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Music Education and Community: Reflections on “Webs of Interaction” in School Music¹

Hildegard Froehlich



Perhaps nowhere is community involvement in the life of a United States school more established and seemingly successful than in the area of sports and athletics. From Friday night football in high schools to Saturday night in colleges all across the U.S.A., local communities take note of their area schools and universities, albeit not necessarily for the reasons envisioned and hoped for by those who call for greater community involvement in matters concerning formal schooling in the arts. School music programs, too, benefit from the public visibility provided by school athletics because of crowd-entertaining performances during “half-time.” Such ready-made publicity causes many a music educator to acknowledge the entertainment value of music as a necessary tool by which to justify the place of serious music study in the curriculum.

As a performance art, music clearly needs an audience, and school ensemble directors typically draw on both the wider school population and the greater geo-political community as audiences for concerts. Community outreach thus is part and parcel of school music as a field of study that entertains at the same time that it exhibits characteristics attributed to other academic subjects—foremost among them, a sequential structure of content organization and the requirement of graded, demonstrable learning gains. This duality in function of school music—entertainment value on the one hand and academic knowledge on the other—gives it a unique position in the curriculum as well as in the life of the school community and is recognized as an important feature by most school music teachers in the United States.

However, in efforts to strengthen the academic footing of music amidst other school subjects, arts connoisseurs, general educators interested in the arts, policy makers in the arts, and music educators have spent considerable energy during the last 30 to 40 years to downplay the entertainment value of the arts in school relative to their inherently aesthetic and educational values. The result has been a plethora of conferences, meetings, and special taskforces that have produced numerous reports and position papers asserting the place of music in the curriculum as an academically worthy subject. Their concerns have ranged from

re-thinking the purpose of formal music instruction within the curriculum to the place and role of school music in the community; from the relationship between the communities of which the students are a part to the music they learn and perform in school; and, from the role of music making “in life” to how that role might or should impact music practices in school. Rarely, however, have such concerns been shared in equal measure by music educators, interested art connoisseurs, various school communities, and the larger geo-political communities of which their schools are a part.

Looking to the community for help in matters concerning formal schooling is neither new nor unique to the arts, at least not in the United States. Community outreach programs are integral to the work of any school administration because such programs are the logical consequence of the fact that local taxpayers play a significant, decision-making part in financing educational matters. Because taxpayers vote for school board trustees and/or the funding of special school bonds, it is easy to see why the political community is perceived by school trustees or School Board members as wielding tangible power. To ensure that such power is used in favor of the schools, school administrators seek to showcase their programs and make them accessible not only to the students’ parents but also to the general public.

It is not the purpose of this article to determine the effectiveness of so-called community nights or community outreach programs in the overall framework of what schools do, although some critics may argue that the perceived need for such projects actually originates from a basic lack of social, cultural, and educational bondage among the schools and their respective, larger communities. Rather, this article suggests that the term ‘community,’ when used unexamined and without a clear concept of how individuals from within different social groups interact with each other in the context of formal schooling, including music education, can prevent well-guided action and constructive activism.

Wenger (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002) suggests that *community* as commonly used is a “warm” term that holds “positive connotations for most people” and conjures “images of harmony, sometimes with a dose of nostalgia” (p. 144). Is it possible that similar connotations and images guide the efforts of school music teachers to strengthen community relations by music’s inclusion in the curriculum, or to incorporate such broadly framed goals into mission statements and curriculum guides?

Clearly, a number of different motivations may be at play in calls for community involvement in school music. Wishing to transform compulsory educational practices for the

benefit of the students may be one action ideal; another may be to gain greater visibility in the community for the purpose of one's own professional validation and legitimization. A third motive underlying calls for community outreach may be perceived or actual financial needs, to be addressed through fundraising projects or other political support mechanisms the public can provide. Because such differences in artistic, pedagogic, or political causes can lead to disagreements in envisioned actions, this essay examines what may constitute "the community" in the context of school music. For instance, of whom do school music teachers speak when they look for "the community" to support their work or advance the cause for music making as a lifelong pursuit? Would those be the same individuals that academics in music education have in mind when they want to transform schooling practices? Who, in either case, would be "the public" from whom such support is sought? Who are the allies and supporters targeted in both cases?

This essay examines such questions through the perspective of symbolic interactionism, a theoretical position that articulates, among other issues, the place of 'self' as an acting agent in one's daily discourse with others. It is a self that constructs meaning and identity through the actions of others toward oneself at the same time that one's own actions construct the identities of those with whom one interacts. When applying that perspective to the term "community," distinctions should be made concerning:

- Geo-political communities—such as neighborhoods, towns, or townships—of which schools are a part;
- Political, education, and artistic special interest groups—such as school boards, local funding agencies, and music teacher associations—that speak on behalf of the arts, music, students or all three; and
- Groups of individuals within the above-named communities that are held together by a declared and tangible common purpose not necessarily sanctioned or shared by any of the larger groups to which the individuals belong politically.

Clarity about which of the above-named communities one might need to think about when calling for community involvement as an action ideal in music education might help to focus the actions themselves.

THE PROBLEM AND ITS THEORETICAL CONTEXT

Members of the Mayday Group and others (e.g., Elliott, 1995, 2007; Bowman, 2000, 2007; Jorgensen, 1995; Small, 1997, 1998; Stubbley, 1998; DeNora, 2000) have concerned themselves for quite some time with the construct of community from various theoretical perspectives, often suggesting understandings of community that are based on the principle of shared praxis in the moment of collective music making or listening. It is a definition of community useful for describing the social dimension of what the field of music education seeks to achieve because it is specific, an issue to which this essay will return later. Other uses of the term community are not nearly as specific. For instance, when examining the meaning of community in articulating and implementing public policies, Adams and Hess (2001) observed that “much of the rhetoric about community as a new foundation for public policy remains confused” and that there is a “muddle of ideas in which this potentially useful concept is in danger of becoming just another public policy reform fad” (Adams & Hess, 2001, p. 13). In the field of sociology, similar criticism prevails. For instance, in the 4th edition of the *The Penguin Dictionary of Sociology*, Abercrombie, Hills, and Turner (2000) called the term community “one of the most elusive and vague [terms] in sociology and ...largely without specific meaning,” a sentiment reiterated more recently by Day (2006, pg. 1).

Given the attested fuzziness of the term ‘community’ as a sociological construct, my examination of ‘community involvement’ as a component in the work music educators do is intended not only to extend Bowman’s (2007) question of “who is the ‘we’” (emphasis added) in music schooling and education, but also to add to the query of “who *they* are” in the communities *we* wish to reach. “*We*” in this context actually refers to at least two different groups within music education, because the responsibilities of those who deliver “school” music instruction differ significantly from those who teach music education at the tertiary level of music training. Because of differences in occupational socialization processes, what is or is not deemed important professionally differs from group to group (if not person to person) and has a bearing on what either group of music educators may consider essential action ideals.

What follows in this section is (1) a brief overview of how various sociological theories articulate the relationship of the individual to society; and (2) an analysis of community and self from a symbolic interactionist perspective in which the focus lies on the

“webs of interaction” that shape music schooling as a field in which networks of groups of individuals may or may not share common purposes, meanings, and/or action ideals. The next section then introduces what Etienne Wenger, Jean Lave (and others) have termed *community of practice* as a useful construct for action also in music education. Akin to but perhaps more concrete than Habermas’ concept of the communicative act, a community of practice is characterized by how its fundamental elements of identity, social practices, community, and learning come together in relationship to each other. The essay concludes with suggestions for actions toward building communities of practice in music education that take into consideration the above distinction of geo-political communities, artistic and political special interest groups outside of music education, and interest groups within the field.

From the individual and society to community and self: Selected macro-and micro perspectives

When investigating “the opposing relationship of individual man [*sic*] to mankind” (Tönnies, 2001, p. 13) in 1887, German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies stated:

There is no *individualism* in history and civilization, except of the kind that flows from *Gemeinschaft* and remains conditioned by it, or else of the kind that gives rise to and sustains *Gesellschaft*. These opposing relationships of individual man to mankind in general are the very heart of the matter. (Tönnies, 2001, p. 13)

The matter Tönnies spoke of concerned the reciprocal interactions of human beings to each other. If such interactions are “familiar, comfortable, and exclusive” (p.18), they result in the formation of a *Gemeinschaft*. *Gesellschaft*, on the other hand, “means life in the public sphere, in the outside world” (p. 18).

The original title of his 1887 book actually read *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, but its translated title appears as *Community and Civil Society*, thereby narrowing the rather broad meaning of the German term *Gesellschaft* to its most political meaning at the macro-level of sociological analysis. Conversely, the translation of *Gemeinschaft* as community juxtaposes the term against the larger entity of civil society. Based upon the idea that *Gemeinschaft* constitutes “a complete unity of human wills” (Tönnies, 2001, p. 22), it is reasonable to assume that such a unity is found more likely in smaller, local gatherings than in larger, amorphous groups and that such unity of will is characterized by like-mindedness among its members more so than other-mindedness.

While the clarity of these two German terms may be questioned (König, 1958), similar criticisms might also be leveled at the English term ‘community.’ Having been used at all levels of analysis—micro and macro, localized and general—the term proves too broad as either philosophically useful or as a clearly defined venue for action. For instance, when music educators (practitioners and academicians alike), call for community outreach, little thought seems to be given to the possibility that other-mindedness rather than like-mindedness prevails either in their own action groups or in any one given geo-political community. Mills’ observation of everyone being “bound by the private orbits in which they live” (1959, p.1) may apply here (see also Neubeck & Glasberg, 2005, p. 7).

Sociologists tell us that local communities of today, as bound as they may be by geographic proximity and locale, represent less a like-minded *Gemeinschaft* than an “other-minded” *Gesellschaft* because geographical proximity, group size, and shared citizenship have become insufficient descriptors of community as *Gemeinschaft*. Instead, the political body of a local community may come closer to resembling “social aggregates, a collection of individuals with no real interpersonal ties or patterned social relationships” (Neubeck & Glasberg, 2005, p.88) than a collective of individuals with shared norms and values. A similar notion is expressed by German sociologist Norbert Elias who titled his 2001 book *The Society of Individuals* (2001), or by anthropologist Gordon Matthews who named his book *Global Culture/Individual Identity* (2000). Other sociologists, philosophers, and anthropologists of today, too many to list here, have articulated similar viewpoints. Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002) attribute the lack of connectedness between individuals to what they call “the suburban society” (p. 74), a societal structure that has permeated many of today’s industrialized societies and fosters isolationism even among neighbors.

The apparent disconnectedness among individuals leads to new challenges also for music educators who look toward their local communities either for political help and support or for connecting school music to life music. Among those challenges are three:

- (1) Although hardly any individual would not confess to liking music, there exist notable differences in what music each person has in mind, what value individuals of different upbringing and ages attach to it, and how that music plays out in their lives. These differ from person to person. Such differences have been sufficiently addressed by many a music sociologist as well as phenomenologists in music and music education and may be too obvious to warrant repetition. However, conceptually it

may be advisable for music educators to assume other-mindedness among individuals and groups of individuals (one's own students included) before like-mindedness can be assumed.

(2) There is a need to determine whether individuals in the worlds of music, education, music education, and the public have enough in common to share or at least understand each other's viewpoints, motivations, and thoughts about the place of the arts and arts education in society, in the schools, and in each individual's own life.

(3) It is no secret that students, educators, music educators, the tax-paying public and politicians represent diverse social groups whose lifestyles, expectations, and experiences make it difficult to connect to each other, whether because of restraints imposed by time, money, or locale. Therefore, finding ways and means to get individuals of different social worlds together may pose one of the greatest challenges.

In *Images of Community* (2000), Smith and Jenks “contrasted between two types of images of community; one as the ‘belonging-together of Being and beings’ ...” (p. 217), the other as “the relationship of systems or organism to environment...” (p. 218), a distinction that perhaps is reminiscent of Tönnies' work. The idea of community as *Gemeinschaft* also re-emerges in art sociologist Baumann's (2007) proposal to move altogether away from a description of community as the concreteness of a group of people residing in one localized area—such as a neighborhood, town, or city—to the construct of community as a safe place.

What is or is not safe, however, is as much a matter of perception and symbolic meaning as it is physical fact. This, then, brings us into the realm of social interactionism, a theory in which all actions, including language, are interpreted as signifying meaning. Derived from Peirce's semiotic according to which all language (in spoken word or in thought) signifies socially shared meanings, interactionists propose that all interactions are signifiers of meaning, symbolically characterizing our relationships to each other. In this sense, not interacting with others is a meaningful, interactive gesture. Such a theoretical position entails concreteness rather than abstraction because interactions can be observed in terms of what Mead called gestures: speech, clothing, with whom we are or are not seen, habits and behaviors that not only show others who we are but also are responses to how we believe others see us.

When signifying meaning through one's actions and responses to the actions of others, each individual creates but also is the receiving part of what several interactionists have

termed a symbolic community of discourse (see, for example, Cohen, 1985; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992; Lovekin, 1991). A symbolic community of discourse is never static; it evolves as interactions evolve around a particular cause. In such situations, then, our actions not only represent responses to those with whom we interact but also indicate the extent to which we relate socially to them.

A symbolic community is the result of what Hogg and Terry (2001) call identity construction in organizational settings and contexts. Both Baumann (2007) and Bruhn (2005) speak of a symbolic community as the connectedness and attachments among individuals due to shared practices and beliefs. Art sociologists Gradle (2007) and Griffin (1990) use the term *symbolic community* to denote the sharing of ideas and values that leads to a sense of belonging. Political scientist Putnam (2000; Putnam & Feldstein, 2003) has suggested to think of the concept of community as a social network where we can ask *and answer* the question of who knows whom and why. Like Putnam, Day (2006) proposes that instead of referring to global, local and communal communities, one should talk about specific networks of which each individual is a part.

Webs of interaction in music education

Such networks as those referred to by Putnam and others are multilayered and complex, a fact that caused Froehlich (2007) to illustrate them for the work school music teachers do at several levels of contextual specificity: (1) each individual's own different empirical selves, (2) the many empirical selves in those groups that make up a particular school, and (3) the networks of empirical selves in groups that make up a specific "public." Each network connects with any of the others on an ongoing basis, shaping the context not only of the school environment in which one works but also one's own personal space and relationship to others.

Empirical selves refer to the roles each of us play in daily living: who each of us is as a breadwinner, parent, spouse, musician, sibling, or friend. Each self occupies our minds in some way at all times although our self as music teacher demands our foremost attention while at work. Placed into the context of school, then, our *music teacher* empirical self is embedded in networks of other empirical selves, be they our own or those of our music students, non-music students, music colleagues, non-music colleagues, administrative and support staff members, our music students' parents, and faculty colleagues in the visual arts

and/or drama. Often, how we label someone reflects their roles toward us in our role as music teachers. Rarely do we see the selves/roles they may hold and play outside of the interactions they have with us as music teachers. The same phenomenon holds true when we conveniently refer to “the public” or “the local community” as a descriptor for a large and diverse multiplicity of networks of individuals in which many different empirical selves represent ways of thinking that, at first, seem to lie outside our own immediate realm of comfort and familiarity.

Our *music teacher* self sees “*the others*” primarily in the role of, for instance, our students’ parents, school administrator, music merchant, president of the local arts council, music teachers in feeder schools, head of the parent-teacher organization, the school superintendent or the president of the school board. The further removed they are from our own reality, the more single-focused their individual selves appear to us because we do not recognize the complexities of the empirical selves in each of the individuals we refer to as “others.” It is our vantage point that contributes to what *we* perceive as *the public*; in the eyes of others, *we* are the public just as much.

Considering the three above-mentioned networks – one’s own empirical selves, the many empirical selves present in the school(s) in which one works, and the empirical selves that make up the geo-political context of the school and its district connections – one begins to see oneself as an interacting link in a complex web of interactions. One also may begin to understand that one cannot get separated from that web without losing a part of one’s identity. In personal terms: My own position in the network determines how I depict the relationships of which I am an integral part. This relationship would be described differently, but would be just as complex, from the point of view of a taxpaying member in town who is unfamiliar to me. Such knowledge would suggest that the geo-political and socio-political environment of the workplace ‘school’ is shaped by who I am, how the school is shaped by its various networks of constituent groups and by the actions taken (or not taken) by the networks of school board members as well as other local, state, and federal groups who are held responsible for educational policies and financial support.

Couched in more general terms, one could think of a three-dimensional space in which cogwheels work in tandem and propel each other. The model might help us in envisioning how communication and interaction work within physical or symbolic networks of individuals and groups. Each of us is a cog in such a system, our presence in one wheel

essential to all other wheels even if we are unaware of all of those connections. Thus, a seeming disconnectedness of individuals in a “society of individuals” may basically be the result of unawareness of the ways our own roles in society may impact others.

Acknowledging connectedness among each and every cog in the system therefore constitutes, from an interactionist perspective, the basis for understanding community relationships.

Interacting networks of relevance to music educators are many and differ according to workplace, job description, and geographical locale. But all of them have a bearing on each other in some way, directly or indirectly. If one were to name a few of those interacting networks, the following readily come to mind: Our own students and their parents, non-music students and their parents, our music colleagues, our non-music colleagues, the local school administrators, arts and education administrators at the state level, other school personnel and members of school boards, lobbyists for the arts, philanthropists (both in education and in the arts), local as well as state legislators, and other taxpaying members of what we call “the public” simply because we do not specify whom we have in mind. However, educators disagree with each other; so do legislators, parents and students. Music teachers, too, do not necessarily see eye to eye either with career musicians or with school administrators. If, therefore, music educators wished to communicate with members of the aforementioned networks for the purpose of formulating new and practice-transforming policies, it would be essential to first understand the values held by those groups, then to find a common cause for action, and, third, in the process of accomplishing the first two steps, build a symbolic community of discourse that shares in a particular action ideal.

To differentiate between a geo-political community and a symbolic community of shared ideas and values would mean to be informed about and sensitive to the differences in symbols (tastes, values, beliefs) present in the geo- and socio-political environments of which we and our schools are a part. Most importantly, if it is true, as asserted by Gradle (2007) and Griffin (1990), that diversity can be shared and celebrated best if a sense of belonging has been established, we would need to work toward a sense of belonging across various geographical locales and for diverse social networks and groups.

Just as it takes time and effort to build a sense of belonging among students in a classroom or rehearsal hall, building symbolic communities of discourse beyond the music classroom is a highly complex process. Therefore, to connect to networks of other-minded individuals outside of formal schooling and music study for the purpose of building symbolic

communities that share goals and ideas, each individual might need to reflect on and possibly adjust his or her own behaviors, actions and held values. No longer would it be appropriate to refer to one community ‘out there.’ Rather, when targeting others for one’s own purposes, any preexisting “we-they” dichotomy between specific action groups would need to be replaced by the acceptance that a symbolic community of discourse is always a work in progress in which mutually understood gestures, agreed-upon paradigms, and shared practices of action are not static but created in the process of ongoing interaction. It thus takes more than written reports and well-intended position papers to move from recognizing individual identities to constituting symbolic communities of discourse in which each individual, by becoming a receiving part of the discourse, also creates it. By being engaged in such a discourse and by being dedicated to a shared cause, a symbolic community of discourse may then become what Wenger and his colleagues have termed “a community of practice.”

THE CONCEPT OF “COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE” AND WEBS OF INTERACTION IN MUSIC EDUCATION
In *Cultivating Communities of Practice: A Guide to Managing Knowledge*, Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002) have called a community of practice “any groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (p. 4). Addressing work with large organizations, such as car manufacturing companies and other corporate businesses, Wenger and his colleagues introduced the concept of community of practice as a way by which to “connect people from different organizations as well as across independent business units. In the process, [communities of practice] knit the whole system together around core knowledge requirements” (p.5). The authors state further:

Communities of practice are everywhere. We all belong to a number of them—at work, at school, at home, in our hobbies. Some have a name, some don’t. Some we recognize, some remain largely invisible. We are core members of some and occasional participants in others. Whatever form our participation takes, most of us are familiar with the experience of belonging to a community of practice. (p.5)

Not new as an idea, the strength of the concept lies on focusing on what bonds individuals together in terms of shared knowledge as “embodied expertise” (p.6). Expert knowledge as defined by Wenger and his associates is not a thing, an object, but is lived experience that manifests itself in “actions, thinking, and conversations” among the experts and “remains a dynamic part of their ongoing experiences” (p. 6). Different from sharing information,

therefore, sharing knowledge requires the gathering and sharing of experience (p. 8) for the purpose of developing new knowledge by means of collective inquiry and collegiality. As Wenger explains it, “knowledge lives in the human act of knowing” (p.8), it is a “living process” rather than “a static body of information” (p.9). Seen in this context, knowledge is tacit as well as explicit, social as well as individual, and always dynamic.

Cultivating communities of practice takes time because it is process-oriented, depends on voluntary rather than mandated participation, and requires ongoing learning by all group members who are bonded by a shared domain of knowledge and expertise but not necessarily by uniformity of viewpoints. In fact, diversity in thoughts and background strengthens rather than weakens a community of practice because the knowledge base shared by all group members would be the result of tested collective inquiry processes.

The sharing, affirming, and testing of tacit knowledge will result in what Hildreth and Kimble (2004) call knowledge networks. These range from individuals meeting in one space and location to virtual groups, the latter resulting in distributed communities of practice (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002, p.113; Hildreth, 2004; Hildreth & Kimble, 2004). Whether virtual or real, Wenger and his associates suggest that ongoing interaction and informal learning processes such as storytelling, conversation, coaching, and apprenticeship are key factors that need to be cultivated over time.

In addition to the three factors of knowledge domain, community, and shared practice, a number of so-called cultivating principles need to be adhered to when shepherding a community of practice from its earliest stage to maturity. Wenger and his colleagues label the tasks as follows: (1) design for evolution, (2) open a dialogue between inside and outside perspectives, (3) invite different levels of participation, (4) develop both public and private community spaces, (5) focus on value, (6) combine familiarity and excitement, and (7) create a rhythm for the community that underscores the community as “a web of enduring relationships” (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002, pp. 51-63). Each of these principles is necessary to build an active community of practice that either is imbedded in or reaches across professional groups, organizations, associations, or institutions. A key difference between an organization and a community of practice, however, lies in the willingness of participants in a community of practice to learn not just from those members who share the same domain of knowledge but also from those with different knowledge domains. Sharing

expertise freely *for the sake of voluntary learning among all participants*, then, would be central to any community of practice in music education.

The perspective finds validation also in Habermas' (1981) theory of communicative action, a theory intended not as "metatheory but the beginning of a social theory concerned to validate its own critical standards" (1984, xxxix). As a result of that intention, Habermas' inductive development of the construct of communicative action is complex, defying an easy, one-sentence definition. Any such effort, while laudable, reduces a macro-level social theory to a social concept. Nonetheless, Habermas' thoughts on communicative action as a macro-level principle of all social interactions bear striking similarities to the concept of community of practice advanced by Wenger and his associates. For instance, Habermas states:

I shall speak of *communicative action* whenever the actions of the agents involved are coordinated not through egocentric calculations of success but through acts of reaching understanding. In communicative action participants are not primarily oriented to their own individual successes; they pursue their individual goals under the condition that they can harmonize their plans of action on the basis of common situation definitions. In this respect the negotiation of definitions of the situation is an essential element of the interpretive accomplishments required for communicative action (Habermas, 1984, 285-286).

In 2003, Powell and Moody (2003) defined Habermas' construct of communicative action as ...that form of social interaction in which the plans of action of different actors are coordinated through an exchange of communicative acts, that is, through a use of language orientated towards reaching understanding (http://theoryandscience.icaap.org/content/vol4.1/01_powell.html).

Although such understanding (in German: *Verständigung*) implies understanding each other as communicative participants, Habermas makes it clear throughout his comprehensive treatise that to satisfy the construct of communicative action, understanding also requires subsequent, informed action; thus, conversation and dialogue alone do not suffice.

Communities of practice in music education

The field of music education has many domains of knowledge ranging from teaching basic musicianship to the highest level of musical artistry, from rudiments of music theoretical constructs to academic scholarship, and from specialized methodologies or instructional techniques to intricate and—at times—enigmatic philosophies about the learning and teaching of music. Therefore the individuals who engage in early childhood music, school music teaching, college level-teaching, or private music instruction at various levels make up many different networks in which individuals share with other, generally like-minded colleagues

their knowledge domains and practiced expertise. Such sharing happens frequently in specialized conferences and off-the-job workshops, hosted frequently by larger professional organizations but just as often by smaller, special interest groups.

For such networks to become communities of practice in the way described by Wenger and others, such gatherings (1) would need to be voluntary, (2) should not only allow but also make it necessary for all participants to learn from each other in mutual respect, and (3) would include learning from and sharing knowledge with colleagues who, despite having similar knowledge domains, hold different viewpoints and have other life experiences.

Examples of such an action ideal are commonplace in the pursuit and exchange of knowledge in music making. They have been described for many years by music educators, musicologists, and anthropologists. A recent example might be Kari Veblen's work on community music networks (e.g., Veblen, 2005, 2007) where she engages in voluntary learning with community music makers. Her case studies (as well as many reported by others before her) make it clear that (1) interdisciplinarity and cross-fertilization of ideas are essential at all stages of the learning processes, and (2) it is time-consuming to build sizable and durable communities of practice by means of trust and personal relationships in which individuals come from different cultural backgrounds.

As for communities of practice whose members seek to transform educational practices or engage in matters of arts advocacy, fewer documented examples exist. Although special interest groups, large and small, convene regularly and also voluntarily, their purposes often lack definition or lose focus during years of getting together, or the participants' knowledge domains as well as work expertise tend to remain unidentified or unshared. Non-specific exchanges of ideas however do not easily result in concrete learning gains that strengthen a group's knowledge base to such an extent that concrete recommendations for new actions or, more importantly, dispositions to execute such actions, can result.

Key to learning as a community of practice is "to develop knowledge based on collegiality" (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder; 2002, p. 41) rather than on hierarchical relationships established by edict or political considerations. This is true for communities of practice formed within any one professional area of expertise and for communities of practice formed voluntarily with individuals from other walks of life, such as representatives of the taxpaying public, political appointees, and/or administrative school personnel. Success in forming such communities of practice in music education is an important action ideal but

requires more than calls for “the community” to get involved in “our” concerns. Rather, a cause or problem shared by “the others” needs to become the core or nucleus for “us” to tackle the shared problem jointly and voluntarily.

It is generally easier to build trust and a sense of connectedness among like-minded members of a group than among individuals with differential cultural backgrounds and experiences. Since, however, the actual value of a community of practice lies in the diversity of thoughts and experiences represented by the group, much energy needs to be spent by all members on developing a “sense of belonging to the whole” (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder; 2002, p. 121). This is especially important in distributed communities of practice, those in which members with different viewpoints communicate across large geographical distances and/or almost exclusively via the internet.

Often, professionally-trained musicians find it difficult to learn from amateur musicians. Similarly, music scholars do not readily accept personal opinions, couched in lay language, about the value of music, education, or the purpose of music education in society. Suspicion rather than acceptance, mistrust instead of trust tend to characterize the interactions of individuals who do not know each other, are from different socio-cultural backgrounds, or do not share similar professional expertise. Different knowledge domains therefore can be barriers rather than enablers for building communities of practice, a fact that explains why it may become necessary for music educators to step outside their own boundaries of professional allegiances for the purpose of facilitating the formation of new loyalties. *We* would need to do the joining instead of asking others to join us; a political dimension of our professional selves that perhaps is easily overlooked but essential for building an understanding among equals that leads to joint action.

At the onset of building such understanding, it is possible that despite shared knowledge domains and lived experiences as school music teachers, one might encounter “co-actors” (Habermas’ term) whose primary concern lies not so much with their or other students’ welfare as with their own daily survival in the classroom; not so much in the pursuit of musicianship or social justice as compliance with school policies; not so much with the welfare of music as a curricular subject as with a school’s international competitiveness in math and science; not so much with cultural literacy as with fiscal responsibility. Critically examining and working constructively with such conflicting positions might well become the purpose of a community of practice in music education dedicated to achieving inclusiveness

of educational purposes. Participants would need to accept as legitimate each point of difference, examining it critically for the purpose of strengthening the group's core objective. A negotiated agreement on the latter might then propel forward collective actions decided on by the group.

Music educators wishing to transform extant special interest groups into communities of practice face at least three challenges: (1) finding and articulating core concerns about education, music schooling, and learning that are shared by diversely thinking groups of individuals inside and outside of music education; (2) accepting many domains of knowledge and areas of lived expertise as integral to the broad field of music education; and (3) voluntarily engaging in an ongoing learning process that is "designed for aliveness" (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder 2002, p. 50) with those who share other knowledge domains and areas of lived expertise. All three steps, if successful, could contribute to what Wenger and his associates characterize as "reweaving the world" (p. 219) also in music education. It is a world where, in Schatzki and Natter's words, the sociocultural bodies and bodies sociopolitical "entwine or interweave" (Schatzki & Natter, 1996, p. 2). This vision suggests a world in which large organizations may become of lesser importance than the existence of a multitude of communities of practice in which each individual can be considered a collegial expert participant in ongoing dialogues and actions that benefit clearly defined and agreed-upon causes.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION: REACHING OUT BY FIRST "LOOKING INWARD"

Community involvement as an action ideal in music education requires clarity about the term community itself. This is the premise that guided this essay and led to the distinction between (1) geo-political communities—such as neighborhoods, towns, or townships—of which schools are a part; (2) political, education, and artistic special interest groups—such as school boards, local funding agencies, and music teacher associations—that speak on behalf of the arts, music, students or all three; and (3) groups of individuals within any of these groups mentioned above who are held together by a declared and tangible common purpose not necessarily sanctioned or shared by any of the larger groups to which the individuals belong politically. Each of the above-mentioned groups requires different communicative work, which is why being specific about who makes up a particular community is important.

Many different contexts and meanings lie behind what has been described as “webs” of interaction in society; multiple, interacting individuals, groups, and social networks of which each of us, knowingly as well as unknowingly, is a part. Once one accepts this premise, two contexts emerge that point to the need for music educators to examine themselves as the community of practice they may want to become before they reach out to other organizations, institutions, associations, or even communities of practice.

The geo-political community, webs of interaction, and music schooling

When making reference to ‘the community’ as a geo-political entity, we need to remind ourselves, first, that we are integral to that very community because of the connectedness of networks of individuals to each other within a geographical area. Secondly, to avoid an *us* versus *them* message, we need to be specific about the particular individuals with whom we wish to communicate, not shying away from understanding the complexities of our own private and professional selves that connect us to the selves of those whose support we seek. The same specificity is necessary in interactions with members of political, education, and artistic special interest groups that we have identified as being needed in furthering our professional causes.

Third, knowledge about who *they* are is as important as is clarity about *us*. Such knowledge may be gained by placing our own values side by side others’. It is a necessary step in learning to accept oneself and others as already existing and integral parts in networks of interaction. Autobiographical stories might become essential building blocks toward identifying such networks. Each story, if constructed honestly and self-critically, can reflect on personal and professional values that have aided or prevented one from a sense of *being in* the community. As each of us examines our own place and role in the scripts called school music and community, we may become aware of and begin to understand our own experiences and practices for what they are: the product of specific socialization processes that enable us to connect more easily to one group than to another. Awareness of those processes as well as an understanding of their impact on our own biographies may lead to getting to know “the others” and empower us to effect changes in the way we inter-react with those unlike us.

Fourth, making connections to others by learning about their many selves—private as well as professional—in our immediate and not-so immediate networks of interaction may require a change of focus away from our own concerns to those individuals we understand the least. We need to make efforts to engage in the causes of others before we promote our own, a principle that is as much a pedagogical model as it should be one for human interactions in general.

Interactive networks, communities of practice, and music schooling

If we reigned in the term *community* by defining it as a particular social network of individuals sharing a sense of belonging and safety and relatedness, the onus would lie on us as music educators to create such a sense of belonging between ourselves and the individuals whose help and support we seek. To say that we ‘reach out to the community’ would then signal our general willingness to engage in the task of creating a sense of belonging with other-minded individuals, a notion that holds some promise and is sharpened by the construct of *community of practice*, a construct that might prove especially useful in a music education field characterized by so many different knowledge domains and lived experiences.

The construct adopts a learning mode that emphasizes equality and collegiality rather than a top-down teaching mode. Furthermore, in light of music education as a broad field of knowledge and expertise, there already exists a considerable aggregate of active and energetic groups of individuals whose shared work experiences and desire to meet on a regular basis have caused them to come together voluntarily for the purpose of exchanging ideas and advancing their respective common purposes. Frequently missing in such groups, however, is the focus on *learning* from each other for the purpose of advancing a clearly articulated problem, the latter a necessary component of any community of practice. Learning about and from each other in a group of equal political footing demands time, patience, acceptance of others, and resolve.

Furthermore, critical discourse in which substantive disagreements are clearly articulated and used for advancing a community’s *raison d’être* are signifiers of group strength, not weakness or inability to act. In a vibrant community of practice, therefore, diversity of opinion and experiences should be actively sought rather than suppressed because they can lead to transformative changes in the group’s collective vision for action.

Due to the transformative potential inherent in what a community of practice works for, not everyone among us may be willing to accept and/or undergo such transformative processes, least of all those among us whose socialization has led us to value a strong sense of absolutes—among them, the integrity of musical taste, music education as aesthetic education, and the purpose of formal music schooling as residing in learning to appreciate the hard-earned rewards of professional artistry. Therefore, committing to a particular community of practice for advancing a clearly articulated cause in music education can be risky and the cost high, especially when one might have to compromise one's own held artistic values and beliefs in order to gain strength in group belonging. Choosing to be an active participant in one or more communities of practice in music education can lead to inevitable and considerable personal struggles about negotiating and possibly reconciling educational, musical, and political values. However, just as in the case of seeking the assistance of members in the geo-political community, one should only reach out to others if one can be certain that the stance from which one reaches out, meets the stance of those whose knowledge domain and expertise advances *a shared and common* cause. Once that assurance can be given, calls for community outreach cease to be rhetoric because they signify the beginning of communicative action.

Conclusion

'Interaction with the community,' at first glance a buzz phrase full of problems, can become a promise (1) to live in and with the geo-political community of which we are a part, and (2) to work actively in and with one or more symbolic communities that are dedicated to clearly defined causes in music education. Required in all cases are specific and concrete actions that make us ready for such involvements. In many instances, the actions themselves may prove to be transformative in nature. In other words, the transformation and emancipation we would like to see for our field and our students would begin with ourselves, commensurate with the educational goals of performative learning and emancipatory practices (Banks, 1991; Rosabal-Coto, 2008). Such living is by nature public and therefore socio-political, a fact whose acknowledgement some may find uncomfortable, even questionable. However, those among us who concur that our students are to construct their own learning by means of "active dialogue, engagement, reflection, and criticism" (Rosabal-Coto, 2008) might concur

also that the same characteristics should be present in the teachers who seek to nurture such qualities in their students. Therefore, active dialogue with others, engagement, self-reflection and self-criticism about one's own role both in the geo-political and the professional communities are necessary components in the work of those music educators who ground their work in critical theory. "Reaching out to the community" becomes "living purposefully and consciously *in* the community," be it a geo-political community or communities of practice within music education. Such a statement, when applied to the webs of communities, concrete or symbolic, that make us who we are, is not only full of complexities but also full of promise for personal change and opportunities for action.

Notes

¹ This essay is a significantly revised and expanded version of an address given at the MayDay Colloquium, Boston University, June 5-7, 2008, Boston, MA.

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