

# ACT Special Issue on the 35th MayDay Colloquium: Univer- sity of Victoria, Victoria, Can- ada, June 9–12, 2024

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**W**e are honoured to co-edit this special issue of *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* based on the 35th MayDay Colloquium held June 9–12, 2024, at the University of Victoria, which is located on the territory of the Ləkʷəŋən (Songhees and X̱wsep̓səm/Esquimalt) Peoples. We acknowledge and respect the Ləkʷəŋən and W̱SÁNEĆ Peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

The colloquium explored the MayDay Group Action Ideal related to theory and philosophy: We actively engage with and generate theory and philosophy to understand the relationship(s) between musical actions and their contextual meanings and values.

We account for the fullest range of meanings and modes of thinking inherent in individual and collective musical actions. This requires asking new questions and developing robust toolkits for understanding and theorizing how we position and are positioned as part of larger groups and practices operating within multiple layers of social, cultural, spiritual, geographical, historical, and political contexts. In so doing, we work to avoid the trappings of narrative frameworks that may oppress or misrepresent the contexts in which we seek greater theoretical and philosophical understandings. We embrace pluralism in knowledge construction (e.g., Indigenous, queer, feminist) which promotes interpretations of musical actions from multiple worldviews and creates more equitable representation.

For this colloquium, we invited scholars to consider the following questions in their proposals:

- What are the problematics of using Western theories and philosophies to understand the relationship between non-Western musical actions and their contextual meanings and values?
- What are the possibilities and limitations of embracing pluralism in knowledge construction in music education through multicultural, intercultural, cross-cultural, transcultural, and syncretic lenses?
- How do we avoid theoretical and philosophical extractivism when interpreting musical actions from worldviews that are not our own to create more equitable representation?
- What are new questions and toolkits for understanding and theorizing the positionality of music educators and education inherent in pluralist contexts?
- Is there a particular non-Western philosophical lens that might transcend the issues we are dealing with in music education? How might it inform what we do in music education?
- Utilitarian, Aesthetic, and praxialist music education philosophies have shaped and guided music education practices in many countries. What might be the next historical turn in music education philosophy?

In keeping with these questions, the opening Ceremonies took place at Wawadłá/Mungo Martin House, Thunderbird Park, an historic Longhouse built in 1953 by Mungo Martin, a Kwagiulth (Tsaxis/Fort Rupert) carver and culture bearer. Elder Terri Barnhard (Songhees First Nation) provided the Territorial

Welcome, while Dr. Vanessa Andreotti (Dean, UVic Faculty of Education) and Dr. Todd Milford (Chair, UVic Department of Curriculum & Instruction) also greeted 45 attendees from Australia, Canada, the United Arab Emirates, and the United States. Dr. Lorna Wanosts'a Williams (Lil'wat First Nation, UVic Professor Emerita) gave the keynote address, entitled *Ti Sit'em lhkalha: Our songs. The window into the Indigenous world*. Following her talk, twenty members of an extended Kwagiulth family—all descendants of Mungo Martin—shared their cultural practices with attendees through dancing, singing, and drumming. Over the course of the next three days, thirty-two participants presented twenty-four twenty-five-minute “provocations” on theoretical and philosophical topics ranging from disability studies to decolonizing practices to suburbanormativity. These presentations stimulated many questions during the twenty-minute discussion period following each provocation, also instigating dynamic informal conversations during breaks and meals.

## The Papers

The criticality of attending to nuance, complexity, and embodied responses in exposing conventional assumptions, thereby increasing the likelihood of mitigating power imbalances, was a key theme that wove throughout these papers. In their article, entitled *Intersectional Identities: Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy through the Lens of Chinese American Music Education*, **Christy Go** and **Garret Graves** expose the limitations of culturally sustaining pedagogy as it is currently framed. Using intersectionality and Asian critical theory, they engage in dialogic counternarratives to examine themes in literature on the Chinese American diaspora, including the model minority myth, stereotype promise, dual identity, assimilation, and the perpetual foreigner. Go and Graves call for music educators to consider students' multiple and intersectional identities and to be more self-reflexive if they truly desire to support their students. They argue for “an ethical, dialogic approach to culturally sustaining pedagogy that resists essentialism, centers student agency, and acknowledges the complexities of identity.”

In the provocation *Sophrosyne as Symbolic Virtue in Music Education*, **Karen Howard** examines the effect of the ancient Greek virtue of *sophrosyne* (i.e., temperance, moderation, self-control in choices and behaviours, keeping lower classes in their place) in minimizing meaningful diversity initiatives in music and

education. The author notes how this concept of moderation or passivity is institutionalized in postsecondary institutions—and in the field of education more widely—regarding diversity initiatives. Howard then uses diversity ideology as an analytic framework to provide “conceptual tools to help us understand music educators who are conscious of inequality and desire to be close to underrepresented people, genres, and performance practices, yet still reproduce the same dominant patterns.” Moving beyond a neutral recognition of diversity to a fuller understanding of how oppression and injustice operate within educational systems—and corresponding actions and reorganization to counter them—requires a refusal of the qualities promoted by sophrosyne.

**Paul Hunt** describes the problematic notion in postsecondary music education programs in North American (US and Canada) colleges and universities, in regard to the accepted idea that music educators need to be equipped with a set of universal music skills that will prepare them to engage with diverse music making practices through the lense of Western art music; nevertheless, Hunt argues that such an approach fails to acknowledge that “as the musical context changes, the meaning of musical nuance transforms alongside the shifting context.” Hunt highlights this issue in the case of Black American music. In *Black Music, White Halls: Toward a Black American Music Curriculum*, he criticizes how violence against Black people has permeated throughout generations via “the reoccurring structure of antiblackness, providing the antithesis for whiteness to define itself.” Hunt acknowledges the difficult path to counter antiblackness and that there is no simple solution for such struggles. He suggests a path for honouring Black American music in postsecondary music education programs. A journey towards this goal will require reflecting not only on the musical elements associated with Black American music, but also critically reflecting on the contexts where those musical expressions are rooted, and the challenges associated with antiblackness and white supremacy.

**Ryan Matthew Lewis** conducts a critically reflexive, autoethnographic examination of power relations while researching the process by which studio music teachers in Malaysia construct their professional identities. In *Unsettling the researcher’s gaze: Rendering a diffractive account of music studio teachers’ lived experiences*, Lewis notes that Eurocentric suggestions to professionalize studio music teaching may not be appropriate in non-Western settings and posits that “new, decolonizing conceptual tools are necessary to think differently about how

teacher identities are theorised in the first place and how research is conducted.” The author introduces critical posthumanism, agential realism, the affective dimension, and a methodology of refusal to reject binary thinking, rather espousing a more speculative approach to what is learned in research, and how it is learned.

In the philosophical inquiry, *Straightforward? Queering High School Show Choir*, **Brandon Magid** problematizes the “heteronormative aspects of show choir competitions” and proposes “the possibilities of queering such practices.” Examining the artistic aims of show choir through the lens of queer theory, Magid provides examples of heteronormative assumptions, how they are manifested in show choir narratives and spaces, and the constraints they place on diverse expressions of gender and sexuality. Then the author offers the concept of queering, which, when applied to analyzing texts and the ways that show choirs choreograph space, “holds untapped potential to disrupt and reimagine assumptions about gender, sexuality, and artistic aims during ensemble rehearsals and performances,” thereby advancing social justice and new ways of being musical in show choir.

**Daniel Shevock’s** interest in synchronicities leads him to examine the relationship between music education and religion, particularly Catholicism. He raises two key questions: “Is Music Education indeed a religion? If it is not a religion, why then do some claim it is, or is almost a religion?” He situates his discussion within the Catholic intellectual tradition and engages the work of scholars such as Wayne Bowman and Bennett Reimer, among other scholars who engage in praxial and aesthetic philosophies in music education. In *A Catholic Ecological-Praxial Realization of Transcendent Beauty: Is 21st Century Music Education a Religion?* Shevock argues for an ecological philosophy that synthesizes praxial and aesthetic philosophies, since an ecological philosophy could be a way forward in the music education field that “is not found in aesthetic theory, which tends to become Platonic. Neither is it necessarily in the dominant conceptions of praxial Music Education, but in an ecological praxis, a praxis of relationships among humans, animals, and nature.”

The six papers in this issue are representative of the wide-ranging philosophical and theoretical topics that colloquium presenters discussed at the 35th MayDay Colloquium. The ongoing effects of the current political climate in several countries remind us that authors’ engagement with pluralism in knowledge construction even at a philosophical and/or theoretical level is potentially risky business. Yet such engagement is necessary to achieve MayDay’s aims, which are “to identify,

critique, and change taken-for-granted patterns of professional activity, polemical approaches to method and philosophy, and educational politics and public pressures that threaten effective practice and critical communication in music education” (What is the MayDay Group?, para. 1). In nuancing culturally sustaining pedagogy, demonstrating how an awareness of the need for diversity is not sufficient to effect real change, countering anti-blackness, paying attention to the role of affective response and non-human actors in neutralizing power relations, queering narrative and spaces withing show choir, and proposing an ecological approach toward music education, the authors featured in this special issue advance the MayDay Group’s mission to challenge and change “outdated practices, contentious methods, and educational politics that impact effective teaching and communication” (Support Our Mission, para.1). We look forward to more thought-provoking dialogue and action on the MayDay Group Action Ideals at New York University (Abu Dhabi) in February 2027.

## References

- MayDay Group. 2024. What is the MayDay Group? <https://maydaygroupofficial.wixsite.com/mayday-group/about>
- MayDay Group. 2024. Support our mission. <https://maydaygroupofficial.wixsite.com/mayday-group>