

The Praxis of Inclusion in Music Education

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Can you remember a time when you felt included in a music education community? When I ask prospective undergraduate students why they wish to become music teachers, they overwhelmingly talk about feeling included in high school music groups. They recount forming close bonds with peers and mentees within music ensembles as well as with their music teachers, who they often deem second parents. Anecdotally, it also seems that many individuals become music educators not only because they felt included within music making experiences, but because they felt excluded from other communities, thus making their experiences within musical groups even more precious.

The practice of inclusion always works in tandem with exclusionary processes. Exclusions can be beneficial. Feeling included within a music group necessarily involves excluding individuals and ideas who would undermine that inclusion. More broadly, Levinson (1999) argues that a liberal education can welcome many conceptions of the good, but it necessarily excludes belief systems intolerant to any but their own habits and virtues. Likewise, while inclusive of a wide range of musical practices and music makers, the authors of the current MayDay Action Ideals necessarily exclude music educators who do not value music as a socially, historically, geographically, and politically situated endeavor.¹

Sadly, many music education endeavors continue to exclude students for arbitrary, often overtly unjust reasons. In Koza's (2008) words, music educators bin bodies and forms of music making, deeming certain bodies and practices appropriate for further study while discarding others. The prospective undergraduate students I encounter, who audition on a narrow range of instruments and repertoire, may have found inclusion within their high school music communities, but many others have experienced exclusion for reasons ranging from their personal uninterest in the content to unjust socio-economic practices that deny them access to necessary resources (e.g., Bates 2023). Since prospective teachers rarely encounter those excluded from current pervasive music teaching and learning practices, they understand existing actions as largely inclusive and thus might benefit from scholarship illuminating unjust exclusions.

Music education scholarly communities can also serve as places of both inclusion and arbitrary exclusion. In the inaugural issue of ACT, editor Thomas Regelski (2002) wrote: "This collection of papers presents a variety of fresh and sometimes competing perspectives that otherwise have been overlooked, minimized, or even denied in many status quo discussions of music and music education" (2). Twenty-two years later ACT, as well as the MayDay Group more broadly, continues seeking to include rigorously argued scholarly perspectives that may face resistance and exclusion elsewhere in the profession.

At first glance, the scholarship in this issue appears to center on including unjustly excluded musical practices and people. The authors center topics ranging from Indigenous music making, affect, and contextual information surrounding folksongs with racist origins to non-elitist music making and Global South perspectives. In this way, the authors engage in what Belsey (2002) identifies as a key practice for poststructural philosophers: centering exclusions. Poststructuralist authors typically welcome and value exclusions, understanding them positively in their own right rather than as deviations from norms.

Yet, inclusion involves considering not just *what* is included versus excluded but the *process* of creating inclusions and exclusions. While often habitual, the practice of constructing inclusions and exclusions is necessarily ongoing. Similarly, Elliott and Silverman (2015) emphasize the active nature of music making, writing: "All forms of musicing and listening exhibit themselves in some kind of doing or action" (207). Although theory may inform music educators' decisions about what to include and exclude, including and excluding is an action or praxis.

Praxis is inextricable from ethical considerations. In the inaugural issue of *ACT*, Wayne Bowman (2002) explained *phronesis*, meaning ethical discernment within context specific situations, as a key part of musical praxis. He elaborates: “Because praxis is socially-situated action, *phronesis* is crucially important, both in human terms and for the practice: that is, right action benefits both the individual and the *socius*, and conversely, wrong action is both an individual failing and detrimental to the practice” (7). As the authors in this issue demonstrate, past and present music education practices are riddled with moments in which wrong action proves detrimental, and at times horrific, for individuals and groups. Although the authors rightly note these lapses or misuses of ethical discernment, they importantly guide the reader through the praxis, and by extension *phronesis*, of acknowledging and evaluating inclusionary and exclusionary processes.

In this Issue

A current law student at Columbia University, **Corey Whitt** draws on a wealth of historical and legal documents to illuminate the colonialist uses of music education. Moving from 1871 to the present, he details the creation and implementation of policies using music education to assimilate Indigenous cultural practices. Showing the incompatibility of Indigenous ontologies with Western art music practices, Whitt makes astute observations about the relationship between the theft of Indigenous lands and the imposition of music education.

Brandon Magid and **Ian Cicco** both grapple with the continual consequences of white hegemony within music education and American society more broadly. **Magid** problematizes the prioritization of propositional knowledge, arguing that such action can promote disingenuous antiracism. Alternatively, **Cicco** critiques the prevalent practices of both erasing folk songs with racist origins and replacing lyrics with racist associations. He argues that both practices avoid conversations about present-day systemic racism.

Sergio Garcia-Cuesta and co-authors **Roger Mantie** and **Pedro Tironi-Rodó** consider questions of belonging within conceptions of artistic citizenship and intercultural music endeavors, respectively. **Garcia-Cuesta** critiques exclusionary understandings of the terms *artist* and *citizenship*. He encourages a repurposing of citizenship as a tool for critical reflection and a focus on “artist-becoming” rather than artistic being. In a hybrid theoretical and qualitative study, **Mantie** and **Tironi-Rodó** detail distinctions between how participants from the

Global North versus Global South understood their experiences in an intercultural music exchange program. Using both a postcolonial framework and the concept of *interculturalidad*, they illuminate key tensions, including the simultaneous celebrating of nation-states with colonial histories and the proposed ideal of a borderless world.

In addition to interrogating the qualities of exclusionary processes within music education, the authors in this issue provide substantial ideas for action. In his editorial to the first issue of ACT, Thomas Regelski (2002) wrote: “This new and sometimes provocative research is offered in keeping with the MayDay Group’s agenda to facilitate and disseminate new ideas, to continue to promote analysis of and open-minded dialogue about both old and new ideas, and to help effect change for the betterment of music education and music in society” (2). Twenty-two years later, the authors in this issue continue embracing the call to effect change both within the profession and beyond.

Corey Whitt proposes that utilizing ideas from the Native American Languages Act of 1990 may provide Indigenous students greater cultural autonomy. Drawing on poetry and novels, **Brandon Magid** explains how multiple narratives, affect, and synthesized understandings can inform antiracist pedagogy. Similarly, **Ian Cicco** calls for the decentering of whiteness and instead centering the lived experiences of the Black, Brown, Indigenous, and Asian/Pacific Islander community through his proposed process of “thoughtfully erasing to radically replace.” Alternatively, **Sergio Garcia-Cuesta** explains the role of everyday apprenticeship in actualizing reimagined conceptualizations of artistic citizenship, while **Roger Mantie** and **Pedro Tironi-Rodó** posit that centering colonial histories during intercultural musical endeavors can benefit those from the Global South.

Importantly, these authors acknowledge that any suggestions for practice are context dependent. Bowman (2002) emphasized that “because social circumstances are highly variable, fluid, ever-evolving, and unpredictable, the right course of action can never be enshrined in general or invariant rules: it is matter of doing the right thing, at the right time, to the right person or people, in the right way, with the right intent, to the right extent, and so on” (7). Continuing in this tradition, the authors in this issue balance thoughtful ideas for what could be with cautions about the complexities that may arise when attempting to put theory into practice.

Scholarship as an Act of Inclusion: A Vision

Through inclusions and exclusions, an editor inevitably shapes the nature of a journal and the discourse within the music education profession more broadly. Although I approach this process of including and excluding with the utmost care, I acknowledge that my decisions are inevitably imperfect. Yet, ACT has been built on the bold visions of those who refused to accept current exclusionary processes within music education scholarship. Extending the visions of the editors before me, I share my aims for my tenure as editor.

First, I envision ACT publishing articles and special issues that respond to topics of immediate concern. ACT's status as an online only publication with no set publication schedule affords it the unique opportunity to promote scholarship responsive to contemporary situations. These might include everything from education policies to artistic happenings, such as concert tours and album releases, to international events. I encourage authors to submit manuscripts on these topics and to consider serving as a guest editor for timely special issues. I am pleased that two such special issues—one on capitalist realism edited by **Sean Powell** and another on artificial intelligence by **adam patrick bell, Ran Jiang, and Mark Daley**—are currently in progress.

Second, I hope for ACT to continue and expand the utilization of and experimentation with innovative virtual material within articles. The previous issue, *ACT* 22(4) edited by **Danielle Sirek**, provides numerous examples of how authors might incorporate diverse virtual content. I encourage future authors to include links to teaching resources, music endeavors, and unique video content as part of their submissions. I am also open to publishing rigorous scholarship that deviates from the typical twenty-page article format.

Third, I aim for ACT to build on its role in mentoring graduate students and early career scholars, particularly those from historically marginalized populations. Few doctoral research programs provide sufficient training in philosophical and theoretical research, and even when students learn such practices, they typically take years to mature. As editor, I am committed to maintaining high standards by both matching beginning scholars with reviewers committed to such mentorship and devoting my own time and energy to such ends. I also hope to see more collaborations between graduate students and researchers, as exemplified in this issue by **Mantie and Tironi-Rodó's** co-authored article.

Additionally, I applaud ACT's reviewers for their longstanding commitment to nurturing beginning scholars and challenging seasoned peers through detailed, constructive feedback. A journal is only as good as its reviewers, and I am inspired by the rigor and expertise with which ACT reviewers approach their service. All ACT authors, myself included, have grown through their careful observations and suggestions.

Any scholar enters into and remains in the profession because of the gracious mentorship they receive. I am grateful to **Deborah Bradley** and **J. Scott Goble** for their patient, generous mentorship as I transitioned into this role. Over the past five years, their leadership at ACT has resulted in significant scholarly advances, including the welcoming of diverse author and guest editor voices. I am also embarrassed to say that only since becoming editor have I come to understand the incredible amount of volunteer labor undertaken by the ACT production team, particularly **Vincent Bates**. All ACT editors and authors are indebted to their expertise and attention to detail.

In 2013, I published my first philosophical research article in ACT. Just over a decade later, I am honored to facilitate the continued publication of high-quality work from established researchers as well as mentor and learn from the next generation of forward-thinking scholars. During my tenure as ACT editor, I hope that many more scholars will feel included within the vibrant MayDay community.

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Notes

¹ See <http://www.maydaygroup.org/about-us/action-for-change-in-music-education/>