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Coping with Discomfort: Understanding Pedagogical Decision-making as Coping with Social Change

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Abstract

The social tides of instability present in today's world often require teachers to cope with social change in their pedagogical practices. *Discomfort* may be viewed as the beginning of a continuous critical reflective practice rather than a momentary emotive state: a way to see music education founded on an acceptance that nothing will be as it was, that nothing is ever supposed to remain static, and thus, no pedagogy is ever supposed to be the same for everyone. In this paper, I define *coping with discomfort* as a process of reflexivity that music teachers may already experience; it is continuous, incessant, and can help music teachers develop capacities to respond more actively to their students from diverse backgrounds.

Keywords

Discomfort, music pedagogy, human mobility, coping mechanisms, adaptation

Human Mobility and Music Education

Patterns related to socioeconomic, cultural, religious, and political conflicts exacerbate trends in immigration and refugee-seeking (Walsh 2011). Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (2005) explained a social reality through an analogy to the physics of liquids. For Bauman, the current reality suggests a "liquid modernity," characterized by the tendency or possibility for social forms and norms to move fluidly and at fast speed, like a river. Liquid modern societies are those that follow a neoliberal agenda in which habits and routines cannot consolidate due to the mobile conditions under which their members act (Bauman 2005, 2). Bauman (2005) argued that the ease of change, primarily in global markets, is a consequence of societies being constructed over "lakes" of instability. Social forms within this global understanding influence societies to be "liquid"; although lakes are contained in one space, "life … cannot keep its shape or stay on course for long" (2).

Bauman's metaphor explains, to a certain extent, this reality of neoliberal societies in which social change occurs rapidly and continuously, and where social structures are quickly replaced by others "only [as] another momentary settlement, acknowledged as temporary until further notice" (Bauman 2012, 3). Liquid modernity represents "the growing conviction that change is *the only* permanence, and that uncertainty *the only* certainty" (5, italics in original). All these social changes influence individuals directly and indirectly throughout their lives. Given this understanding, the ways in which individuals live and interact with the circumstances around them may be influenced by their capabilities to adjust to social change. Even when this adjustment or adaptation occurs in multiple ways, and as a process, it depends on specific circumstances and predispositions, responses to changes in demographics may still be supported by oppressive hierarchies (Niknafs 2021, 13).

Nation-states that open their borders to receive asylum-seekers and immigrants have also been the cause of such mobilities following centuries of colonization (Dei 2006, 2; 2012, 103). Colonial structures (Dei 2006, 3) inform the ways in which these nation-states respond to social transformation at macro, meso, and micro levels. At a macro level, for instance, the reorganization of social forms caused by human mobility shifts how sovereignty is defined and perceived by individuals and how "national economies, identities, cultures, and concepts of nationhood" (Jones 1998, 149) are rearranged. At a meso level, for some societies, this

may imply the destabilization of a sense of "national" group identification and sense of belonging (Bauman 2016), and for others this may imply the reinforcement of national identifications that do not support processes of adaptation that integrate newcomers' perspectives and lived experiences. In this last case, the various possibilities for an intercultural interaction of multiple groups and "senses of belonging" may be limited by placing emphasis in the preconceptions of the meanings of nation that have been produced in the society. As Anderson (1991) states, in the expressions of a sense of nation there is something that denotes an object to "which one is naturally tied" (143). However, in "everything 'natural' there is always something unchosen" (Anderson 1991, 143). These "ties" may be strong and may motivate individuals to cling to commonplace understandings of national belonging, even as asylum-seekers, refugees, migrants, and immigrants grapple with multiple definitions of what "belonging or not to a nation" may mean.

As one example that directly pertains to music education, professionals working in education systems may find it necessary to adapt to increasing human mobility as newly arrived students are placed in their schools (Fleras 2015). These trends materialize at a macro level in policies and curricula; at a meso level, schools are significantly impacted by changes in their racial and ethnic compositions. This sort of change in a school's population may be conceived as an enriching event for all involved, while it may also be conceived, at first, as a challenge that must be *dealt with* quickly.

When adjusting to social change, Bauman (2016) stated that individuals, especially middle classes who have not had the opportunity to critically analyze their current reality, may experience fear, discomfort, and stress as emotive responses to changes in immigration patterns. In schools, principals and administrators may make decisions to address the needs of their communities mainly based on generic knowledge of socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, and gender; in this situation, teachers—particularly those who are not immigrants or refugees themselves and have not yet found meaningful ways to engage with the change around them—may consequently adapt by accommodating their practices as responses to uncomfortable moments (Hess 2018). In this context, teachers who experience changes in their schools and perceive this transformation as something that needs to be dealt with quickly may be prompted, pedagogically, by a variety of coping responses, some of which will not be sufficient to focus "on a thought- full and care-full

pedagogy that highlights the moral obligation everyone in music education settings has to each other" (Niknafs 2021, 20).

In psychology, coping is frequently defined as the behavioral, emotional, and cognitive responses to discomfort and stress (Lewis and Frydenberg 2004, 5–10). Coping responses, commonly understood as ways to deal with stress and discomfort, may provide momentary relief and help one adapt. Coping responses as ways to deal with discomfort may, however, also provide space to respond to social change in protective ways. In such cases, coping may support processes of decision-making that help to preserve practices that otherwise would have changed fluidly—a form of resistance to change. Coping mechanisms, visible through teachers' actions and reactions if they experience distress as their communities hybridize, may then either help them adapt in ways to critically analyze themselves, their conceptions, and assumptions about newcomers' experiences, or adapt to preserve their pedagogies and cling to practices of music education that exclude newcomer students.

Today, many music teachers have developed multiple resourceful strategies to cope with discomfort and stress besides defensive or suppressive mechanisms (Karlsen 2019). I propose, nevertheless, that the field of music education may benefit from reconsidering the notion of *coping* for those who have not yet found opportunities for reflection when they face demographic changes in their classrooms. I then reframe coping and discomfort to understand them as ways to see and turn assumptions, perceptions, thoughts, and emotions related to immigration into self-regulated actions. In reconsidering notions of coping and discomfort, this article may help educators to see more overtly the pedagogies and processes of pedagogical decision-making that favor a "Eurocentric canon of music with its corresponding pedagogy and sociological understandings" (Niknafs 2021, 12) that remain in place and do not serve the inclusion of all students in music classrooms.

Here, I make a theoretical distinction between normative understandings of coping, psychological understandings of coping, and some forms of coping I experienced as a researcher and participant-observer while being with Louise, a middle school band music educator grappling with her preconceptions regarding human mobility. These theoretical and empirical ways of knowing helped me develop a conceptual pedagogical notion that I call *coping with discomfort*.

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Philosophical research served as a methodological premise to embrace "the possible as well as the actual, the messy, cluttered, confused, and untidy … and concern for what ought to be as well as what is" (Reichling 1996, 118). The philosophical understandings of narrative inquiry (Barrett and Stauffer 2012; Nichols 2013) also served as guidelines, given narrative inquiry's overt emphasis on grappling with ideas in theory based on understanding "life experiences as narrated by those who live them" (Chase 2011). I therefore envisioned, explored, and troubled in theory and practice the multiple ways in which music teachers may approach their pedagogical and personal engagements in relation to a social reality of high human mobility, particularly when working in rapidly and continuously changing social contexts.

This article is organized into three sections that aim to connect theoretical understandings with the ungeneralizable and subjective experiences of Louise, a practicing teacher. The first section describes the global social context of current liquid societies. The second is specific to the responses of nation-states to immigration, particularly in relation to education systems. This section also delineates a reality experienced around the world at a macro level—to situate at a micro level—music educators who teach newcomer students as having a crucial role in the changes that can occur in their communities. In this second section, I begin to include Louise's experiences and understandings while teaching music in a middle school that receives a large number of newcomers. I interviewed Louise on January 17, 2019, and all her words in this article came from that interview.

The third and last section focuses on concretizing the central notion in this article by delineating how *coping with discomfort* may be a way to actively respond to social change in music education. In what follows, I contextualize—socially and politically at macro, meso, and micro levels—the existing challenges and controversies surrounding teaching (and living) in liquid modern societies, where one's survival and well-being partly relies on the need to, metaphorically, run with all one's strengths "just to stay in the same place and away from the rubbish bin where the hindmost are doomed to land" (Bauman 2005, 5).

Tides of (In)Stability

In addition to historical patterns of immigration, human mobility increased around the world in the decade between 2005 and 2015 (Heckman 2016). In

Canada, for instance, in 2005, the net immigration rate was "almost double than that of the United States, and higher than that of other G8 countries" (Statistics Canada 2009). These "unprecedented levels of worldwide migration [have generated] significant demographic and cultural changes in most regions of the world" (Suárez-Orozco 2012, 3). In neoliberal societies where changes occurred most pressingly (such as in Canada, the United States, Germany, Australia, Ireland, and the United Kingdom), governments were required to respond to the contextual changes experienced. National agendas influenced societies ideologically by creating discourses and policies that supported the implementation of institutional changes. Discourses, policies, and documents of practice were developed from existing resources with the purpose of mainstreaming "newer" social norms and understandings (Bauman 2005, 16). At a macro level, certain governments made efforts to support newcomers, thus avoiding the increase in the demand for public services. At a meso level, efforts were made to provide social support so that newcomers eventually formed part of the communities to which they were relocated (Contreras 2002, 134–36). Institutionally, many of the host countries that received applications for refugee asylum also engaged in significant changes to discourses and policies referring to the public recognition of newcomers; such decisions impacted both newcomers and non-newcomer individuals in their personal and professional lives.

In Germany, for example, public institutions conducted research to understand how to better respond to the waves of human mobility that brought in millions of refugees. Data showed that most participants supported immigration in terms of economic progress. Nevertheless, it was unclear to what extent the general population was open to intercultural dialogue (Heckman 2016). Consequently, the German government questioned and redefined concepts of multiculturalism. New and redefined concepts were intended to promote dialogue, as "nation-states continued to hold substantial power over the formal rules and rights of citizenship and shaped the institutions that provided differentiated access to participation and belonging" (Bloemraad, Korteweg, and Yurdakul 2008, 154) especially for newcomers. In Germany, "newer" discourses included two different notions: the first was "welcoming culture" (*Wilkommenskultur*), and the second was a "culture of recognition" (*Anerkennungskultur*). As a discursive element, the concept of *Wilkommenskultur* aimed to continue attracting new immigrants, and

Anerkennungskultur focused on dispersing notions of inclusion on the already existing diversity of German society (Heckman 2016). The results of these changes in policies created spaces for reform in institutions that addressed newcomers' most pressing needs.

The Ministry of Education of French public schools, in another example, addressed the importance of language development as one of the primary necessities of newcomer children and youth in schools; however, the inequities that stemmed from ethnic, cultural, or religious differences were not directly acknowledged in the discourse. There was a belief that ethnicity-based social stratification and stigmatization would occur if policies were developed to only target newcomer children and youth (Escafré-Dublet 2014). In this case, the French education system addressed a crucial need for newcomer students, but the specific needs of teachers, the possible approaches to interacting and engaging with newly arrived children and youth, and the need to recognize the increasing diversity of student populations in schools may have been overlooked.

In Canada, the development and implementation of education policy has been experienced as a reactionary process (Birjandian 2005). Given the absence of federal oversight, the Ministries of Education of each province are responsible for creating integration policies that respond to the social changes experienced within their own contexts. Historically, "multiculturalism" as a paradigm was adopted as a nationwide initiative to provide opportunities for group representation in local and national entities, and this has had crucial implications for the development of a national group identification and sense of belonging (Vertovec 2012, 287); however, despite the intention for multiculturalism to be a notion that embraced acceptance and respect, it may still be limited, as the subtlety of discrimination is at times exacerbated by a mainstreamed multicultural Canadian national self-identity that disregards a history of colonialism (El-Bialy and Mulay 2018, 4).

The context of Canadian education has obvious implications for school music education and in newcomers' experiences with music education. The understanding of multiculturalism, as related to curriculum in music education, often served to differentiate and discriminate students of immigrant and refugee backgrounds (Dei 2006), portraying a limited perspective of multiple musical traditions while attempting to unify various populations into a single *multicultural culture*; an approach that often leads to essentializing diversity and at times oversimplifying

what it means to belong to a particular nation (Bradley 2009a). This position is embedded in the discourse of national identities and has provided "a virtual reality that reproduced stereotypes and displaced realities" (Morton 2001, 39). Multicultural music education is still often presented in the form of inclusive methods and musical materials that aim to "simplify" concepts and "include and accept" music that belongs to various racial and ethnic groups rather than providing space for dialogue.

In Canada, this issue has created distinctions that diminish and separate multiple music genres, styles, and practices, and therefore, individuals, teachers, and students (Bradley 2009b, 2015; Morton 2001; Schofield 2010). For some music educators, opening to multiple music practices meant opening to approaches and strategies that understand different *multiculturalisms*[1] as "fixed cultural objects" (Wu 2012, 304) with no possibility for transformation. In other words, multicultural practices have sometimes been understood as a singular approach to teaching for multiple realities, which suggests that some music teachers may implement multicultural pedagogies without further contextual analysis. I suggest that even when larger social processes impose "a certain kind of obliged appreciation upon individuals who are positioned as immigrants" (Niknafs 2021, 11), individuals—music teachers, for instance—have the option of choosing to respond by engaging, suppressing, or ignoring the changes around them. I suggest that coping with discomfort, following a process of critical reflection (Fook 2015), may be a way to engage with social discourses and requirements to create more meaningful spaces for music education.

Music teachers' agency in a process of adaptability can be obvious when they question normative powers (Allsup 2003; Benedict 2007; Schmidt 2013) "to unearth and unsettle assumptions (particularly about power) and thus to help identify a new theoretical basis from which to improve and change a practice situation" (Fooks 2015, 446). By engaging in this kind of critical reflection, music teachers may recognize and take responsibility for their own situatedness and the effect that situating oneself may have on the setting and people with whom they work (Berger 2015, 220). Agency in a process of adaptability, then, also involves taking responsibility for the repertoire they use, the pedagogies that take place, and how these pedagogies impact their students (Karlsen 2011; Schmidt 2013). Music teachers can address unpredictable paths of transformation present in the world by "placing

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emphasis on personal interactions and dialogue that may be significant for a continuous search for growth and transformation" (Schmidt 2013, 28).

Established discourses in societies have cumulative effects in institutions and upon individuals (Vertovec 2012, 287). From the Canadian perspective, multiculturalism and its multiple understandings are crucial for analyzing social discourses and the education practices that occur within. In Germany, the different meanings and understandings of *kulture*, of what it means to welcome and be welcomed, and to recognize and be recognized, are crucial in analyzing praxis; in France, questioning why and how ethnic, cultural, and religious differences are or are not being openly addressed or acknowledged may have a cumulative impact on French education systems, schools, principals, teachers, students, and their families.

The previous examples demonstrate ways in which policies related to immigration have implications for how teachers may consequently perceive and interact with state curricula and make their own pedagogical choices. Thus, it is possible that teachers—key participants in education systems—are personally and professionally affected by such changes in society. The possibility to ignore and suppress change by normalizing certain events is highly present in societies today. I therefore suggest understanding music teachers' responses as coping mechanisms that have implications for their pedagogical decisions, such as that of coping with discomfort, which can become an active response to social change.

In the next section, I use psychosocial functioning theories and social learning theories to define the commonplace understanding of coping as a response to stress. I then position a redefined version of coping through an ethics of discomfort (Foucault 2000) as a possible way to engage, adjust, create, and modify pedagogical approaches to music education in situations that are perceived as thwarting.

Coping?

Coping mechanisms are one of the ways in which music teachers may adapt to agitated realities. The mechanisms that have been studied in education settings are limited, understood as responses that do not routinely allow for critical reflection. I perceive that music teachers may be dynamically coping in more diverse ways than found in the psychological research literature. The theorization of coping with discomfort presented here may help to further develop research that looks specifically at music teaching coping mechanisms.

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In psychosocial functioning theories, on the one hand, coping responses are framed as "reciprocal interactions between behavioral, cognitive, and environmental influences" (Bandura 1978, 344), as processes that change over time and involve joint interaction between the personal characteristics of an individual and the surrounding environment (Lewis and Frydenberg 2004, 5). In research, this process is known as the transactional model of coping (Folkman and Lazarus 1985), through which the "transactions with the environment are appraised as threatening, harmful, or challenging, and [thus] stress is regulated by emotion-focused strategies designed to reduce the distress or manage a problem" (Lewis and Frydenberg 2004, 5).

For social learning theorists, on the other hand, coping is defined as "unidirectional models of human behavior that emphasize forces either internal or external that determine behavior" (Litt, Tennen, and Affleck 2012, 389). Internal or external forces are altered by behavioral and cognitive responses on a continuum. This means that the changes and interactions between the internal forces (i.e., needs, desires, or emotions) or the external forces (i.e., environmental, or situational changes), and the behavioral and cognitive responses, are dynamic.

Psychological research in education settings has addressed general coping strategies primarily through two types of techniques: direct action and palliative actions (Kyriacou 2001). Direct-action strategies suggest that the feelings of discomfort can be eliminated, with one option being that of suppressing diversity. One example of direct-action technique in education, in the context of this paper, might be a teacher choosing to "disappear" diversity by taking a color-blind approach, which means to believe that "racial categories do not matter and should not be considered when making decisions" (Richeson and Nussbaum 2004, 418); this in turn may lead teachers to adopt harmful pedagogical actions. Transforming the conception of discomfort using critical reflection as a framework (Fook 2015) may enable music teachers to use certain pedagogical resources and strategies. Critical reflection regarding perceived discomfort may encourage music teachers to act more responsibly through their practices with newcomer students, including increasing awareness of ethnocentrism and potential colonialism present in their current pedagogical decisions (Timonen 2020, 4).

Palliative techniques refer to actions that are aimed at reducing stressful feelings (Kyriacou 2001, 40). Teachers lessen feelings of uneasiness through the

process of assessing the value of the situation; this process may suggest a form of critical reflection that prompts action in more responsible ways. Even when palliative techniques support music teachers in continuing with their practice, they may also limit possibilities to engage with discomfort or to become more aware of cherished beliefs. For example, a teacher may cope with change through palliative techniques by assessing a situation and responding momentarily to specific events, not with the idea of following a process of critical reflection afterwards, but primarily to move away from discomfort (Kyriacou 2001, 39–41). The temporary nature of this technique leads to coping pedagogically through momentary adaptation. If music teachers ignore possibilities for engaging in discomfort in ways that "encompass an awareness of how assumptions about the connection between oneself and social context/structure can function in powerful ways, so that awareness of these assumptions can provide a platform for transformative action" (Fook 2015, 441), then music teachers may also ignore their own possibilities for actively responding to the students with whom they work.

Under the umbrella of psychological understandings of coping, processes of pedagogical decision-making may represent the cognitive (thought) and behavioral (action) responses to internal (emotions) or external forces (social change). Explained through these theories, for example, music teachers' behavioral responses to an internal force might be to silence students when multiple languages are spoken in the classroom. If the internal motivation is discomfort, understood as a threat to one's well-being, then frustration resulting from the teacher's inability to understand what students are saying may result in specific actions motivated by the experienced emotive responses (e.g., Van Praag, Stevens, and Van Houtte 2016, 1353). These responses do not serve to create space for critical reflection nor to create pedagogies that actively seek to respond to students' agencies (Apple 2013; Benedict 2007; Hess 2017; Kallio 2020; Niknafs 2021; Schmidt 2005, 2013).

A music teacher's cognitive response to an external force offers another example. The external force may be the compulsory guidelines for multicultural music curriculum, and the music teacher's cognitive response may be to look for repertoire that relates to the home country of their student population (Abril 2006, 30). In this example, the coping responses to stress that the teacher implements move between their pedagogies and the internal or external forces that influence the decisions. All these responses may help the teacher to ignore or suppress the

possibility to engage more actively in knowing the diversities within the music classroom. The forms of coping that lead to specific pedagogies vary depending on the individual characteristics of teachers and their communities of practice, which opens space for the development of coping with discomfort as a technique to engage with stress in a critically reflective way. A critical reflective practice may help to relocate the role of emotive responses in pedagogical practices, as discomfort seen as an emotive response may help "uncover and problematize the deeply embedded emotional dimensions that frame and shape daily habits, routines, and unconscious complicity with hegemony" (Zembylas and Chubbuck 2009, 356).

The form of critical reflection that may support the emotive response of discomfort is one that supports "a reflective analysis, particularly of power relations, which leads to change effected on the basis of new awareness derived from that analysis" (Fook 2015, 446). As Fook (2015) also states, this process is only relevant if it emphasizes the processes of analysis and change (446). Coping with discomfort, as I define it here, requires an alternative understanding of these coping techniques. I propose coping with discomfort as a possibility to engage with discomfort differently. If immigration generates discomfort, this discomfort is first perceived as thwarting, and music teachers can transition to coping by following a process of critical reflection on their pedagogical choices, then discomfort may be seen as valuable in challenging dominant beliefs, social habits, and normative practices (Zembylas 2015). Schmidt (2013) argues:

> To think only within habitual (or ideologically dogmatic) spaces might be self-soothing and even instructive, but evanescent in its failure to entice collaborative interaction and thus help us to generate curiosity, criticism, and most significantly today, creative adaptability. (25)

Viewing discomfort as an opportunity to challenge "self-defeating beliefs about [one's] place in the social structure [and one's] own power and possibilities for change" (Fook 2015, 446) may consequently position momentary uneasiness as a possibility for creating individual change, and later, social transformation might occur through a different process of pedagogical decision-making that may be more thoughtful. As Fook (2015) states, "social change must therefore be both personal and collective" (446). Coping with social change through a critical reflective practice can then become a continuing mode of analysis of the self, as well as a possibility for political awareness. The development of coping with discomfort as

an adaptive process infers a process of change based on the capacity of human beings to critically reflect on their assumptions, their discomfort related to changes in immigration patterns, and to adapt to global changes (Smit and Wandel 2006). Socio-environmental stressors offer spaces for critical reflection and interrogation of what it might mean to teach music—not to go back to previous practices and pedagogical traditions—but to find many ways to teach music in unceasingly changing social contexts.

Coping with Discomfort Through a Continuous Critical Reflection

The processes of pedagogical decision-making may be understood as coping responses if discomfort (as a trigger for coping responses) becomes relevant by being perceived "as neither inherently oppressive nor liberatory, yet with the capacity to be both" (Cooper 1994, 435). Foucault (2000) defined an ethics of discomfort as:

> Never to consent to being completely comfortable with one's own presuppositions … never to believe that a new fact will suffice to overturn them; never to imagine that one can change them like arbitrary axioms, remembering that in order to give them the necessary mobility one must have a distant view, but also look at what is nearby and all around oneself. To be very mindful that everything one perceives is evident only against a familiar and little-known horizon, that every certainty is sure only through the support of a ground that is always unexplored. (448)

This frame places discomfort in a double position: akin to emotive responses such as fear and stress (the generalized understanding of coping), while also potentially serving as an opportunity for transformation, thus making discomfort a means to critical reflection (the conceptualization of coping with discomfort that I suggest). Discomfort may help teachers seek within themselves ways to analyze their position, preconceptions, and assumptions that relate to changes in student population in their classrooms. Coping with discomfort, then, is not only one way in which teachers may adapt to new realities by acknowledging the diversities among their students, embracing differences and treating their students as raced, gendered, sexual, and classed individuals (Kumashiro 2002, 36), but also one way through which educators might be capable of recognizing their own diversities, which may in turn help them change their current practices in new social realities (Hess 2018, 29).

By coping with discomfort, teachers may have agency over ignoring, suppressing, or engaging with the social change around them. Coping as a concept and process of critical reflection, as I suggest here, may also acknowledge the relevance of, but aims to avoid, those psychological mechanisms that seek to normalize changes. Music teachers who do not see a possibility to adapt, or who engage in reflective practices without following through by creating or imagining multiple forms of doing, may perpetuate damaging practices in music teaching. Music teachers who see a possibility to adapt may open their views and cope with discomfort as an acceptance of the need for a continuous critical reflective practice, complying with and contributing to the transformation of the liquid social world in which they live.

Without disregarding the importance of all possible coping responses such as palliative and direct-action techniques (adaptation cannot take place if overwhelming responses such as discomfort do not decrease), the reality of global migration and displacement today reminds us that mobility-directed change will remain, which in turn leads me to believe that music teachers who may be perceiving changes in demographics as discomforting may also continue ignoring their capacities for reflexivity. I argue that the possibility for music teachers to normalize changes to seek stability will be illusory, as discomfort and stress will remain present in the profession in one way or another. Engaging with social change by coping to "sooth one's practice" will not provide a way to respond to a society in transformation. This approach to coping may have consequences for others, especially for newcomer students who may be living discomfort themselves in their relocation to a new environment.

The philosophical and pragmatic implications of this conceptualization may range from discovering ways in which teachers can reflexively respond to changes in society, to how music educators can engage with immigration in a way that does not make them "cover up" or "put aside" the discomfort of interrogating themselves and their practice. My hope is that a new conceptual framework may help teachers to engage with it, possibly by consciously adapting and actively responding in more nuanced ways.

It is important to note that all the combinations and interactions of coping processes and mechanisms serve to produce specific effects in individuals, and therefore impact societies and institutions. As Bauman (2016) stated:

> I am fully aware that choosing this course [of action] is not a recipe for cloudless, trouble-free life and effortlessness in the task that demands our attention. It portends instead dauntingly lengthy, jolty and thorny times ahead. It is not likely to bring an instant relief to anxiety––it may even trigger, initially, yet more fears, and further exacerbate the extant suspicions and animosities. All the same, I don't believe there is an alternative, more comfortable and less risky, shortcut solution to the problem. (19)

Studying the implications of coping in music teaching practices is highly relevant for responding to societies in more nuanced ways.

Engaging with Discomfort

Research with newcomers has focused mainly on understanding their sense of resilience, their processes of adaptation, of re-settling and re-location, and of struggle and transition—making distinctions of their needs based on the reasons and causes for their mobility (e.g., refugee or immigrant) (Karlsen 2014, 422; Marsh 2012, 93). How individuals living in social spaces undergoing transformation perceive the arrival of newcomers to their communities has not been studied to the same extent. By this, I mean how people who have lived in society and have not moved or resettled elsewhere respond to human mobility experienced in their communities.

The emotive responses and adaptive processes of newcomers is a subjective element of individual experience that must never be disregarded. In the context of this paper, however, I am placing attention on the possible adaptive processes lived by music teachers who are experiencing changes in their schools, particularly those music teachers who are not immigrants or refugees themselves and who have normalized lived changes in ways that do not serve their ability to creatively adapt. In this section, I draw from the professional experience of Louise, a music educator in Southern Ontario. Following a qualitative paradigm, I interviewed her on four different occasions, following semi-structured interview protocols for a larger research study (see Ocádiz Velázquez 2020). All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed, and Louise is a pseudonym. The first interview occurred on January 17, 2019, and all of Louise's words in this article came from that interview. Her experiences suggested that her process of pedagogical decision-making may be influenced by multiple coping mechanisms that help her continue with her practice. Louise, therefore, helps me to combine all the notions mentioned in the previous

sections and to theorize the concept of coping with discomfort directly in a music education context.

Louise's Voices

Louise taught a middle school (6th, 7th, and 8th grades) instrumental music program. For the past 5 years, she had experienced multiple changes in her school's demographic composition, and she was highly aware of the implications of immigration within her classroom. She recognized that immigration trends have changed over the past decade. During her interview on January 17, 2019, she commented:

> Nowadays Canada has changed its immigration policies, and we are seeing a greater influx of people coming in from countries where they don't have instrumental music in their school system, at least not in the sense that we have it here … I am just sort of trying to navigate what it is that we do and how it is that we deliver it and making sure that we actually are doing our job delivering the curriculum but also meeting the needs of the kids in our room, which, you know, depending on the school where you teach and where is it in the city, and whatever, it can look completely different.

Louise verbalized a notion of discomfort. She was aware of the vicissitudes of social change and how they affected her practice. She recognized social contingency by expressing the country's change in immigration policies and how the government's response to larger social conflicts, at a macro level, also generated changes at a meso level in the reception of peoples from multiple countries into Canadian society. Therefore, at a micro level, she saw how this generated change in her school's community. Louise acknowledged the push to comply with state-mandated documents such as curriculum but also understood that she must respond to the needs of the children in her classroom.

When Louise spoke about her classroom and explained her approach to making pedagogical decisions to teach music history, she sensed disjuncture based on the aforementioned factors. She saw race, ethnicity, and nationality by recognizing that "there are lots of students in the classroom who may be of Persian, Asian, or African descent." She further implied that perhaps there should be a distinct approach to teaching music history in a statement: "'those' musical heritages far outdate western classical." Such speech conveyed her view of students' backgrounds and how their heritages may play a role in her pedagogical decisions. Louise

expressed a need to acknowledge the existence of "other" musical traditions by saying that western classical music was not the first nor the last one to exist.

Louise's comparison of her experiences and realities with those assumed to be her students' incurred the risk of imagining that her students' cultures or practices represented a sense of unity or simplicity when contrasted with her own (Schmidt 2013, 25). I wonder, however, how this approach might be modified if Louise followed a critical reflective process to take more responsibility for her own situatedness and the impact of her decisions (Berger 2015, 220) with some kind of active response to this reality—a process that, instead of helping her preserve and maintain the practices she already knew, facilitated ways in which she might engage in practical changes.

Louise's coping mechanisms may have helped her grapple with the limitations she perceived as impacting her music classroom. Her capacity to articulate the challenges associated with immigration may be boundless, but there is also an unwillingness to engage in practical changes that may seem difficult, discomforting, or impossible (Hess 2018).

Louise also questioned her approach to teaching music history by saying: "there is always this little voice in my head that is like: okay you've said that ["that" being 'the other' musical heritages that existed before western music], but what are you going to do about it?" By stating that there was a "little voice" in her head that made her question what she was going to do, she may have been coping with the diversity in her classroom by suppressing or obviating her need to respond. Her need to change her practice may have been obscured by indications of impossibility.

Although transforming her teaching practices may have been discomforting, Louise recognized a need to navigate multiple layers and saw an "obligation" to include "culturally relevant" repertoire. As she said:

> When I was going through teacher's ed., the big idea at the time was that of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy. It was really something that was pushed at us very aggressively as teachers in teacher training, and it was really viewed as being at the forefront of what was the new wave of education. For a long time, it was a buzz word in the [name deleted] school board. Culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy was like a buzz word! Like the big thing everybody is on about! You know, thinking about the kids you have and responding to their … experiences through the materials that you are teaching.

Her ability to see the multiculturalities in her classroom was also shadowed by a perceived push in the system to "diversify materials and to represent 'other' cultures and 'other' belief systems through the visible materials in the classroom, and through the materials that the teachers are using for lessons and assignments." Her ways to cope with the discomfort of a hybridizing school community came from her need to preserve her own music traditions, showing a connection between personal experiences, emotive responses, and pedagogical decisions.

Louise talked about the challenges in teaching music:

> Most of what we do is based on a singular structure in terms of learning to play an instrument. There are certain programs in the school board that have adopted steel pan, or … African drumming and things like that, but I think because the vast majority of music educators are founded in western classical training that's really … what we would lean on.

In such statements, in addition to showing hints of difficulty in adapting her practice, Louise also demonstrated an ability to reflect and question the system of which she was part, thus assuming some responsibility for the reproduction of a particular tradition of instrumental music teaching. She stated:

> I have been trained in the tradition of western classical music; therefore, I will lean on to teaching western classical music; however, I question if I should be modifying the repertoire I use to teach musical concepts or ideas, or if I should modify the ideas I aim to teach.

Louise was capable of reflecting critically; her thought process portrayed awareness of her need to continually respond and actively change, but she also saw difficulties in adapting her practice to the realities of her students because of the musical tradition on which she saw her praxis bounded, as well as her own personal experiences with music education. She was not able to see herself as "capable of arranging learning spaces, which provide subjective resonance to the learning subjects that are supposed to commit desire and passion to learning in the service of [her] own subjective lifeline" (Krejsler 2007, 48 as cited in Karlsen 2019, 187)

Her questions speak to the nature of coping with discomfort. Paraphrasing Louise: should music teachers modify the repertoire they use to teach musical concepts or ideas, or should they modify their own conceptual frameworks as they teach? I add one more question: how can music teachers see themselves as possible agents for engaging with the social change around them through their frameworks, ideas, repertoires, concepts, and pedagogies?

Engaging with discomfort implies that music educators must leave their own precious conceptions behind in order to move forward. The dualistic controversies that can be found in a notion such as coping with discomfort suggest relinquishing valuable practices and continuing "to run" (metaphorically), but they also suggest a need for critical awareness, willingness to struggle, and predisposition to creative adaptability. In this way, the complexity of coping mechanisms and the role that coping with discomfort could take may be exposed, reimagined, and may be seen as crucial to continue transforming music education.

Louise's thinking allowed her to acknowledge the existence of opportunities to engage with her newcomer students; however, the pedagogies she embraced were obscured by a conglomerate of fixed notions that impeded more active responses to social change. I do not mean that she was not responsive; her pedagogies indicated that she was responsive within the limitations of a discomfort understood as unproductive and coping only as palliative. Louise's responses add to this philosophical framework the possibility for reimagining a productive notion of coping that not only allows teachers to continue with their practices but also to change. Her way of thinking suggests that music teachers can engage in processes of pedagogical decision-making that are actively and continually responsive to social change, and that (merely) coping as a momentary response is not enough.

Louise, while working in one of the most diverse cities in Canada, reflected on her pedagogical decisions that sought to be inclusive: "When the kids hit my class, it doesn't matter if they are special ed, or if they've been labeled ESL, doesn't matter if they are gifted. They are all at the same knowledge base." In using a direct-action strategy to cope with the diversities within her classroom, Louise may have suppressed her own opportunities to engage pedagogically by assuming that all newcomer students or ESL students, all students with disability, and all "gifted" students have the same needs (Bradley 2015, 190). Her pedagogical actions may have, therefore, curtailed differences of language, ethnicity, and sociocultural norms and perhaps, within a social justice framework, incited colorblindness and reproduced silence (Bradley 2007; Schofield 2010) in multiple ways.

Ocádiz, Gabriela. 2022. Coping with Discomfort: Understanding Pedagogical Decision-making as Coping with Social Change. *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 21 (1): 80–109. https://doi.org/10.22176/act21.1.80

Coping with Discomfort as Possibility to Modify Music Teaching Praxis

Louise represents only one music teacher's perceptions, experiences, and realities. Through her example, it is possible to theorize a distinct approach to coping and discomfort. Her struggles, challenges, and limitations provide only one view of the discomforts that immigration may generate in music education. Louise's reality helps me to place the notion of coping with discomfort in a school music education context. I reiterate that engaging with change in distinct ways is possible: I reimagine engaging with newcomer students who bring multiple backgrounds and heritages into the music classroom, suggest the possibility of breaking through perceived immutable music traditions, and place discomfort as crucial to critically reflecting and changing pedagogical orientations in hybrid liquid societies rather than as a limitation.

The speed with which liquid modern societies move generates paradoxes based on the emerging regimes of globalization and historical colonialism: "mobile capital, mobile production and distribution, mobile populations, and mobile cultures" (Suárez-Orozco 2012, 3). The speed with which individuals adjust, however, may be slower and highly complex compared to that of a larger global context. Newcomers will continue to be expected to cope with the difficulties of resettlement; however, the purpose of this article is to acknowledge that music teachers may also be coping with the difficulties of immigration and to provide more spaces for dialogue and understanding. Newcomers and non-newcomers experience social change in distinct ways. The motivation for initial responses towards the expectation of quickly adapting and adjusting to immigration (Zembylas 2015) is crucial for establishing parallel relationships between processes that may require rupture as much as balance (Schmidt 2013).

Classrooms may be envisioned as open "spaces" where "music is less institutional" and where creativity is strongly "constructed as a near given, that music learning and teaching [only] depends on communicative spaces where interaction between divergent, non-consensual, and unfamiliar thinking are found" (Schmidt 2013, 28). Stauffer (2012) argues, however, that "music education has become a place-bound concept," and some theoretical frameworks "tend to keep music education 'in place' and to discourage practitioners from engaging in conversations

that point to change" (436). Acknowledging the possible existence of coping mechanisms that facilitate teachers' continuation of their practice without problematizing discourse and practice may hinder possibilities for transforming music education. Coping with discomfort aims to open philosophical engagements with music teaching and learning in growingly diverse settings. I envision music classrooms—where teachers cope with discomfort originated by immigration—as places to speak, reflect, and critique found differences, variants, and mainstream discourses, not only through repertoire and verbal acknowledgement of preconceptions and understandings, but through their active practice within discomfort.

New social contexts will likely push individuals to follow significant adaptation processes, possibly demanding the development of new or different forms to address cultural understandings, personal and emotive reactions, and their pedagogical decisions. It is crucial to accept that some music teachers may continue to rely on coping mechanisms that facilitate their work in a changing society. I have suggested, however, that in liquid societies, music teachers with little to no previous involvement with newcomer students can choose to cope with change by ignoring or suppressing experiences to ease their practice, and this will not be sufficient if music education is to be responsive to the social change more pressingly experienced. I have also suggested, as an alternative, that music teachers may cope with discomfort by engaging with their actions' implications for newcomer students through reflexivity, taking responsibility for their own pedagogical decisions and approaches (Berger 2015, 230).

Questions remain about the possibilities for engaging differently through actions with newly arrived children and youth in music classrooms and students' processes of lived discomfort (Karlsen 2014; Saether 2008; Marsh 2012, 2017; Westerlund, Partti, and Karlsen 2015). This article, based on an interpretation of societies as liquid, only conceptualized the pedagogical and coping responses I have attempted to explain and thereby inform music teachers. Within the realm of music education, music teachers, music teacher educators, and scholars may learn from the notion of coping with discomfort if they work within the following conditions: (a) music teachers who receive newcomer students into their classrooms and communities, (b) music teachers who have not yet discovered their capabilities to engage with newcomer students, (c) music teachers who oversimplify their engagements with newcomer students, or (d) music teachers who do not see

possibilities to engage in multiple ways or who attempt to normalize changes through their pedagogies. Investigating the particularities of each of these conditions may help develop theoretical understandings that explain the possible pedagogical connections and interactions that can occur dynamically and in mutual reciprocity between music teachers and their newcomer students.

To reiterate, I conceive of coping as a vehicle for a pedagogical decision process that may help music teachers to engage with the social tides of instability that are present in our world. Discomfort, viewed not as a momentary state but as the beginning of a continuous critically reflective practice, helps in understanding music education as founded on an acceptance that nothing will be as it was (Foucault 2000, 448), that nothing is ever supposed to remain static (Bauman 2005), and thus, no pedagogy is ever supposed to be the same for everyone.

The concept of coping with discomfort can be both a way to engage or to obviate discomfort; however, as Schmidt (2013) has written, "difference that remains different" (23), or in this case, discomfort that remains uncomfortable, may help music teachers attend to the ways in which they come to understand said discomfort. Music educators can then be the social actors who judge this concept as pertinent or commonsensical to their own specific realities. The dissonance that these two words (*coping* and *discomfort*) may generate also illustrates how our attention to polarities makes possible our dispositions to engage in critical dialogue; therefore, it seems pertinent and constructive to stop thinking about music education practices as "dictums of hierarchical value" (Schmidt 2013, 24). Rather, we should think of music education using frameworks that compare, or "make sense—and make new sense—of educational and musical events, products and interactions" so that there is more space to "understand cultural dispositions, political structures and contemporary economic mandates" (Schmidt 2013, 24).

Conceptualizations such as this one may provide a framework to continue understanding the complexities of the productivity of dissonant experiences in music education, to teach and learn music in societies that are likely to undergo change, not only by coping with the civil unrest that is lived more pressingly, but by coping with discomfort—acknowledging that transformation can be continuous, and that responses are available to us if discomfort is perceived as an opportunity for reflexivity. Interrogating, reflecting, and adapting liquidly to social change then

Ocádiz, Gabriela. 2022. Coping with Discomfort: Understanding Pedagogical Decision-making as Coping with Social Change. *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 21 (1): 80–109. https://doi.org/10.22176/act21.1.80

becomes a necessity in order to respond pedagogically to the needs of newcomer students.

Coping with discomfort offers a possible way to think about the processes that occur while facing human mobility, not as a perceived force that intensifies labor in the teaching profession, but as a way to counteract "the reduction of professionalism as the amassing of technical know-how and to support pedagogical and creative autonomy within classrooms" (Schmidt 2013, 28); more so, coping offers an "ethos of experimentation that is oriented toward carving out spaces for resistance and reconstruction here and now" (Coté, Day, and de Peuter 2007, 317). Consequently, teachers may cope with discomfort to rethink their practices, and to envision and reconstruct their music teaching spaces and practices actively and endlessly.

About the Author

Gabriela Ocádiz graduated in 2020 with a PhD in Music Education from Western University. She is an active music educator, researcher, and scholar. Gabriela was a Limited Duties Professor at the Don Wright Faculty of Music at Western University from 2019-2021, teaching the course "Teaching and Learning Music," and Sessional Faculty at McMaster University in 2019, teaching the course "Elementary Music Education." In addition, she teaches early childhood classes with a Kodály approach at Forest City String Education (FCSE) and develops and implements music education programs with newcomers to Canada in collaboration with community centres. Her research has focused on examining the experiences and practices of music teachers in community and school settings in social contexts in transformation due to human mobility. Gabriela received her bachelor's in music education from the *Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México* (UNAM) in Mexico, and her master's in Music and Kodály certification from Colorado State University in the United States.

Ocádiz, Gabriela. 2022. Coping with Discomfort: Understanding Pedagogical Decision-making as Coping with Social Change. *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 21 (1): 80–109. https://doi.org/10.22176/act21.1.80

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Note

[1] I purposefully used the word *multiculturalisms* in plural, not as an understanding of multiple cultures, rather, as the multiple existence, intermingling, and interlacing of a variety of cultures.

Ocádiz, Gabriela. 2022. Coping with Discomfort: Understanding Pedagogical Decision-making as Coping with Social Change. *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 21 (1): 80–109. https://doi.org/10.22176/act21.1.80