Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education
January 2026. Vol 25 (1): 39–51. doi:10.22176/act25.1.39

Sophrosyne as Symbolic Virtue in Music Education

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Abstract

In contemplation of music educators who voice support for diversification of dispositions and curricula, I problematize the incongruency between their stated beliefs and behaviors. In this philosophical essay, I consider moderation (or sophrosyne) and its connection to music educators who choose behaviors that temper their stated commitments to diversity initiatives. These actions demote cultural and musical ways of being to a "lower class" thereby reinscribing Whiteness and maintaining power. I apply Mayorga-Gallo's (2014) framework of diversity ideology to common behaviors among music educators including: diversity as intent, diversity as acceptance, diversity as commodity, and diversity as liability.

Keywords

sophrosyne, music education, diversity ideology, reinscribing Whiteness

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In consideration of music educators who voice support for the diversification of mindsets, pedagogical practices, and curricular content, I problematized the incongruency between stated beliefs, behaviors, and outcomes, even for those who self-identify as activists for social change in education. While considering this disparity between stated commitments to equity and stagnant policies, I found connection with a cardinal virtue: temperance or moderation, also known as *sophrosyne*. Sophrosyne was lauded by Plato[1], and is one of the foundational pillars—that of controlling oneself—found in school music settings. There are four Cardinal Virtues (Wisdom, Courage, Justice, and Temperance) touted as pillars among Western European philosophers, and as part of Christian theological teaching. The term cardinal refers to a "hinge"—as in the hinge of the doorway that allows access to heaven, or wealth, or power, or even worthiness of inclusion in educational practices.

Plato considered wisdom and courage as virtues for those in power, those who can "be trusted to defend and maintain order" (Ridgeway 1912, 247). The tempered virtue of Sophrosyne was linked to those considered of a lower class, thereby incapable or undeserving of courage and wisdom. Here, I consider sophrosyne and its connection to music educators who choose behaviors that temper their stated commitments to diversity initiatives and the people and practices they are meant to uplift. These actions demote cultural and musical ways of belonging to a "lower class" thereby reinscribing whiteness, cis-hetero-maleness, ableism, and economic elitism among other means to maintain authority and power. As sophrosyne represents a means of keeping in one's place, in one's lane, I used Mayorga-Gallo's (2019) diversity ideology as a lens to examine this inertia around diversifying the music education profession—in people, process, and content.

I offer here a brief introduction to the four virtues: prudence, or wisdom, helps people to recognize and choose right from wrong; fortitude, or courage, helps us to face challenges; justice helps us to see what is fair and reasonable; and temperance, or sophrosyne, helps to practice self-control in choices and behaviors. One can imagine that access to these cardinal virtues creates an educational landscape tilted toward equity. And yet, educators can simultaneously recognize diversity, but not oppression; they can appreciate difference and still deny diversity; and they can be consciousba of difference, but dysconscious (King 1991) of continuing injustice. Should we, as asked by Higgins (2019) only "strive for the possible?" (74), or can we aim for truer alignment of belief and practice?

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The Virtue of Sophrosyne

While the words from Plato through Socrates touted the unique intelligence gained only through the making of music[2], its contextualization was situated within the same hierarchical thinking regarding certain musics today. Instead, I am interested in noting the qualities of sophrosyne; also known as quietness, shame, obedience to authority, control of one's desire and body, and contentment with little – that are present in teacher education, music departments, and school music in the U.S., and may be at play in the slow to minimal progress in meaningful diversification of educational practices.

Over a century ago, Ridgeway (1912) described shades of sophrosyne, a version of different strokes for different folks depending on one's position in a class and power struggle. While considering these facets, of note was that our profession's treatment of marginalized musics and peoples bears a striking resemblance to the doling out of access to virtue. Those in power held the truest temperance following the highest knowledge. The elites were aware of their responsibility to educate those less fortunate, a kind of Greek El Sistema, what Baker (2014) referred to as a "model of tyranny" (para. 8). Those considered lower in status were viewed through a deficit lens since their virtues were deemed a rote mimicry of their moral and intellectual superiors. Those identified in the lowest class were expected to demonstrate sophrosyne by pure obedience to external authority as they were deemed "irrational; Reason cannot rule it by persuasion, but needs a police force to compel submission" (Ridgeway 1912, 251). Ones with potential were plucked from the depths and educated in gymnastics and music until they moved through the ranks toward a more virtuous state. This did not include women, enslaved peoples, any forms of disability, or any people that were not considered what is now defined as white.

This is reminiscent of Rademaker's (2005) commentary on withholding labels of quality or excellence. It is not uncommon to hear a music educator say something is "not music" in response to genres that are outside of the Western Eurocentric classical canon and its approved offspring. Rationales are offered that too many key musical attributes are missing, or not readily discernible. As a result, the genre or culture in question does not qualify for whole-hearted inclusion in the category of music that is appropriate for and worthy of study in music education.

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What is "Good," and Who Decides?

To consider how musics and cultural traditions are sorted into degrees of value, I found connection with Rosch's (1978) claim that categories and labels are structured around prototypes: central cases that form so-called normal examples of its category. A wastebasket is probably less of a piece of furniture than a couch because it does not fill a room in the way that a couch may do, and because it can be used outside, in a way that a couch will normally not be used. Rather than recognizing the semantics at play here, as they are reflecting facets of culture, music educators hold strong to musical "standards" and "quality," often absent of reflection on how these labels and categories are determined. In the broadest sense, music educators work within spaces that hold faithful to one category of school music, music teacher preparation, and teacher evaluation, thereby demonstrating a moderation, or sophrosyne, in approaching change.

An example of this effect is plain to hear when considering melodies of the Wagogo people of Central Tanzania. In this video, a women's choir is rehearsing for Sunday service at their Christian church: https://youtu.be/12H1120K-jQs?si=31BkDU6Qs0GFRjlH. In traditional Gogo music such as heard by the women, the tritone is the signature interval. Not only are tritones key, but so, too, are descending parallel tritones. Without the parallel tritones, Gogo music and education expert Dr. Kedmon Mapana[3] said, "it is not Gogo" (personal communication).

The reader may recall from their own university music theory or orchestration courses that the tritone is so full of dissonance and tension that it earned the nickname "the devil's interval." An interval was deemed as so horrific that it was named after Satan, surely not an interval that would be considered moderate or under control. I also recall getting points taken off arrangements because I liked the sound of parallel intervals moving together. Rather than assimilate and temper myself into the Western Eurocentric rules, I strive to reflect the multitude of aural, visual, and kinesthetic influences that have constructed my personal and pedagogical knowledge—an approach not based in sophrosyne. It may well be that some attribute, timbre, texture, or cadence deemed "appropriate" or "quality" is shared by multiple timbres or textures or cadences. These attributes are likely to be prized in certain genres, but are then under-considered and undervalued when found in musics of historically excluded and marginalized people.

Rosch (1978) warned that frequency of perception may well be a symptom of a label rather than its cause. Even if mirrors and clocks are less typical pieces of furniture than tables and chairs, that does not necessarily mean they are or should be encountered less often. This can result in a good old days mindset, by which music educators remember their pasts as invariably "good," even if it was rather mixed. These days of old required those not in power to know their place, to temper their desires, to moderate their behavior, thereby demonstrating sophrosyne.

In the case of a patriarchal culture where women do not hold power, Yildiran (2015) noted this requires two sides: one to control and the other to be controlled. In terms of women's musicality or pedagogical expertise, a "female may cause some leakages by saying things that should not exist or should not be expressed even if they exist; hence it becomes a necessity to put a door on the female mouth in patriarchal society" (845). This lack of continence of the mouth, or lack of sophrosyne, leaves it to the patriarchy to remove a woman's incontinence. To some extent, music educators self-assimilate and participate in continued oppression through our pedagogical dispositions.

Demos (1957) described the presence of sophrosyne as the key to maintaining harmony among groups, so long as order is maintained to benefit those in power. This reminded me of a writing tip I learned in graduate school to root out the use of passive voice by applying the phrase "by zombies" at the end of a sentence. If the sentence works with the phrase, the sentence is in passive voice, e.g., The concerto was performed … by zombies. I offer that the same works for the phrase "so long as order is maintained to benefit those in power."

Students may audition in the style of their choosing, so long as they perform in a large ensemble that performs what is a more common repertoire. Music departments will prioritize hiring a Black, Brown, Indigenous, or Asian faculty member in an ongoing search, so long as they have expertise in Western Eurocentric musical traditions. Choral and instrumental music educators commit to programming pieces by women, so long as their thematic ideas come first. And, so it goes. Demos (1957) aptly noted, "The … horse, rebelling against the charioteer may, after many efforts by the latter, be brought to submission. But such obedience reflects no credit on the horse; it only shows the strength of its master" (403). Sophrosyne is considered a form of excellence that reflects not only the personal valor of one that passively practices self-restraint, but also a quality that has been politically institutionalized and replicated through the infrastructure of education.

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Ideology

Before examining a diversity ideology, a clear definition for ideology is offered here. Cultural theorist Stuart Hall (1980) defined ideology as systems of meaning, concepts, categories, and representations which make sense of the world. Ideology is also known as dogma, gospel, doctrine, and philosophy. Ideology is a collection of ideas that rely on basic assumptions that may or may not have any factual basis. Ideas become repetitive through choices and actions. These ideas serve as the foundation from which further ideas emerge. One's belief may range from passivity to zealotry.

Minar (1961) described ways that ideologies are used including: the role ideas play in social interaction, or the structure of an organization, e.g., universities, or as a meaning whose purpose is persuasion. Existential psychologists Greenberg, Koole, and Pyszczynski (2004) posited that people want to believe in a fair world for a sense of control and security, and generate ideologies to maintain this belief, e.g., by justifying inequality or unfortunate events.

Dominant groups in music education use cultural practices to justify the systems of inequality that maintain their social power over non-dominant groups, using what Haslanger (2017) referred to as "masking or illusion" (150). They organize social relations in a hierarchy with some social identities and ways of musicking being superior to others, which are considered inferior. The dominant ideology is passed along through university teacher preparation programs and graduate studies. There are music educators who tend to defend existing society, even at times against their own interests, which in turn causes people to create ideological explanations to justify the status quo.

A Diversity Ideology

I applied Mayorga-Gallo's (2014, 2019) framework of diversity ideology to common behaviors that maintain a status quo for hiring, programming, course offerings, publishing, and performance practices despite stated support for meaningful diversification of these areas. While Mayorga-Gallo's (2014, 2019) analytic framework "provides conceptual tools to help us understand white individuals who are conscious of racial inequality and desire to be closer to people of color, yet still reproduce whiteness as structure" (1790), I will include other forms of oppression in its application.

Diversity ideology is structured around four principles: Diversity as Intent, Diversity as Acceptance, Diversity as Commodity, and Diversity as Liability (Mayorga-Gallo 2019). Diversity as Intent refers to the centering of good intentions during discussions of diversity issues and initiatives. It is during these department and committee meetings that those who create the harm are preoccupied with establishing their own innocence. Minimal gestures, such as identifying a problem, are privileged over how those oppressed experience a space.

Diversity as Acceptance calls for tolerance and inclusion of differences, while equating inherent differences (e.g., race and sexuality) with idiosyncratic differences (e.g., personality). It celebrates representation as the answer to inequality. Inclusion here does not address power or privilege imbalances. Without an emphasis on how identities shape access to opportunities, calls for diversity may result in nothing more than tolerating difference. A general ethos of acceptance that is not grounded in a discussion of inequitable power distribution becomes a tool of oppression for the powerful.

By defining acceptance of marginalized and minoritized musics and peoples as the threshold for promoting diversity, oppressing organizations can let themselves off the hook and maintain the dominance of their structures. While a music department may be able to claim it is representative and inclusive of all, its priorities are likely to reflect those in power. When combined with the discriminatory nature of academia, "open to all" becomes "all male, all white, or all but one". Several friends have expressed their utter exhaustion at being "the one" in a music department, e.g., the one Black, Brown, Indigenous, or Asian faculty member, or the one representative of the LGBTQ+ community, or the one who lives with a visible disability.

Diversity as Commodity reflects the treatment of oppressed peoples and practices as objects for the benefit and satisfaction of others. This includes more than just consumption (Mayorga-Gallo 2019). It covers objectification, racialized identities, and can serve as neoliberal instrumentality with its lack of power analysis. There is emphasis on visible representation, and a display of diversity for others to see. Diversity as commodity concerns the objectification of minoritized people within discussions of diversity, which often reduces people to representations of ideals. Diversity ideology obscures these roots, framing the desires of those in power who engage in the diversity bargain as positive, so long as the order is maintained to benefit those in power. When the interests of those who hold power no

longer align with people's desire for equality, progress is abandoned and even identified as a threat.

Diversity as Liability refers to what is seen as a threat to those in power, and to "American" values (Mayorga-Gallo 2019). This allows those in power to construct a positive identity as supportive while simultaneously warning against the perils of diversity initiatives. While educators in power may appreciate diversity, hooks (2015) reminded us that they want to be able to consume and engage it on their own terms. This ideology was originally motivated by the dominant racial ideology of white people who consider themselves progressive and perhaps even antiracist, who yet enact practices and policies that perpetuate systemic whiteness. Mayorga-Gallo (2019) offered this ideology as "the rationale through which these beliefs and practices are possible, predictable, and logically consistent" (1793).

This "Yes, but" mentality (Smith and Gallo 2017) "allows people to suggest that they are thoughtfully weighing the pros and cons when they actually have strong feelings for or against something" (904). While music educators may claim to value diversity, it is often in a superficial manner. They may agree that repertoire lists should be reviewed for oppressive material (diversity as intent), but express that there are certain pieces too beloved to remove, regardless of harm. They may believe that everyone is different (diversity as acceptance), and therefore not all meant for university music experiences or faculty positions. They may value the presence of people and musical practices from diverse traditions and backgrounds because this offers global perspectives (diversity as commodity), yet they may not value these offerings as equal to long held practices. And they may believe that the idea of diversity initiatives is positive (diversity as intent), while not believing it to be worth the time to change their ways of doing and viewing it as a threat to the status of power (diversity as liability).

Diversity ideology as an analytic framework provides conceptual tools to help us understand music educators who are conscious of inequality and desire to be close to underrepresented people, genres, and performance practices, yet still reproduce the same dominant patterns. The threat many music educators feel when approached with evidence of privilege is not only based on the myth of meritocracy, but the immorality associated with benefiting from oppression. Diversity in music education seems to be for white, able-bodied, middle- and upper-class people. A diversity ideology can be used to distinguish themselves from sullied categories:

bougie,[4] racist, misogynistic, classist. This results in a non-performative environment, naming something so as to not bring it into being.

The logic of diversity ideology allows those upholding the status quo to construct a positive identity as open-minded and accepting of difference or musics as innovative and necessary, while maintaining the social and legal benefits of systemic oppression. This moderation of the self, this sophrosyne of the profession, parallels the illusion provided by an ideology. The diversity ideology helps identify the parallels in music education. By seeing these points of connection, we can be better equipped to identify resistance strategies to combat the reinforcement of systemically oppressive practices. A diversity ideology maintains inequity because it enables those in power and offers illusions of change. If diversity is to be meaningfully present, we must gain the skills to structurally reorganize music education. Simultaneously, we must be vigilant as Hess (2023) noted, "To enact anti-oppression is a continual process of creating, recreating, acting and imagining.... Educators must thus be aware of, critique and challenge the moments when pedagogy 'slips' and reinscribes oppression" (16–17).

In a 2019 letter to the Canadian Journal of Music, Dylan Robinson called for the end of DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) committees. Robinson is a xwélmexw (Stó:lō/Skwah) artist, curator, and author whose research includes Indigenous and settler colonial practices of listening (2020), music and modernity among Indigenous peoples (2019b), and action beyond the Truth and Reconciliation work in Canada (2016). Robinson's call to action (2019a) included:
"My colleagues in music, you should know by now what needs to be done in order to truly transform systems of music education into spaces where different epistemologies and values of music and world views are equally supported" (137).

I agree with Robinson's to-do list, and I have worked with others to enact change in my small music department at a liberal arts university. We will find an instructor for any genre or instrument a student wants to study, and we have created new ensemble opportunities to match. We have abandoned rigid criteria for recital repertoire. We are continuing to grow our music business and recording industry programs at a rate more rapid than all the other concentrations put together.

One of the largest challenges is that no one can make faculty do anything. Contracts relate to teaching responsibilities, service, and professional engagement. While a university might be able to keep students from registering for classes until

they complete an online module about sexual harassment, faculty can be reminded to complete it, but not forced. There is not a mandate or incentive to participate in initiatives. This leaves stubborn faculty who make no changes in their curricula or programming, leaving the work to others. It has also tested our pedagogical skill-sets. As we changed the requirements, so too, we changed the average student entering the program. We were used to students that could jump through the same hoops that we did, and instead, we are learning to spot the new hoops and how to jump through them for ourselves.

Robinson (2019a) demanded that we "devote part of ALL courses to an intersectional analysis of how structures of white supremacy, settler colonialism, and heteropatriarchy have underpinned music education, composition, music analysis, and music history, and to end the dominance of white male leadership" (139). I hope to see this in the years that I have left in my career, but I am left with more questions than answers. Will future graduate students wonder at the passionate advocacy in our writings, but shake their heads at the lack of meaningful change—what I have dubbed the "Tanglewood Symposium"[5] effect? Will they view our gatherings as tempered, moderated to be held within the walls of a conference or in publications read by graduate students caught in the same cycle? Has our activism been muffled by virtue of Sophrosyne?

About the Author

Karen Howard is Professor of Music and Director of Graduate Studies in Music Education at the University of St. Thomas. Karen is the author of multiple articles and books related to diversifying music education through dispositions, repertoire, and pedagogical practices. She is a frequent national and international clinician supporting music educators in their journeys toward developing equitable teaching and learning environments. Karen is also a faculty fellow with the Office of Diversity Equity and Inclusion, she is the founder and editor of the World Music Initiative series through GIA Music (in which all musics are considered "world" music"). With more than 30 years of experience working with children of ALL ages, Karen is most at home in a room full of music educators.

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Notes

[1] Plato reflected a valuation of an ordered soul in the work *Charmides* (around 380 B.C.E.), a dialogue focused on Socratic philosophy. Such order was part a whole person who exemplified temperance in one's physicality, ego, and actions.

[2] In *Laws* (around 340 B.C.E.), Plato (1980) emphasized that certain musics taught to children would cause them to become "habituated to feeling delight and pain in a way opposed to the law and to those who are persuaded by the law, to make the child's soul follow and feel the same joys and aims as an old man" (40).

Stamou (2002) interpreted this to mean that a solid education led to children who "will eventually develop a taste toward good and bad, similar to the musical taste of the wise men in the city" (6).

[3] Dr. Kedmon Mapana was recently appointed by the President of Tanzania as Executive Secretary of Tanzania's National Arts Council (BASATA).

[4] Bougie—exhibiting qualities attributed to the middle class, especially pretentiousness or conventionality. From Oxford Languages.

[5] The Tanglewood Symposium was an all-male conference sponsored by the Music Educators National Conference in 1967. An oft-cited yet commonly ignored recommendation from the symposium was that music educators should meaningfully include pop music and folk music from many traditions.