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How Can We Change Our Habits If We Don't Talk About Them?

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How Can We Change Our Habits If We Don't Talk About Them?

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Abstract

For the late nineteenth century pragmatists, habits were of great interest. Habits, and the habit of changing habits, they believed, reflected if not defined human rationality, leading William James to describe habit as “the enormous fly-wheel of society.” What the pragmatists did not adequately address (at least for us) is the role of power relations in the process of changing habits. In this article we discuss our experience of attempting to engage critique and reflection on habitual practices in music teacher education, offering the reader an article within an article. That is, we reflect on our failure to publish a critical article in a widely read practitioner journal by sharing the original manuscript and its reviews, with the hope that our experience might shed additional light on social reproduction and efforts aimed at change.

Keywords: habit, social reproduction, teacher certification, professionalization, change

*Action, as distinguished from fabrication, is never possible
in isolation; to be isolated is to be deprived of the capacity to act.
Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition*

For William James and other late nineteenth century pragmatists, “habit” was a concept of central concern. (James even published a book called *Habit*.) James went so far as to describe people as bundles of habits. Habit, wrote James, is “the enormous fly-wheel of society”; it is society’s “most precious conservative agent” (1890, 51).¹ A flywheel is a rotating disc used to store and release

energy. Flywheels can be found in many applications, but many people probably imagine them as found in farm machinery.² The point of the flywheel is to smooth out changes in rotational speed resulting from momentum generation and mechanical load. Many machines with flywheels include sacrificial “shear pins” as a safety device to prevent an overload that might damage or destroy the machine. James’s flywheel metaphor was intended, therefore, to emphasize how habits help create stability, allowing society to function smoothly. While change arguably happens all the time, the flywheel helps to avoid damage from too much disruption (too disruptive a change and pins might shear).

Habits, then, are essentially a good thing. Much of our individual and collective identity and functioning as music educators derives from a sense of stability created by habitualized practices. Indeed, as Bowman puts it, “the basis for human rationality is habitual action” (2005, 4). We would argue, however, that while the pragmatists saw habit in a reflexive way, James’s metaphor of the flywheel clearly speaks to what sociologists describe as social reproduction. Bourdieu (1977), for example, provides a similar-sounding but quite different concept, known as *habitus*.³ Bourdieu’s concept, which emphasizes *acquired, durable dispositions*, serves as a reminder that our capacity to transcend routine, to change habits, and to “rationally” choose between alternatives is hardly an unproblematic matter of agency because we are born into an existing structure of values. Even if we entertain the possibility of agency and rationality that might allow us to change habits, Weber (1962) is quick to remind us that violations of convention are often met “with the most effective and serious retribution in the form of social ostracism” (76). In other words, even if we wish to take up other habits, the flywheel (in the form of existing power relations) helps to ensure that we do not.

Bowman (2005) perceptively seizes on the double-barreled nature of habit by questioning the assumed positive value of the flywheel as a “precious conservative agent,” provocatively asking: “why not insidious?” Bowman encourages thoughtful reflection to avoid, in effect, habits becoming *habitus*, where people unreflectively participate in habitual action, becoming complacent, or worse, prey to the machinations of the powerful. We argue, however, that efforts to recognize and

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critique (let alone change!) the habits of the status quo are enormously difficult because the flywheel of the American music teacher education system is so monolithic in its historically-produced weight and momentum that it (a) serves to blind us from alternatives, and (b) it polices action so effectively that contrarian voices are often kept in isolation so they cannot “act” (in Hannah Arendt’s sense).

The present article is a story about our efforts to raise and critique issues of social reproduction in the American music teacher preparation process, and our subsequent re-thinking about where we may have strategically erred in our attempt to bring such issues to greater consciousness. Our aim was (and is) to critically examine what we perceive as the limiting effects of certification and accrediting structures in the American music education establishment—the homogenous codified, standardized, and too often unexamined habits, if you will. Such issues are, of course, *de rigueur* in the pages of ACT (being, as they are, fundamentally tied to the MayDay Group’s “Action Ideals”). While we appreciate the impact the MayDay Group has arguably had on the music education profession, ACT does not necessarily represent the mainstream of thought—at least in American music education. To be truly effective, we originally believed, we needed to publish our critique in a widely read practitioner journal. The difficulties of our task did not escape us. We were conscious of trying to make the manuscript as “practical” and user-friendly as possible,⁴ and opted for a narrative form that we thought might speak to the issues of social reproduction in the profession that concerned us. We avoided overly academic language and deliberately played on the widespread authority of Dewey and a theme of diversity-as-potential (to counter our “straw man” argument of uniformity as a professional weakness).

From the outset, our goal was to try to find a way to interrogate how the complexities of processes of professionalization and social reproduction manifest themselves in music education, and to communicate this process with the wide readership of a practitioner journal. We present our original, unaltered manuscript submission below as part of a self-reflexive exercise aimed at revealing our failure in attempting to generate self-critique of the profession. The point of our story is *not* to bemoan that our manuscript was ultimately rejected, paint the journal or our

anonymous reviewers in a bad light, nor critique the peer review process.⁵ Rather, we present our story as an example of how difficult it is to critique status quo practices in mainstream forums, given their location within a complex cycle of social reproduction that strives for the preservation of existing power relations.

Manuscript Submission (Part One)

For the sake of visual clarity, we have italicized the passages from our original manuscript, painted blue the revisions we made in response to the original comments from the reviewers, and interspersed personal reflections and self-critique.

Should One Size Fit All? A Responsive Narrative to Music Education

“...for only diversity makes change and progress”

—John Dewey, *Democracy and Education*

United we stand, divided we fall. Or so goes the popular wisdom, but who is the “we” that is united? What about strength through diversity? Who gets to become a musician or music teacher after going through 12+ years in a traditional public school music program? Does the “we” really represent our society or our communities? Who falls off along the way, who is missing, and at what point does “unity” become confused with unreflective uniformity, leading to the kind of “groupthink” that prevents timely innovation and responsive action?

Through our fictitious narrative of Jack and Jill, we invite you, the reader, to consider the advantages and disadvantages of homogeneity and heterogeneity in the profession. With a combined experience of over 20 years in the K-12 classroom, we want to be clear that we are attempting to problematize the structural aspects of our profession, not the daily work of school music teachers. Our goal is not to offer simple solutions (they don't exist), but to encourage dialogue about the structural nature of the profession in response to the challenges of the 21st century.

Jill recently graduated from a prestigious school of music with a doctorate in music education and is now coordinating a music education program at a small liberal arts college. Her responsibilities are many, ranging from teaching six

classes a year and placing/supervising student teachers to conducting community children's choirs and a newly formed iPad ensemble. As a former middle and high school music teacher *herself*, Jill values the expertise and experience *public school music teachers* bring to the undergraduate teacher education program. Upon observing teachers in her area, she quickly came to understand that the types of thinking and methods explored in her “*progressive*” doctoral program often contradict the practices she and her preservice teachers observe in the field. Conflicted with trying to prepare her preservice teachers for the “realities” of schools, while simultaneously trying to shape a new path for music education in the 21st century, she establishes professional development partnerships with area teachers in order to improve and shape the musical experiences of her students as well as her area teachers and their programs.⁶

Similar to how her own understanding of music teaching and learning was challenged in graduate school, Jill encourages her preservice teachers to *critically examine* and re-conceptualize the music learning environments they encounter. Jill understands she is in a unique position to influence and encourage a shift in people's thinking about music education in her region, but as her students and area teachers remind her daily, the realities of working in a system that is often resistant to change requires us “to do what people expect us to do”—*especially in a climate of teacher accountability and high-stakes testing*. Jill begins to wonder: How have we come to teach music in this particular way? In this particular time? In this particular place?

“Everything tastes like ketchup”

In her first year teaching at *a small liberal arts college in the northeastern U.S.*, Jill is asked to chair a self-study committee on the music education degree program in order to gain accreditation by the National Association of Schools of Music (NASM). In reading about the history of NASM, she discovers that the association was founded in 1924 in order to bring coherence to the policies and practices of institutions of higher education, focusing on entrance requirements, standardization of credits, technical standards, and repertory.⁷ In order to

maintain accreditation, member institutions agreed to abide by policies articulated in the NASM Handbook. As she and her colleagues review their own curriculum, Jill asks her committee members to consider their own experience learning to become a music teacher. She discovers that her program of study at a big state university was identical to that of her colleagues at their mid-size university and small liberal arts colleges, which, they realize, was not surprising because everyone's institution was NASM-accredited. As they contemplate ways to respond to the challenges of the 21st century—local, national, and global—Jill and her colleagues realize that they may have to consider not becoming accredited.

Although NASM often goes to great lengths to emphasize that their guidelines are not intended to be prescriptive or meant to infringe on the autonomy of individual institutions,⁸ the reality is that few schools of music deviate from traditional practices. A brief examination of preservice music education programs across the country reveals a remarkable degree of consistency in terms of programs of study, course syllabi, and materials used. Jill and a research partner get their hands on a full list of NASM accredited schools (approximately five hundred with music education programs) and examine, using a random generator, programs of study from fifteen random institutions. Additionally, they examine over one hundred course syllabi, including course objectives and required textbooks. In all cases, they find that differences in music teacher preparation programs are usually cosmetic at best (e.g., names might vary: “strings class,” “strings techniques,” “strings methods and materials,” “strings skills,” etc.). Almost every program examined has between 30-45 credit hours of music education content (beyond the required music theory, musicianship, music history, performance, and liberal arts credits) and all more or less contain some combination of introduction to music education, methods/techniques classes, and student teaching practicum. There are minor state-to-state differences because some states grant licensure based on specialization (e.g., choral, instrumental, elementary) rather than general certification as a music teacher. This one licensure difference aside, music teachers in the United States undergo very similar programs of study regardless of where they receive their degree. And if everyone's

program of study is nearly the same, it should not surprise anyone that we turn out similarly. In the words of Jill's dear departed friend, "if you put ketchup on everything, everything tastes like ketchup."⁹

Jill and her colleagues note that the "founding fathers" of NASM were initially concerned with the vocational training of musicians and of future music professors. In 1952, however, leaders from NASM and MENC met to help "shape the future of music in education and the future of music as an art in the United States."¹⁰ Since that time, NASM "has established standards for teacher preparation... [insisting] that each music teacher be a musician."¹¹ In other words, school music teachers must be "musicians" who are trained via classical music theory, ear training, music history, studio lessons in voice, piano, strings, winds, or percussion, and performance in ensembles such as choir, orchestra, band (and sometimes jazz band). The resulting homogeneity of professional preparation helps to ensure uniformity of curricula and to turn out "little boxes." This effectively guarantees that anyone who wishes to teach music in schools meets the minimum standards of classical music performance practices. *Although there is a small pocket of activity in the profession aimed at "alternative paths to licensure" in certifying music teachers from non-traditional backgrounds,¹² the very fact that it is called "alternative paths" makes clear that, while we have each had our own unique experiences, virtually every one of us (the authors included) has shared the same entrance and licensure requirements on our journey towards becoming a music teacher.*

It is clear to Jill that NASM and NAfME have substantially shaped the past, the present, and the future of music education in the United States. She considers that without the kind of visionary leadership provided by these organizations, it is doubtful that the United States would boast the quality and quantity of school music programs it currently enjoys. As Newton observed, objects in motion tend to stay in motion—unless, of course, they meet a superior force. As Jill's husband, a professor of finance, likes to remind her, *however*: "past performance is not necessarily a predictor of future performance." Thus, while the standards, policies, and structures put in place by organizations such as NASM and NAfME have

served us well for many years, Jill and her committee report to their music faculty that they think the resultant homogeneity of the profession may be undermining music education's ability to be *responsive to 21st century society*. She suggests that the school consider not becoming accredited by NASM due to these limitations and illustrates her reasoning to the faculty by telling the story of one of their new preservice teachers, Jack.

Reflection One

Given that our intent was to try to encourage music teachers to raise questions about how present practices (i.e., habits) came into being and how they are perpetuated through structural forces—something that held the potential for defensiveness on the part of practitioners who represent and constitute the values we were trying to critique—we made the conscious decision to construct the manuscript using fictitious narrative form, hoping to soften what could have been perceived as the authoritative voice of academics scolding school music teachers. That is, we hoped to provide description more than prescription, and hoped that readers might embrace the spirit of the fictional form. Our use of the names Jack and Jill, for example, contained many layers of meaning, from the playful allusion of the children's nursery rhyme (including its loping compound meter and some of its gendered connotations), to the Sisyphusean implications of the tasks of many music educators, to some sly "insider" references to the occupational circumstances of one of the co-authors.

Based on the initial feedback from the reviewers, we thought we had mostly hit the mark:

Thank you for this polished submission. The writing is clear and portrays a serious commitment to improvement in the field of music education. [reviewer 1]

I appreciate the arguments made in the article regarding resistance to curricular change and feel there is merit to continuing consideration of the way music is taught and teachers are prepared. The article does a good job of balancing credit for things that have worked well in the past with points that pull the reader toward the consideration of re-conceptualization. [reviewer 3]

This is an excellent article: Thought-provoking and timely, with essential points for reflection within the profession. (And written refreshingly well.) [reviewer 4]

One reviewer was both supportive but concerned:

The narrative is imaginative and engaging, yet I am concerned that practicing teachers might be offended as they are painted as complicit in halting the evolution of teaching practice by mindlessly doing only what they were trained to do. I do not disagree with generalization, but do wonder if it might be presented in a gentler manner? [reviewer 2]

Our fictional narrative approach definitely did not resonate well with one reviewer, however:

The Jack-and-Jill story within the story is also a bit too ‘cutesy.’ Again, I think the framing here undermines the importance of your argument by reducing it to absurdity. All in all, I think the paper raises good points that do need to be discussed, but I think the format of presentation weakens your stance a bit. [reviewer 5]

In keeping with the narrative frame of our manuscript, we engaged Melvina Reynolds’ song “Little Boxes,”¹³ and the “everything tastes like ketchup” metaphor, hoping that readers might indulge the possibility that the music education profession exhibits a very high degree of conformity and uniformity. We had hoped that by leading off the manuscript with an epigram by John Dewey, an almost universally respected name in education, readers might accept the ideal of “diversity” (however they might interpret the term) and that we might be able to play on the possibility that *diversity* should be regarded as a strength rather than a weakness. By counterposing uniformity and diversity, we gambled that readers might be more receptive to the underlying message of self-critique.

The most difficult challenge was to *demonstrate* uniformity in the profession. To do this we took aim at the structural conditions that help to produce the “little boxes” to which we alluded throughout our manuscript: barriers to entrance (i.e., performing classical repertoire on voice or traditional orchestral instruments) and standardized programs of study required for accreditation. Specifically, we conducted a small, but systematic and rigorous web-based examination of randomly-selected, NASM-accredited institutions. We were pleasantly surprised by the initial

openness to this aspect of our manuscript. Of the three reviewers that commented, two appeared generally supportive:

I appreciate your thorough description of NASM, which will be valuable to the practicing teachers who make up the readership of [the journal]. They may have less exposure to NASM's influence in schools of music if they have not studied beyond the typical undergraduate or masters degrees...You have chosen a gargantuan task of convincing the readership that one size doesn't fit all and without admitting that standards (from NASM or NAFME) come with some benefits. How would you change the curriculum? It is easy to add things, but you would have to remove/reduce others. What balance are you suggesting here?...Thank you again - we have a lot to learn from re-evaluating the way we do things! [reviewer 1]

This is a brave article in that it draws attention to the homogeneity of our professional practices and, while praising NASM in some respects, also challenges the power that we have perhaps unintentionally assigned to NASM's guidelines, policies and procedures. [reviewer 2]

What we appreciated in these two comments was that the reviewers recognized that our intent was not to critique NASM specifically, but rather, the underlying classical conservatory values that created NASM and its guidelines. Unfortunately, we failed to fully grasp the message from the reviewers that what they (or at least some of them) were looking for was a clear articulation of alternatives to the status quo—something we offer, in hindsight, toward the end of this article. Although we had included “sidebars”¹⁴ of practical suggestions aimed at fostering culturally responsive teaching (supporting our calls for “diversity”), we did not tackle, head on, the more difficult task of advancing an alternative vision of music teacher licensure.

Manuscript Submission (Part Two)

Having spent the first part of our manuscript describing Jill, we attempted to further describe social reproduction in music education in the second part of our manuscript with the fictional character, Jack, trying to show how established structures in school music privilege particular ways of musical engagement (and hence particular groups of people) over others.

Jack-in-a-Box?

Jack is a product of “the system.” He came from a family who loved singing around the house. His elementary teacher, Mrs. Robinson, saw great potential in Jack’s musical skills and often had him leading the class in movement activities and improvising on barred instruments. She recommended him to the elementary band teacher, Mr. Clark, who started Jack on trumpet in fourth grade. Jack continued on trumpet until eighth grade, when his middle school band director, Mrs. Sandoe, encouraged Jack to transfer to French horn and study privately with Ms. Delmonico at a community music school in town. In high school, Jack played French horn in the concert band, and took every music class that was offered outside of ensembles: music appreciation, guitar class, and AP music theory. Outside of school, Jack enjoyed playing guitar in the church rock band. He played mellophone in the marching band after school and became drum major in his junior year. During the summer between his junior and senior year, Jack attended a few conducting camps in the summers at a nearby liberal arts college, where the assistant marching band director asked him to apply to become a performer with the wind symphony. Inspired to follow in the footsteps of his high school band director, Jack majors in music education. In his first year at college, Jack is taught by Jill, who asks him to reflect first on how he came to be a musician at this particular place, in this particular time. Jill also asks Jack to look around the room and consider the type of person represented in the music education profession? She has him consider his friends who may not have participated in music, yet were very invested in music in other ways? Was there a place for them in the system of music education? Jack reflects on his friend Hector who can recite every lyric to every rap and loves to compose his own music in his home studio, yet there was no place for him in the school curriculum. Or his friend Tiasa who leads drumming and dance at the YWCA on the weekends and wants to be a music teacher, but was not admitted to music school because she didn’t read music.

Jack and Jill go up a hill...

Most of the time there are good reasons for how the present came to be. The first half of the twentieth century experienced a dramatic expansion in higher education. Without the formation of NASM it is quite possible that most universities would not have schools (or faculties) of music. Without the foresight of NASM's founding fathers, who recognized the necessity and benefits of self-governance during turbulent times, it is doubtful that professionalized academic musicians (i.e., college music professors) would exist, and that specialized music instruction in schools of the kind that has come to define music education would have come into being. Similarly, without NAFME's efforts (historical and contemporary) it is doubtful that school music would enjoy the relatively strong position it currently enjoys. Consider for a moment: How many university "schools of dance" are there in comparison to schools of music? How many dance teachers are there in K-12 schools? How many specialized elementary drama teachers are there? When put in perspective, it is obvious that us musicians have done pretty well in comparison to the other so-called "arts" disciplines.

As the saying goes, "if it ain't broke, don't fix it"—and for people like Jack, music education certainly is not broken. For Jill, however, there are reasons to be concerned about the status quo. She sees too many instances where traditional practices are failing to connect with students and failing to meet the musical needs of communities; she recognizes that current practices are the response to yesterday's problems, not today's issues. Jill tries hard to get Jack and the rest of his preservice classmates to question current practices. She asks them why wind band instrumentation has to be so standardized, why every music ensemble sticks to traditional seating arrangements, why festival adjudicators are almost always university ensemble directors, why elementary music classes use the same textbooks, and why bands, orchestras, and choirs choose repertoire from the same lists of so-called "quality" repertoire.

Jill tries to unpack the history of music education for her students, attempting to show them that "music education" can occur outside of traditional paradigms, and that existing practices can be modified to reflect local

circumstances. For most of her preservice music teachers, however, the imperative to conform to past practices and emulate the kind of music programs they themselves experienced is simply too great. Even when all indicators suggest that trying something new and responsive is prudent, they resist. Perhaps this is simply part of a mass culture phenomenon: we wish to dress the same, listen to the same music, watch the same movies, and not stick out. We try to do what people expect us to do. In the case of music teacher preparation, we keep training as band, choir, and orchestra directors (or elementary music specialists) because that is what the job market wants, it is what preservice and inservice music teachers tend to want, and it is often what university professors want. Jill is not just trying to work against the received beliefs of her own students in trying to diversify practices in music education, she is working against an entire system!

Jill understands she will need to help incoming teachers deconstruct their own learning and provide opportunities for them to put new models and practice in motion. In her introductory music education course, Jill introduces her students to responsive teaching. She asks her students to read *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* by Paulo Freire, *Teaching as Subversive Activity* by Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner, and *Musician and Teacher* by Patricia Shehan Campbell. She models inquiry based-learning and asks her students to re-conceptualize music teaching and learning by answering the following essential questions:

1. What are the major models and practices of music education in the past (large ensemble, chamber music, shape-note singing, manuals, instrumental methods books, adjudication, methods in Kodály, Orff-Schulwerk, Eurhythmics, Suzuki, and Music Learning Theory, and Comprehensive Musicianship, etc.?) What problems were those models meant to address? What implications can the implementation of those models give to music educators today?

2. How can curriculum and school knowledge be conceptualized to become responsive to social change, contingency of knowledge, life in mediated worlds, and inequalities?

3. *How do teachers as agents of change navigate the current educational system in the age of accountability to pursue equity among, in, and through education?*

Jill expands Jack's and her own understanding of the possibilities of music education by modeling that the teacher is not the sole source of musical knowledge in the classroom. She brings in guest musicians from the community and engages in distance learning with established professors at universities across the globe. Jack and Jill begin to ask together how music can be learned and taught in other contexts. They consider, develop, and practice new forms of musicking together because it is through action and collaboration that new creative ways are developed and put into motion.

Conclusion [original manuscript]

Famous philosophers have drawn attention to how we live in conditions that are not of our making.¹⁵ That is, none of us had a say in the families or the conditions we were born into. Similarly, none of us likely participated directly in the construction of the music education profession in which we currently work and live. NAfME, the All-State system, the bands, orchestras, and choirs, Dalcroze, Kodály, and Suzuki—all of these predate us. It is simply assumed by many music teachers that this is “the way things are,” and that this is what music teaching has always been. Rarely does one stop and consider how things could be otherwise. What if there was no Orff-Schulwerk? No marching band? (What would happen during halftime?) No All-State?

The point of the examples listed in the sidebar is to try to get your students (and maybe yourself) to think differently about music making and its place in our lives and in society. The current paradigm of music education has served [the profession](#) well for almost a hundred years, but in the process it has in many cases caused us to forget how things came to be. As a result, we have lost many of our abilities to adapt and respond to changing circumstances. In addition, the current [climate of fear in education](#) also causes a great deal of frustration among those who wish to effect change or operate outside the norm.

It is helpful to remind ourselves from time to time that, in spite of day-to-day challenges, we should be proud of what has been accomplished under the banner of music education. At the same time, we cannot take our present status for granted. Malvina Reynolds' satirical take on suburban sprawl ("Little Boxes") provides a poignant reminder of what can happen in the absence of diversity: we come out all the same. Based on our examination of the present state of music education, we suggest that the time has come to entertain the possibility that our current state of conformity may be at a point where it is undermining, rather than enhancing, our performance as a profession.

There have been few times in history when school music has not been in the crosshairs of those who believe that music is an expendable subject from the school curriculum. Understandably, then, music educators have often been a defensive lot and, as a result, have tended in the direction of "united we stand." By confusing unity with uniformity (and conformity), however, the music education profession has perhaps weakened its ability to adapt to changing circumstances. There is much to be said for strength in numbers; it is suspect, however, to believe that all of us need to be the same in order for us to function with a shared commitment to music instruction in schools. Similarly, there is much to be said for upholding standards (e.g., "the national standards"). There is a difference between standards and standardization, however. Whereas standards suggest that things matter (in this case certain aspects of the learning of music), standardization reduces diversity—a feature necessary, in biological terms, for survival (recall that pure breeding usually results in greater susceptibility to disease), and, according to Dewey, for a flourishing democracy. Given the educational climate of today it may be time to question more seriously whether music education needs to look the same regardless of place and conditions. One size does not need to fit all. As David Myers remarked at the 2013 Suncoast Music Education Research Symposium, "Every school [of music] does not have to look like every other school." Diversity, rather than being a weakness, may in fact be the key to our survival as a profession...lest "we all come tumbling after!"

Reflection Two

Based on the positivity of the initial reviews, we thought the manuscript stood a very good chance of acceptance, pending minor changes. In addition to revising all items (approximately 20) recommended by the reviewers save two—items with which we did not argue, but instead responded by saying that space did not permit the kinds of extensive analysis requested—we undertook the additional step of soliciting feedback from several trusted school music teachers and made additional minor modifications based on their feedback. The practitioners from whom we solicited feedback strongly encouraged us to frontload our manuscript with a disclaimer about what we wanted the readership to do. One wrote,

If you want us to engage in critical reflection, tell us what we are getting ourselves into, otherwise we'll be defensive when we get to the part that implies we are all similar. I know I don't teach the same as my other music colleagues, but it took me a moment to realize you weren't suggesting that notion. If I knew I needed to think about how we all participate in a larger structure, then I am more likely to understand better how I might be privileging certain types of musical knowledge and certain cultural practices. This would then help me understand that we are indeed similar.

One veteran teacher expressed a desire to engage in the kind of change we were advocating (e.g., activities included in the sidebars of the original manuscript), but also acknowledged that she and her colleagues work in a system of fear where the unions no longer are able to protect them.

I'd love to do things suggested in your article, I'd love to do things differently, but in today's school climate, I'm afraid to shake things up too much, I'm afraid of losing my job...You both need to talk about the culture of fear surrounding our education system in your article; you need to let people know we don't have the freedom to make these changes.

Trapped in the system? Feeling fearful? As untenured professors, this teacher's comments resonated with us strongly. Still, we were feeling confident based on the original positive round of comments and our attempts to revise the manuscript according to their suggestions. We thought we had managed to “thread the needle” and successfully present critique in an acceptable manner for a mass audience of music teachers.

Our enthusiasm turned out to be misguided. Reviewer 1, who, in response to the initial submission wrote, “I appreciated your treatment of ‘Little boxes’—thank you for this,” wrote in response to the revised version, “To turn out “little boxes” still strikes me as colloquial.” Equally surprisingly, this reviewer, who initially wrote, “I appreciate your thorough description of NASM...” raised new concerns upon receiving the revision:

Your revision has allowed me to better focus on the rationale and method for the analysis you reference in your article. Since this writing is scholarly in nature, I would have appreciated knowing what list of NASM-accredited schools you procured and from what year and whether it was NASM who provided it. Also, it would be worthwhile to know the exact [sic] number - you cite an approximate number of 500.¹⁶

Reviewer 2, who initially wrote, “This is a brave article in that it draws attention to the homogeneity of our professional practices and, while praising NASM in some respects, also challenges the power that we have perhaps unintentionally assigned to NASM’s guidelines, policies and procedures,” wrote this in response to the revised version:

The choice to become NASM accredited or not as a response to the desire to change the future of music education is but one option that Jill and her committee might pursue. Other options include exploring the spaces that NASM leaves for innovative practice or the choice to deeply engage in NASM to bring about change.

Reviewer 4 challenged our reasoning, taking umbrage with our method and conclusions:

“All look the same”: MTE completers do not look the same; the curricular structure of their programs (at least from NASM institutions) look similar. Certified music educators, regardless of their training, are free to act on their individual beliefs about music teaching and learning, within their classrooms and in the context of their curricula and mandated standards. The article does not provide an argument that similar structure in training equals similar learning experiences for students in K–12 music education...There are approximately 800 MTE programs across the United States. Not all MTE programs hold NASM accreditation. This article uses strong language based on what appears to be a three-percent sampling of about two-thirds of MTE programs.

Very clearly, we had completely misread the original reviews and what was expected of us in the manuscript revisions.

A Lesson Learned

By rejecting our manuscript, the reviewers provided us an opportunity to both reexamine our strategic missteps, and to reflect on our own habits, listen to our own advice, and consider how we might change. We attempted to learn from our experience by reflecting on why our efforts failed to connect with the reviewers. This was not our first manuscript rejection, but this one somehow seemed different from others. How had we managed to misread the reviews so badly? Why, for example, did reviewer 2 write that s/he did not disagree with our generalization, but wondered “if it might be presented in a gentler manner”? Why did our reviewers go from calling us brave to saying we had weak arguments?

We began by re-reading our manuscript from their perspective. We considered specifically reviewer 5, who encouraged us to be more direct:

I feel as though YOU could present the questions you ask to draw attention to the calcified nature of the profession from your own perspective instead of from “Jill’s.” This is an academic journal where scholars are allowed to express their own substantiated positions and theories without the need for hiding behind an overly-saccharine fiction.

We suspect that the reason why we failed to connect with the reviewers is that we positioned Jill (who, in actuality, was us) as the thoughtful savior and the profession (the status quo) as the villain. Reviewer 5 was right: our arguments and our research may have been sound, but the fictitious narrative came across as disingenuous if not sanctimonious. Our attempt to avoid appearing like authoritative figures scolding the profession from the perch of our ivory tower backfired. Instead of our satirical form reaching out to and connecting with readers, we ended up insulting and further alienating them. While the use of “Little Boxes” held the potential for capitalizing on some pop culture cache to illuminate the processes of social reproduction we were attempting to interrogate, we neglected to observe how the song’s “ticky tacky” line implied that the status quo of the profession was cheap and shoddy. Worse still, by changing the lyrics from “lawyers and doctors” to “music teachers ... and music ed

professors” we inadvertently portrayed members of the profession as mindless and unthinking.

Although we attempted in our original manuscript to present an argument for diversity-as-strength in opposition to what we perceive as unhealthy homogeneity, we painted too bleak a picture. Our allusion to inbreeding clearly went too far. Our manuscript implied that all members of the status quo were guilty of failing to diversify the profession, thus threatening its long-term survival. Even if diversity is accepted as a strength, as we proposed, it does not logically follow that status quo practices are wrong or without merit. The flywheel fulfills a valuable function, after all. Nowhere in our manuscript did we create a space that applauded (or even acknowledged) the excellent work done within the status quo. Nor did we adequately recognize those individuals (and institutions) doing critical and innovative work “at the margins”—resisting status quo practices in places where they may be inadequate, insufficient, inappropriate, and so on.

Returning to James, we are reminded of Bowman’s observation: why view the flywheel as precious rather than insidious? We began our journey together with a shared sense that the degree of homogeneity in the music education profession in the United States may not be working in the interests of all stakeholders. We had hoped to offer, to a wide readership, a palatable if not effective critique of the processes of professionalization and social reproduction in the field. In addition to our strategic missteps in presentation, our argument was unfortunately read by the reviewers as a referendum on NASM accreditation practices rather than as a general critique of habits in the profession.¹⁷ Accreditation is an extremely powerful mechanism of social reproduction that ensures a healthy degree of professional uniformity; arguably, it is the flywheel *par excellence* of music teacher education. Our point, which we clearly failed to make, was that accreditation practices reflect power relations in society. If we are to avoid the danger of unintentionally oppressing marginalized or overlooked groups, then the habit of changing habits needs to become a regular part of responsive, ethical practice.

In reflecting on our experience, we feel we fell short because we failed to convince the reader that it was in the interests of the profession to consider changing

habits, something we continue to believe is vitally important. We recognize there are some who might argue that change for the sake of change is irresponsible if not reckless. Changing, however, need not mean arbitrary replacing (e.g., replacing band with guitar classes). At no point did we intend to give this impression. Nor did we intend to give the impression that we knew all the answers to the problems of music teacher education. Rather, given the degree of social and cultural change occurring throughout the country, we had hoped our manuscript might help to support the kind of open discussion we feel is desperately needed at this particular point in time.¹⁸

One of the criticisms of the reviewers was that we did not sufficiently advance proposed alternatives (even though we did include in our sidebar a number of concrete steps music educators might consider). Given that this journal's name emphasizes *action*, we offer here three arguments on which we would focus had we the opportunity to submit our manuscript again.

- Arts education has held relatively steady over the past couple of decades in the U.S. for white majority schools and communities, but arts education programs have suffered dramatic declines in Hispanic and African American majority schools and communities. Regardless of the reasons (which are admittedly complex), “alternative paths to licensure” represents an untapped opportunity (or “market”) to expand music and arts education in underserved schools. Involving more students in music and the arts is likely to garner more support for artistic programming from taxpayers and policy makers than if these programs are associated with white privilege. *Hence, it is in the best long-term interests of music education (practically, if not also ethically) to support alternative paths to licensure.*¹⁹
- “Alternative” music offerings rarely take students away from traditional music classes. “Emerging” practices usually attract students historically uninterested in traditional band-orchestra-choir offerings.²⁰ Through coordinated school-university partnerships, emerging practices could start the same way instrumental music started in the schools: as an extra-curricular activity. Such classes could eventually become curricular (hence creating additional music

teaching employment opportunities) as interest attained critical mass. *Hence, it is in the best long-term interests of music education to support emerging practices in whatever ways possible.*

- Legitimizing the efforts of those already doing work outside the norm is vital to overcoming isolation. By recognizing such practices in journals and at conferences (developing a “strand” dedicated to emerging practices, for example), state music educator associations would help to support the kinds of critical mass necessary for the establishment of professional preparation in higher education. *Hence, it is in the best long-term interests of music education to support and advocate for anyone doing work outside of traditional large ensembles.*

In 2013, the Chronicle of Higher Education released a 46-page report entitled, “NEXT: Shaking Up the Status Quo (and Why It’s So Hard to Do).” Although addressed to the practices of higher education, the idea behind the title is a familiar one. Practices are built upon shared and historically-entrenched values and beliefs; changing—or “shaking up”—the status quo depends on getting those who enjoy privileged positions—teachers, professors, policy makers—to adopt (or at least accept) values and beliefs that potentially undermine the advantages they enjoy. Our narrative did little to hide our direct challenge to the status quo. Our manuscript’s explicit message that music educators should surrender the very values and beliefs that constitute the core of their being stood little chance of a positive reception in the absence of some acceptable and convincing alternative(s) articulating how embracing diversity could be a both/and rather than either/or endeavor. Furthermore, it failed to sufficiently address the many benefits of habitualized action.²¹ If we agree with James that rationality is to be found in habitual action, then it stands that new habits reflect, and will only result from, a condition where a critical mass of those in positions of privilege—those with the capacity to “act,” as Arendt puts it—believes it is in their best interest to change. Indeed, as Bowman (2005) reminds us, it benefits everyone to consider “the limitations and impediments created by our habitual ways of thinking and speaking about music and music education” (6). Theory and critique, rather than passive and removed from music learning and teaching are, in fact, a

form of action and may be fundamental to our survival as a profession...lest “we all come tumbling after!”

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Notes

¹ *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 4:1 provides an excellent overview of the problem of habit, action, and identity. The issue consists of essay reviews of Erkki Kilpinen’s book, *The Enormous Fly-wheel of Society: Pragmatism’s Habitual Conception of Action and Social Theory*. The five ACT authors in volume 4:1 explore various aspects of Kilpinen’s work, along with pragmatism’s underlying ideas of action, knowledge, habit, thinking, reflexivity, and rationality. A common theme among the authors revolves around definition and conception: what do the words “habit” and “habitual” mean, and what did they mean for the late nineteenth and early twentieth century pragmatists (e.g., James, Peirce, Dewey)?

Mantie, Roger and Brent C. Talbot. 2015. How can we change our habits if we don’t talk about them? *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 14(1): 128–53.
act.maydaygroup.org/articles/MantieTalbot14_1.pdf

² The principle of the flywheel can be found in the potter's wheel, the spinner's wheel, automobiles, bicycles, and so on.

³ Bourdieu did not invent the concept of *habitus*. He has, however, popularized it to the point where many people associate it with his work on social reproduction. Thomas Regelski includes a thorough discussion of habitus in "Social Theory, and Music and Music Education as Praxis," *Action, Criticism & Theory for Music Education* 3:3.

⁴ The journal's editor insisted that it would not publish articles that did not have "immediacy" for practitioners (personal communication).

⁵ The ethics of the peer review process was the subject of NAFME's Philosophy Special Research Interest Group session in 2010, where Estelle Jorgensen notably "unmasked" the reviewers by calling out some of their questionable reviewing practices. The confidentiality of manuscript reviews is very much a matter of debate in academia. We maintain that if peer review is to uphold its integrity, then peer reviewers and their comments cannot remain privileged. *Peer* collegiality requires that reviewers be accountable for their decisions and their comments.

⁶ Susan Conkling and Warren Henry, "The Impact of Professional Development Partnerships: Our Part of the Story," *Journal of Music Teacher Education* 11, no. 2 (2002): 7-13. See also: Susan Conkling and Warren Henry, "Professional Development Partnerships: A New Model for Music Teacher Preparation," *Arts Education Policy Review* 100, no. 4 (1999): 19-23.

⁷ *Historical Perspectives, 1924-1999: National Association of Schools of Music, Seventy-Fifth Anniversary* (Reston, VA: National Association of Schools of Music, 1999), Sheila Barrows, compiler and editor.

⁸ See Appendix III.A. in *National Association of Schools of Music: Handbook 2011–12* (Reston, VA: National Association of Schools of Music, 2012).

⁹ Wayne Bowman cites this aphorism by a now-departed mutual friend in his chapter, "'Pop' Goes...? Taking Popular Music Seriously." See *Bridging the Gap: Popular Music and Music Education*, ed. Carlos Xavier Rodriguez, 29-50 (Reston, VA: MENC, 2004).

¹⁰ *Historical Perspectives, 1924-1999*, 14.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹² See Daniel S. Hellman, Barbara J. Resch, Carla E. Aguilar, Carol McDowell and Laura Artesani, "A Research Agenda for Alternative Licensure Programs in Music

Education,” *Journal of Research in Music Education* 20, no. 2 (2011): 78-88. Notably, and somewhat surprisingly, the authors do not discuss NASM.

¹³ Malvina Reynolds, *Little Boxes* (Schroder Music Company, 1962).

*Little boxes on the hillside,
Little boxes made of ticky tacky,
Little boxes on the hillside,
Little boxes all the same.
There's a green one and a pink one
And a blue one and a yellow one,
And they're all made out of ticky tacky
And they all look just the same.*

*And the people in the houses
All went to the university,
Where they were put in boxes
And they came out all the same,
And there's [music teachers] and [preservice teachers],
And [music ed professors],
And they're all made out of ticky tacky
And they all look just the same.*

¹⁴ This sidebar appeared in our original submission:

TOWARD RESPONSIVE TEACHING

- Conduct a musical identity project. Create a list of your favorite songs. Choose songs from the list that best reflect you. Analyze and share these songs with the group, describing not only important musical features of the songs (i.e., lyrics, form, texture, instrumentation, mode, meter, etc.), but how the pieces reflect aspects of one's identity. Revisit this project throughout the year to show how identity is fluid. Create responsive lessons and curricula that connect to the interests of students and their communities.
- Conduct an “ethnography” of music making in your surrounding area (be sure to look beyond just “classical” music) by scanning public announcements on the internet, in newspapers, and on store bulletin boards. Contact ethnic community centers for a listing of performances. Have students conduct brief interviews with participants and/or audience members at these events. Bring them into class as guest artists.
- Explore music options on the website meetup.com to learn about the diversity of the musical “communities” in which students might consider participating beyond the school years. For example, the Dallas Ukulele Headquarters—yes, DUH—started a few years ago with a handful of people organized around a website. Now, hundreds of people participate in regular “hookups” (i.e.,

playing sessions in public and commercial spaces) facilitated by DUH. Drawing attention to the potential of social media will undoubtedly lead your students to devise new ways to organize themselves in musical activities outside of class time.

- Create and arrange music (apps and low or no cost technology exist). While it may be impractical to have your ensembles perform every single piece, it is relatively easy to give an assignment requiring everyone to arrange their favorite song (of pre-determined length, e.g., 32 bars). Consider showcasing the best piece(s) at your concert. This kind of assignment falls neatly into the kinds of individual assessment required in many states under Race to the Top legislation!

¹⁵ Karl Marx famously said this (“Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past.”)—but others have adapted and extended the idea.

¹⁶ This is certainly something we would have been happy to clarify and edit had we been given an opportunity. While we accept our failings in offering convincing and acceptable critique in the manuscript, we strongly object to the implication on the part of the reviewers that our research was in any way questionable. We steadfastly maintain that our empirical work was rigorous and consistent with the highest of standards. A thorough presentation of our data and analysis can be found in Brent C. Talbot and Roger Mantie, “Blinded by Bureaucracy: The Pitfalls of Professionalization,” in Conkling, S. (ed.), *Envisioning Music Teacher Education* (Roman & Littlefield, in press).

¹⁷ Although our empirical research involved NASM institutions, NASM itself was (for us) incidental. Practices in Canada, for example, where institutions do not belong to NASM, are similarly homogenous.

¹⁸ We in no way intend to give the impression that we are original or lone voices in raising such concerns. The report of the College Music Society’s Task Force on the Undergraduate Music Major, for example, represents (for some) a dramatic re-envisioning of not just music teacher education, but musical training in general. That the report has, at time of writing, disappeared from the CMS website, however, suggests that contrarian views often suffer the kinds of ostracism Weber foretold. For other examples of critique (beyond those frequently appearing in ACT), see Lee Bartel (ed.), *Questioning the Music Education Paradigm* (Canadian Music Educators Association, 2004) and, more recently, John Covach (February 2, 2015), “Rock me, maestro,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.

¹⁹ Nick Rabkin and E.C. Hedberg, E.C., *Arts education in America: What the declines mean for arts participation* (Washington, DC: National Endowment for the Arts, 2011). While one might argue that declines in arts offerings at underserved schools

are unrelated to music teacher licensure, we would counter that expanding the range of musical options can do no worse than traditional ensemble offerings and, based on evidence related to culturally relevant (or responsive) teaching/pedagogy, holds the potential to do a whole lot better.

²⁰ See, for example, Roger Mantie (2008), "Getting unstuck: the One World Youth Arts Project, the music education paradigm, and youth without advantage," *Music Education Research* no. 10 (4), 473-483.

²¹ As Bowman (personal communication) put it, "habits mean that we don't have to learn to re-tie our shoes each day."

About the Authors

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