (Brown 2012, 6).

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> As the history of religion in so many societies has amply demonstrated, government edicts do not eliminate deep-seated belief systems from the populace. (Thomas 2006, 28)

> I am opposed to teaching for religion in schools; but that is a very different issue than automatically rejecting—as I believe too many progressives do—the spiritual and religious grounding of many people's actions. Doing so makes it even harder to create the conditions for alternative coalitions that stand in opposition to the current rightist reconstruction of the lives of all too many people in this society. (Apple 2001, xvi)

My go to wish when I blew out birthday candles, or the wish I made at the appearance of the first star in the night sky, always used to be for world peace.

I wish for world peace.

Until one day in class, after singing "Star Light, Star Bright" and urging every-one to wish for world peace, a student raised their hand and said, "Professor, what if your world peace is different than mine?" Indeed. What if.

If educators ignore the fact that our students hold values that are incommen-surate with our own and with others, we do so, not just at our peril, but the peril of this world. And while many values are incommensurable, there are none more so than how one comes to know the world through belief traditions and systems. Thus, it is difficult to imagine anything more perilous than avoiding, silencing, or disregarding, for instance, the religions and religious beliefs of our students.[1] And yet, the definition of a "good" citizen educator in a democratic state seems to be one who either tolerates or remains blind to religions and religious beliefs. Both are problematic without a more nuanced reckoning.

In this article I suggest that this structural blindness, furthered by democratic and secular religious "neutrality," has had a reproductive effect enabling and fur-thering an agenda that serves to both sanction and "demarcate the intolerable" (Brown 2012, 6). In other words, governmental mandates that make religious ex-pression free for its citizens too often are operationalized in such a way as to sup-press an integral part of identity development, doing little toward "helping people communicate creatively about their differences" (Pearce and Littlejohn 1997, 9) and much to pave the way toward policies that "[reify] as natural the differential orders of power between the tolerating and the tolerated" (Brown et al. 2015, 162). Consequently, a need exists to understand "tolerance" manifested politically through policies as "a problem of power and as organizing relations among citi-zens, subjects, peoples or states..." (160).

Presumably operating under the assumption that "secularism generates toler-ance as mutual respect among religions" (Brown 2012, 7), democratic states have historically relied on systems of tolerance to further spaces of inclusion. Clearly, we know this has not happened. One need only to reflect on the October 2020 be-heading in Paris of the history teacher Samuel Paty, who had brought into class caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad as part of an open discussion on freedom of expression. French President Macron responded to what he referred as a "ter-rorist, Islamist attack" by emphasizing that the teacher was attacked "because he taught the liberty of expression, the liberty to believe and not believe" (Nossiter 2020, para. 6). As the beheading in Paris reminds us (as do all acts of religious extremism throughout the world), societies built upon religious secularism rarely

work as ostensibly intended. Rather than open spaces that embrace difference and epistemological pluralism, they drive more deeply from the public space discussions that might generate further nuanced understandings of (for instance) freedom of expression.

In this article, I frame "the promise of toleration," specifically religious toleration, as one in which "coexistence in disagreement is possible" (Forst 2013, 1) and as "an attitude that is intermediate between wholehearted acceptance and unrestrained opposition" (Scanlon 2003, 87). Tolerance, then, can neither assume mutual respect, nor can it condone false generosity. To that end, I am driven by the demand "to think about education against prejudice in all of its forms" (Tate 2017, 86) and urge "the need to find a means of communication across the chasm of belief and unbelief" (Noddings 2008, 370).[2] Hence, in this article I take seriously Noddings' "means" as a pedagogical mandate that supersedes any content or repertoire we choose to program and perform. The goal in this context is not to argue for teaching about religion, nor is it to understand the "interrelationship between music and religious experience" (Jorgensen 1993, 103), or the "importance of understanding the spiritual significance of the music we teach" (Boyce-Tillman 2018, 279). While the words of Marie McCarthy (2018) suggest profound possibilities and beauty, I do not seek in this article "to find ways in which experiences and interactions in the music classroom can simulate the spiritual in the child to connect to the spiritual in the universe through participation in music" (59). My purpose is to argue the falseness of neutrality and explore the need for pedagogical spaces that recognize manifold layers of pedagogical epistemologies, so that in our pedagogical encounters we might find ways to "come to terms with the peaceful coexistence of sacred and secular worldviews" (Boyce-Tillman 2018, 2). It is concerned ultimately (Tillich 1957) with pedagogical encounters that encourage students to stand in relation with our *whole being* to the other (Buber 2001/1937, italics added), no matter the depth of seeming incommensurability.

It may seem that the points I raise in this article pertain only to educational systems in which there exists a constitutional separation of church and state (as, for instance, in the U.S. and Japan), or educational systems that mandate religious instruction in their governing documents (England, Scotland, and Ireland, for instance). This is not the case, however, for several reasons. There is a broader politicization and weaponization of religion taking place throughout our world that "serves to legitimize a social order, a particular regime, or a political community

against destructive forces" (Zúquete 2017, 2), purposefully dividing the world into us and them—"good" and "bad." We live now in a world in which extremist religious factions threaten our existence in very real ways (and I am not just referring to Islamic extremism; mass shootings take place in the name of religion and in houses of worship all over the world). We also live in a world where authoritarian forms of governance and populist movements in all areas of our lives embrace homogeneity and threaten the eradication of plurality.[3]

I am wary, however, of painting a "caricature of the opposition," as my colleague William Perrine (2017, 21) warns, as I desire to create a "real space for alternatives" (22). While Perrine supports "[being] charitable towards divergent viewpoints, attempting to understand alternatives on their own terms" (29), I am reluctant to leave it at that. Charitable in this context feels too similar to a stance where tolerance has to do with agreeing to disagree, or "you do your thing, and I will do mine." More often than not, such a stance is wielded from a place of privilege where one can simply remove one's tolerance on a whim. I also argue that this stance feels precariously close to engaging in acts of false generosity, which for Freire (1970) have more to do with reproducing systems of oppression than with coming to understand ourselves with the other. I argue, then, that whether our governmental mandates "allow" or do not "allow" religious expression, we need to address how our pedagogy, our being with others, recognizes and welcomes pluralism so that state-sanctioned and mandated tolerance does not "[co-opt] our practices" (Schmidt 2007, 162) to such an extent that "these norms are used as inscription devices, proposed as simplistic solutions to problems with the mere intent of skirting them" (163). In other words, policies intended to protect diversity too often, in their seeming simplicity, function as devices of surveillance, repression, and suppression.

Many readers of this journal consider themselves critical pedagogues. I know that I certainly do. In 2019, for some reason, perhaps an act of grace, I was part of a space that opened in a class where graduate students felt comfortable sharing that for most of their entire schooling, they had had to deny their faith-based ways of knowing the world in order to participate in the educative process. I am forever thankful to those students for helping me come to terms with how many of the tenets of critical pedagogy I had embraced "obscured, in some ways, the limits of my own tolerance for difference" (Goodburn 1998, 347). I am reminded, then, and hope to remind those for whom these arguments are sense making, that a critical

pedagogy that does not open discussions to the belief backgrounds of our students risks treating deeply important aspects of the lives of our students as "arbitrary and unimportant" (Carter 1993, 6).[4]

Tensions and Retreat

Tensions between authoritarianism, pluralism, sectarianism, inclusion, diversity, and religious and national identity pervade and construct the possibilities of global discourse, so much so that these tensions may signal a retreat from possible reforms that require discomfort, reflexive engagements, courage. This retreat manifests in policies, both real and those we imagine to be real, that seek to neutralize public educational pedagogies and curriculum. We live now amid a perfect storm, the nexus between ideologies of politics, class, race, and religion, wherein which authoritarian populist movements including those of "religious conservatives … who are deeply worried about secularity and the preservation of their own traditions" (Apple 2016, 4) have "radically reshaped the common sense of society" (Apple 2001, 226). Sitting out the storm (or worse, allowing the storm to frighten us) and tiptoeing one's way tentatively through accountability and "hyper-punitive policies and practices" (Giroux 2017, 2) at a time in which "market fundamentalists around the globe have gone on the offensive doing everything they can to strip education of its civic purposes" (Giroux 2014, 12) feels like common sense. Surrendering to preserving this common-sense view of how the world functions, however, means abandoning disruptive pedagogies. We need not read disruptive in this case as a complete dismantling of all things conservative, but rather, as a tool to "consider all perspectives…despite divergent philosophical bases" (Perrine 2017, 7).

This is not to say that music education as a discipline has not crafted spaces that have the imprimatur of officially sanctioned, socially just topics that serve to disrupt. Discussions linked to colonialism, gender, sexuality, race and racism, for instance, are officially welcomed, as current texts and conferences might indicate[5]—less so, however, those linked to class, and even less so, if at all, are those linked to religion. While no one challenges the interrogation of color-blind or even gender-blind practices, religion seems to paralyze us. Thus, even when confronted with visible markings of religious belief systems, we often resort to religion-blind "common sense" engagements. This logic, however, mirrors color-blind practices. If teachers treat all students as if they are the same "[that usually means] that their

model of the ideal student is white and middle-class and that all students are treated as if they are or should be both white and middle-class" (Jordan Irvine 1991, 54): so, too, in religion-blind practices. In secular democracies, particularly the U.S., by ignoring the religions of our students, we tend to treat them as if everyone is or should fall somewhere on the broad spectrum of Christianity or, in our more aware moments, Judeo traditions. The problem, as Brown (2012) sees it, is that we assume

> that secularism generates a religiously neutral state, social and public order, or put slightly differently that in drawing a firm line between church and state, religion and law, ecclesiastical and political authority, Western secularism secures a religiously neutral, because religiously evacuated, public sphere. (2)

Of course, there is no such reality as a religiously evacuated public sphere, even though we may wish and act fervently to believe this. Spaces are always "social, political and historical constructions and, therefore, bounded" (Poulter, Riitaoja, and Kuusisto 2015, 78–9). Unfortunately, this "religiously neutral state" creates the denial and suppression of a space with "free discussion and deliberation, in which a plurality of opinions can be expressed before a public" (Singer 2017, 4). Thus, while purporting to be neutral, simple (perhaps read as ingenious) good faith actions such as being "[non-responsive] to children's questions on worldview issues" (Poulter, Riitaoja, and Kuusisto 2015, 79), while "seemingly inviting, open, in fact, oppresses" (Schmidt 2007, 162). Though it may appear that overlooking religions and religious beliefs makes it easier to facilitate and create spaces that embrace and encourage critical thought—surely a tool against oppression of all kinds—being blind to faith, to these ways of being and knowing the world, renders us complicit in erasing not just the identities of our students but of ourselves. Consequently, ignoring all aspects of plurality both denies and represses who we are as distinct individuals (Arendt 1958) and denies this world of multifaceted and multitudinous individuals who must find a way to live together.

Oppression as Intersectional

In order to further frame my arguments, I borrow from Bonilla-Silva's (2019) discussion of race and racism, as well as critical race theory, in order to better recognize the differing mechanisms that produce and reproduce inequalities. If we are serious about understanding, as Hess (2018) writes, "oppression as intersectional"

(4), then religion blindness must be considered as one oppression among many. The ideology of religion-blindness has become a political tool much as color-blindness has (Bonilla-Silva 2019, 8). And much like color-blind ideology, which proposes that "race is irrelevant to social life" (Fryberg and Stephens 2010, 115), religion-blindness also "render(s) invisible the experiences and the everyday realities of different [peoples]" (115). Hess (2015) reminds us that "anti-racism challenges the institutions in society that facilitate unequal power relations" (72). Thus, problematizing religion-blindness also challenges "technologies for producing inequality" (Schmidt 2007, 164). While it may seem farfetched to consider religion-blindness as a technology for producing inequality, consider the rest of the Schmidt quote, which suggests that these technologies come with the "inherent perception that such reality is inescapable—and appropriate—as long as they at the same time produce a discourse that justifies such inequalities" (164). Even in democracies, then—particularly in democracies that do not officially sanction, allow, and in many cases forbid the presence and recognition of belief systems—courage is the willingness to enact "freedom to" and challenge policies and discourses that produce and reproduce a Western secularism discourse intimately tied to hyper individuality and market-driven purposes.

While religion-blind actions may be placed within a larger interconnected web of racism, this would not fully account for how authoritarian and suppressive policies operate. Thus, we need both an anti-racist framework as well as other theoretical and pedagogical frameworks that continue to challenge and disrupt the discourse of populist movements, neoliberalism, and "neoconservative intellectuals who want a 'return' to higher standards and a 'common culture'" (Apple 2000, 230). It is not just simply that government mandates may severely curtail conversations about religion (even though in the U.S., teachers are "allowed" to teach *about* religion). It is also how these policies have been forced in such a way "that the very nature of our common sense about education is constantly being altered" (Apple 2016, 3). For music teachers, the desultory effects of this have not just manifested in our cowering further from programming musics but, even worse, from pedagogical encounters that recognize differing religions and religious ways of knowing the world.

Implications for Music Educators

Bradley (2009) reminds us that "anti-racism as critical pedagogy aims to engage students in reflection, encouraging and enabling them to identify and interrogate power structures" (70). However, as Apple writes, "critical pedagogy cannot and will not occur in a vacuum" (Apple 2000, 250), which brings me to implications for music educators. I thus turn to two unswerving and devoted teacher educators to help frame pedagogical possibilities: Gert Biesta and Nel Noddings. Biesta (2013), in challenging the stranglehold constructivism has had on the teaching/learning process, asks us to consider that an "engagement with religious language and theological argument is no longer a matter of jumping over the fence of reason, but is part of overcoming—and perhaps even refusing—the very way in which this fence has been constructed in the first place" (452). While he makes this argument in the context of the reclamation of teaching and the possibilities thus of transcendence, I read within his words a call to interrogate the policies and spaces we have accepted as "inescapable—and appropriate" (Schmidt 2007, 164). Noddings (1993a), forever stalwart and fueled by the mind of both mathematician and philosopher, has for a very long time recognized the paralyzing effects that ignoring religion has had on students. Never one to shy away from the ethical heart of an issue, the phrase she uses when referring to this blindness in the public classroom is "morally reprehensible" (123), as in, "it would be morally reprehensible not to discuss 'controversial moral issues'" and that we "must be prepared" to do so (123).

Educating for intelligent belief or unbelief, as Noddings suggests, means taking on a pedagogy of neutrality, which for her does not mean the neutrality of silence, which in itself is not neutral. Rather, just as we grapple with critical race theory and language that embraces gender identity fluidity in our classrooms, we must extend those practices toward, as Noddings frames this, belief and unbelief. I have observed Professor Noddings teaching, and this is not simply a space where ideas and stories are tossed about. She is a master at recognizing the student in front of her and insists that an "obligation to present all significant sides of an issue in their full passion" must also be driven by "best reasoning" (Noddings 1993a, 12). "Students" she writes, "must be allowed, even encouraged to ask how, why, and on what grounds" (123). In order to do this, however, students must learn communication skills that move them beyond simply agreeing and disagreeing. In order to learn to ask how, why, and on what grounds, we must teach students the skills of reflexivity,

to recognize the ways in which their subjectivity influences their reasoning (Fook 1999). They must do so in order to become "critical of the sociopolitical circumstances and individual preconceptions that surround and influence [them] to act in particular ways" (Ocadiz 2020). In terms of religion, this is, of course, easier said than done. While Noddings (2008) recognizes that many of her suggestions fall into the realm of "theoretical possibilities" (370), I believe it is possible to create spaces of critical recognition just as we do when addressing gender and race.

Pedagogical Implications

Educators, as Knaus (2009) writes, "must remember how students live before, during and after school. To fail to consider students' personal context is to ensure that what we teach is irrelevant to their daily survival" (139). If we remain silent to the religions of our students, we may create both the "impression in the minds of the young that religion is unimportant and has nothing to contribute to the solution of the perineal and ultimate problems of human life" (American Council of Education 1953, 6).[6] It also deprives them and ourselves from the possibility of turning a critical eye toward all belief systems. Noddings (2008) points out, however, that when teachers talk about religion in schools, more often than not "[they] avoid the critical discussion of beliefs and refer to (for instance) religious wars and persecutions with delicacy, often treating them as anomalies" (370). Discussions of war and the place music has played in both interrogation (protest songs) as well as celebration (glorification of war) have long been part of the music curriculum. Extending these discussions to (for instance) what dominant religious power or personage paid for musics to be composed and for what purposes they were intended, and what toll this may have taken on composers, focuses discussions on authoritarian religious reach. Moving students then to consider what counts or does not constitute music in religious contexts (e.g., the *adhan*, or the Islamic call to prayer) also opens spaces to contemplate the religious sonic places in our lives that many of us take for granted, do not hear, or simply disregard or worse, disavow.

I recognize, then, as Bouma (2017) does, that how we choose to focus dialogue frames directional ends; indeed, the kinds of questions we ask "can open up a whole new continent of knowledge, bringing other vital queries tumbling in its wake" (Eagleton 2008, 21). For instance, by framing classroom conversations as "belief and creed arguments," discussions gravitate toward "what is correct and

what is not" (Bouma 2017, 130). However, providing space that helps students to "encounter the religious 'other'" in their day to day lives allows for a differing kind of dialogue—dialogue that is "designed to promote intergroup understanding and respect both among groups and individuals" (129). It is helpful, thus, to consider Noddings' thinking on pedagogical neutrality much as we would when we apply the tenets of critical race theory. And while the following pedagogical strategies may appear simplistic, I view them as not: they move us from the "morally reprehensible" realm into the moral influence realm of vocation (Hansen 1994). Hansen (1993) suggests that while there may not be a direct "cause and effect, at least not in any direct or easily measurable sense" (398), we can and do "invite" students through our moral influence in ways that underscore our "often tacit, standards and expectations" (397). We wield an awful lot of power. How we choose to view the construction and flow of this power and the "enduring influence [this has on our] students" calls us to attend more mindfully to "that which we least attend" (Hansen 1993, 398).

First, I believe we must make explicit to our students our pedagogical goals and not simply hope that they intuit our moral compass. Thus, with students of all ages, I make clear the importance of addressing social justice education by thinking through—with them—issues of race, socioeconomics, gender constructions and fluidity, and religion. Saying these words out loud signals to the students that I will not shy away from bringing these issues forward, noting these issues as they arise and perhaps, more importantly, naming them when they are not being named. Second, I have started to attend purposefully to religious or religiously grounded comments from students in ways that I would have covered up and brushed aside in the past. For instance, at the elementary level, a student recently recounted a story about engaging with a homeless man who ended up teaching him more than he had expected and how thankful he was that he stopped to engage with the man. While there were many ways I could have responded, not least among them to treat the story facilely as a lesson well learned, I purposefully remarked, "Oh, this sounds similar to various religious parables and creation stories I have read." On another occasion, I was addressing how to take notes in such a way that helps situate oneself reflexively and told the class, "I do this all the time. If I find myself in a house of worship, for instance, I am the kind of person who takes notes on the back of the 'program' so that I might further think about issues that have been raised." I encourage class projects that connect students with the musics they hear in all parts

of their worlds, including houses of worship; I actively encourage students to share their faith-based traditions of knowing the world as much as I encourage them to share with the class the kinds of musics to which they gravitate. What I have discovered in doing this reaffirms my belief in the ethical imperative behind these brief, but public, connections.

I have also had to address those moments in which I have felt uncomfortable, as students speak of their religions and religious experiences. I make clear that my discomfort comes not from the student but rather in the intimacy and urgency that does not align with my own beliefs. In these moments of honesty, I hope to model several things to the other students: the recognition that being uncomfortable does not mean that we do not see and honor the other, that discomfort can still reflect respect, and that in my listening, I am not engaging in indoctrination but rather thinking through who I am in the appearance of the other (Arendt 1958). In this context, then, I engage in what Boler (1999) has described as a "pedagogy of discomfort" (175) whereby we meet the other in our "collective witnessing" (176) and consider our own values and assumptions.

As I wrote earlier, several students have approached me and expressed thanks for the public affordance of personal religious identity. They share that throughout their schooling, they have felt they must keep this part of themselves hidden. In these moments, I both move toward a deeper understanding and live the teachings of Martin Buber and Hannah Arendt. Not only am I able to "pause," as Tate (2017 writes, to "explore further the implications of difficult situations, see things from different angles and refine [my] judgment" (188), I also believe these students are able to do so as well. Indeed, I believe that in these pedagogical moments where space is afforded for epistemological humility, my being feels most alive and aware with the other (Buber 2003/1947).

Lingering Thoughts

How students come to know their world through and with our teaching should be an integral step toward preparing students to live a world, as Noddings (2008) writes, of "pluralistic values" (386). Perhaps I have become more aware of this living in Canada these past five years, where epistemological frameworks that recognize and bring mindfully into the curriculum Indigenous ways of knowing demand morally essential and ethical beginning points. I am heartened when I read of the Denver public school system in Colorado revisiting their curriculum to interrogate

the "myths and untruths" surrounding Native American Indigenous peoples (Asmar 2019, para. 12). These moments call me to recognize the startling veracity in the words of Noddings (2008) when she reminds us that "religion plays a significant role in the lives of individuals, and increasingly it is playing a political role that affects both believers and unbelievers. We cannot remain silent on this vital topic and still claim to educate (386).

As we are cognizant of color-blind policies and practices, we too must be cognizant of the anti-democratic consequences of refusing to speak on matters of belief traditions. It is not simply difficult in the U.S. to address and speak of religion, it feels impossible. But this is exactly the "[hegemony and] virtue for the regime that hosts these differences" (Brown 2012, 7) that should both concern and propel us as we remember that impossible simply means we know not and have not yet acted the possible.

I am always already a stranger to the other—at least I hope to be, particularly in the ways Arendt sees the possibilities of distance and strangerhood. Hansen (2004), thinking through Arendt's conception of strangerhood, reminds us:

> To be a stranger is to exist for others prior to the ascription of value; or to relate to others without indifference, hostility or beneficence. But it is to have an identity, to confront others as a person, and this creates "space" in which to appear. (7)

I wrestle with these implications; I know I fail daily at the task Hansen, Biesta, Buber, Arendt and others place before me. I also struggle with the existential doom that seems to pervade every area of our lives, particularly policies whose mode of rationality (such as neoliberal, authoritarian, and populist) extends its governance in ways that suggest common sense: the good for. Giroux (2018) asks us to "make education central to politics that changes the way people think, desire, hope and act" (11). Education may be central to dismantling, or at least interrogating, these modes, but education, thus presented, must be inextricably linked to deliberate pedagogical engagements. I am not yet quite able to give up wishing for world peace, but as I become more mindful of welcoming rather than shutting down how others engage in the world, I now work toward a conception of peace that calls me to attend to the other prior to the ascription of value.

As I bring this article to a close, it feels fitting to choose to cite Goodburn (1998) in full:

> Perhaps faith is what is needed most for a successful critical pedagogy—faith in the value of initiating dialogue in the face of conflicts over discourse and faith in students' and teachers' ability to value and negotiate each other's' differences. (352)

About the Author

Cathy Benedict is an associate professor at University of Western Ontario. Her scholarly interests lay in framing environments in which students take on the perspective of justice-oriented citizens. Her research focuses on the processes of education and interrogating taken-for-granted, normative practices. She has written numerous chapters and published in journals such as *Action, Criticism and Theory for Music Education, British Journal of Music Education, Journal of Curriculum Theorizing,* the Brazilian journal *ABEM, Canadian Music Educator, Philosophy of Music Education Review, Music Education Research, and Research Studies in Music Education.* She co-edited the journal *Theory into Practice, The Oxford Handbook of Social Justice and Music Education,* and most recently published the book *Music and Social Justice: A Guide for Elementary Educators* (Oxford University Press).

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Notes

[1] In *A Common Faith* (1960) Dewey makes a distinction between religions and religious; or "between anything that may be denoted by a noun substantive and the quality of experience that is designated by an adjective" (3). In this article, I focus solely on the first and thus, the use of the word *religion* pertains to the multiplicity of religions throughout the world, including the Abrahamic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam, as well as Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism, Indigenous ways of knowing, and all other religions that may not fall under these categories. Spirituality in the context of this article falls under the second category, that of an adjective. For further examinations of spirituality in music education see, for instance, June Boyce-Tillman (2018).

[2] At the heart of Nodding's (1993b) presentation of educating for belief and unbelief is the crucial mandate of "the cultivation of critical intelligence" (18). Her argument rests on the ways in which "[believing] without thinking … to merely accept or reject—is surely not intelligent" (xiv). Thus, as will be presented throughout this article, recognizing that our students in front of us yearn to be seen and known is the first step toward opening spaces for the existential questions that drive each of us.

[3] It is imperative in this context to consider the January 6, 2021 insurrection at the U.S. White House. By many accounts and analysis of this insurrection, this was an act fueled and propelled by (among a multitude of other issues) Christian Nationalism and Trump's connection to religious authoritarianism. See (Edsall 2021). Throughout the article, the author seeks out the opinions of those who have been researching Christian Nationalism before the events of January 6th. In particular, many of those the author contacted commented on the prevalence of sacred signs, symbols, and language that were used to further their message. Other articles in the New York Times (and this is just the NY Times) including Dias and Graham (January 11, 2021) suggest similar troubling and dangerous examples of our inability to communicate with the other.

[4] More detailed curricular lessons connected to a version of this article can be found in my book: Cathy Benedict. 2021. *Music and social justice: A guide for elementary educators*. Oxford University Press.

[5]See for instance: (Bradley 2006, Hess 2019, Prest and Goble 2021, Talbot 2018). Conferences include: Symposium for LGBTQ Studies in Music Education, National Association for Music Education (NAfME) SRIG—Social Justice, Society of Music Teacher Education (SMTE) ASPA—Cultural Diversity and Social Justice, MayDay.

[6] I recognize the nuanced message I am laying out could be misinterpreted by teachers for whom religious indoctrination, as part of their faith-based practices, may come easily. The goal (whether mandated by law or not) is never to indoctrinate but rather "the cultivation of critical intelligence" (Noddings 1993b, 18). Perhaps, then, it is also worth noting that in our pedagogical encounters, teachers should both be mindful of privileging one belief system over others and those ways we can facilitate discussion towards the ways in which faith-based systems have historically supported and furthered systems of oppression.