

# The Politics of Not Knowing

## The Disappearing Act of an Education in Music

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### Introduction: Complexity as Task and Challenge

**E** DUCATION IN MUSIC tells both a cautionary tale about the institutionalization of creative practices, as well as demarcates the possibilities that socio-artistic enterprises bring to learning and teaching. In short, an education in music speaks of the delicacy of music politics, of the veiled danger of automated responses to well-known practices, and of how we resist the fear that cherished artistic enterprises really can be or be seen as mundane. Indeed, if we look across the nation at the practice of music in schools for the last 80 years, the parameters of learning have experienced modest or little change. At the secondary level the structure of large ensembles remain virtually the same, with the occasional theory or music appreciation class thrown in. Middle schools either serve as initiation to the ‘real’ musical practices of high school, or are caught in the (at times loathed) world of general music. And at the elementary level, mostly the realm of music teaching methods such as Kodaly, Orff, Suzuki<sup>1</sup>, music learning is understood functionally as preparatory; the musical analogue to pre and functional literacy.<sup>2</sup> While at the elementary level music is often compulsory and therefore reaches most students, high school music programs involve, if successful, 15 to 20 percent of the student body—a number that historically remains unchanged. What then are we to think of the fact that while music outside of schooling pervades society, inside educational institutions it is dismissed by 80 percent of the population? In this paper we propose that both music and schooling, particularly in their combination, can function as a disappearing act: students are rendered resistant to institutional versions of music, while at same time lulled by sleight of hand to be more willing to accept it or consume it.

We begin from the premise that in order for anyone to consider education in its complexities, it is necessary that those engaged in its processes acknowledge and attend to the multiple and frequently contradictory elements presented to us daily. As power circulates back and forth in a

Foucaultian framing, these contradictions are neither self-evident nor necessarily paralyzing (Foucault, 1980; Paras, 2006). We see the complexity of power as formational to any political life, as a dialectics of interaction which makes possible the friction constructing understandings that are critical and challenging (Bohm, 1996). Therefore, to build the possibilities embedded in these issues, it is necessary to push forward visions and pedagogical practices that are responsive and responsible; while continuing to stand upon democratic and reflective foundations. This requires first and foremost that we become able to interrogate that which we think we know. It requires also that we consider the subjects at hand, music and education, and imagine a pedagogical point of entry where assumptions go beyond any specific technique, practice or achievable solution, and where we acknowledge that learning and teaching processes are always multiple, contextual, embedded, and frequently erratic. A major impediment, however, is that while most of us are willing to see musical products as multiple, contextual and erratic, we are much more tentative in accepting these same parameters as part and parcel of educational processes. And here is where we find our conundrum: if music and music making are acceptably multiple, and education recognizably prescriptive and sequential, what is it (or perhaps who is it) that disappears in this process? In other words, how do we foster educational practices that do not reduce enterprises as complex as music?

To educate in and through mathematics, English, science, or music is not a challenge confined to the contents of a field. In fact, we argue, to educate requires an expansion of the content toward political and social consciousness; similarly to what Freire (1970, 1985) proposed, where interactions challenge the assumptions embedded in the social practices that we considered ours, and those that we see as of the Other. We suggest that commitment to a consciousness, and to its processes as an expansion of ‘content-driven’ education, is the first step toward unveiling a politics of music as a constitutive element of learning and meaning making. To use one example, our stand point would imply that unless we reclaim the word ‘method’ away from the contemporary corruption of ‘prescription’ and toward its etymologic Greek roots of a ‘pathway’, we will remain unable to see the challenges and possibilities of the irremediably political nature of both music and education. To be direct, we would argue that school music today can be said to do two things: 1) it detaches the social-political interest that youths attribute to music from its creative/productive manifestations and 2) makes it more acceptable that music be produced and done by a privileged few, both of which leads to music as an apolitical activity, to be consumed rather than something in which one actively participates.<sup>3</sup>

These, we argue, are the first moments of a politics of not knowing. At issue, then, are the ideological barriers and the ways they slow our interest or diminish our capacity to challenge cherished or comfortable positions. Most everyone we encounter will have had at least one music class, will have taken lessons on an instrument, and some may even continue to play or sing in community and religious groups. We all know music is ‘good’ for us. Whether be it higher SAT scores or success in medical schools, we have all heard of research (specious, in several cases, but often the holy grail of music education advocacy) instrumentally linking music studies to success in other areas. What need then is there for anyone outside music education to consider the challenges of an education in and through music? What need for those in the field of music education to think through issues outside music proper?

This article seeks to address the indulgence of this not knowing, or this veil. In particular, we are interested in the ways in which music education as a field constructs salvation narratives inside the reproductive practices of methods, performance, and entertainment. Rethinking methods and methodology and its effects also present a parameter for us to examine the baleful

outlook of market-based education; unfortunately not simply a ‘privilege’ of hard or basic disciplines. Further, we argue that standardized thinking, cloaked in the discourse of self-esteem, equity and self-worth, is at the center of the de-politicizing practice of school music. Lastly, we attempt at a critical proposition for change in our field, believing it can serve as one doorway into a meaningful relationship with education in general. Our aim, therefore, is to provide a framework that can sustain future conversations, such as: 1) curricular changes that shift from performance based to performativity<sup>4</sup>; 2) the reengagement with what it means to be prepared; and 3) multiple pedagogies that are culturally and contextually bound. In attempting this, we return to Freire’s preoccupation with the constitutive element of education as restless engagement, not as product.

### The Prosaic and Predictable

Music education in schools is often immediate and straightforward. There are few unexpected surprises as one walks into a music room; children are often busy playing games, singing songs, and playing instruments. There is a sense of knowing what to expect and what not to expect. Classroom teachers look forward to music as planning or release time; music is often referred to as a ‘special’. Diversity, multiculturalism, group work, cooperative learning, ‘exposure’ to other cultures and musics are a given. Even practices connected to garage bands at times paint the picture of streamlined and conventional engagements (Allsup, 2003). The normalcy of the situation frames reflexivity within the music classroom as an afterthought. While reflective thinking is by no means a ‘lost art’ in music teaching, we are concerned with the extent to which purportedly critical musical practices present themselves as a given, becoming therefore innocuous. Transformation, for example, is the word *du jour*—never mind that its discourse is often practiced through misguided re-articulations of behaviorism.

Thus we argue that the time and structure of the pedagogical life of schooling is governed, not always, but most often, by a political economy of learning structured by a vicious cycle that discourages innovation, risk, and divergent propositions. Such apolitical behavior conforms to how teaching and learning of music is regularly assumed to transcend reforms, while idealized as a response to other American educational ills. Indeed, in music education many continue to believe in a “one best system” (Tyack, 1974). The paradox is that as educational reforms are proposed, music is both ‘left out’ and proposed as a model.<sup>5</sup> The absence, or more to the point, the unacknowledged presence of politics, creates a reproductive cycle that constrains serious and feasible alternatives for an education in and through music. Music education supposes itself as an exemplary pedagogical space, a place where a myriad of educative ‘solutions’ can be creatively interpreted and produced, but the practical manifestation of its discourse belies its ideological directives.

A case in point is Arizona, where on November 2, 2000, Proposition 203 was passed prohibiting bilingual education. The subsequent reality for music education was made manifest in districts such as Mesa, where over 85 percent of the population are Hispanics. In this district music teachers were told that as consequence of the proposition, they could teach songs in any language except Spanish. While some have indeed co-opted the application of the state law and continue to find ways to question and dissent, no discussions on this or similar issues can be found in the larger profession. Perhaps the fear is that by placing music at the center of political realities we would make apparent, make reappear, the fact music is not transcendent but rather

dependent upon contexts; that music is ordinary, in the sense that it is directly dependent upon peoples' lives. In other words, music education's possible political contribution in exposing the inequities of Proposition 203, by virtue of its apparent local reach, seem not to appeal to the larger constituency when compared to, for instance, the power of "making one smarter".<sup>6</sup> As music education holds on to universalizing ideologies, varied and significant constituencies disappear right in front of our eyes. This is what we mean by the disappearing act of not knowing; the not allowing political aspects of musical practice to appear in music education.

The search for the seductive veil of transformative education simulates and presents the semblance of change while carefully maintaining the status quo. Consequently, music as an educational institution constantly enacts possibly pernicious policies by denying the import and scope of the political. An example comes from Deborah Bradley's insightful observations on choral experiences and Nationalism. Through the lens of Adorno, Bradley (Spring, 2009) examines those ways in which repertoire as curriculum (singing the National Anthem, for example) can become "fascistic" and how the "imagined community created through musical experience at times generates seductive feelings of unity that are easily manipulated" (p. 70). Consider also the way particular music methods have become not merely the way of educating in music, but also taken as a bureaucratic obligation in many school systems: if one is not, for instance, an "Orff teacher" or a "Kodaly teacher" one will not be hired in said school systems (Benedict, 2009). Thus, pedagogy, as a more politicized version of methods,<sup>7</sup> is didactically substituted for a supposedly apolitical "methodological moral certainty," which often leads to negligence (See Giroux, 1981), while impeding more flexible structures necessary for the development of questions that uncover complexity and multiplicity.

It is in this context that we submit that engaging with critical pedagogies and the process of political conscientization (Freire, 1970) can provide a doorway into how we may see our practices and ourselves. We understand Foucault's (1980) proposition that legitimacy is created through the perception of what is 'correct' or 'moral', but also align with Lee Higgins' (2008) musings regarding the possible futures for music education in community models, where the category of the musician is framed as someone "committed to people, participation, context, diversity and equality of opportunity through which active music-making experiences happen" (p. 326). Higgins presents questions that are central to the prescriptive element of the transformational language in music education, as it is manifested in discourses of creativity, for example. He therefore asks: "how often do facilitators fool themselves and/or fool the participants that they are working within open creative structures? How often does one start a creative music-making workshop but knows full well what the musical outcome will be?" (p. 330). Borgo (2005) and Hickey (2009) ascribe similar concerns with processes of improvisation, which schooling have turned either inexistent or prescribed to the extent that it happens only as an expression of a genre's stylized practice (Jazz for instance), but not as a process of free and creative learning. These propositions are placed alongside a caution that the absence of music politics in education allows for "methods of subjugation" to take hold in the name of that which is 'appropriate' or 'efficient'. To clarify and exemplify this issue, next we further address the political transformation of education into method, and method into methodolatry.<sup>8</sup>

## A Step Back to Methodolatry: Music and Education as Abstract Value

So that we can direct attention to the import critical pedagogies could have in an education in music, it is necessary that we speak first to methods and practices such as those based upon ‘teaching to the standards’, or the common traditional rehearsal techniques for large ensembles most all of us are able to recall. Arguably, one could say that before anything else, the objective in streamlined practices is to compress and condense time inside the teaching moment; literally situating the educative processes according to parameters of managerial performativity (Ball, 2003). Still others would see streamlined teaching not in mere determinism or conditioning, but rather the non-political balance between the comfort of what is certain and the seduction of efficiency management. Accountable, precise and unwavering practices have become commonsensical apt in current mainstream discourse.

Music, in and outside schooling, has a long history of managing ways of learning and being; from orchestras to big bands, to studio recordings, to the sampling and splicing techniques of today. Certain models (and this is not exclusive to music education) can be traced to the institutional demands and economic restrictions of schooling and businesses alike. Regardless, in order to be veiled or ‘disappear’ as a political force, such management must hide behind other social/cultural assumptions and givens.

A first given could be named the mythological discourse of the *power of Art*. This romantic ideal, as Isaiah Berlin (1999) has articulated, is an ideological masterpiece; as it places a heavily political slogan as the central element of a discourse that claims to be apolitical. Art is powerful because it transcends the mundane, it delivers us from the low morals of everydayness (Roberts, 2006) and ‘saving’ the brave and the believer. Art then is indisputably ‘good’ and undeniably demands its own proselytizing.

In the United States, a goals oriented music education tradition has been codified since the early 1990s by the development of the National Standards in Arts Education—an educative ‘translation’ of the power of art.<sup>9</sup> These standards, which have functioned as the supporting arm of the educational arts field, are the main representation of that which Apple (2006) has called the conservative movement in general and educational politics. This can be exemplified by the analysis recently made by the president of a major arts organization in the US, as he applauded how the development of the National Standards for Music and Arts ‘saved’ states like Florida, from spending ‘precious time’ investigating local realities and needs.<sup>10</sup> Such politics and policies become acceptable in a discipline where the power of art is taken to be self-evident and unified. In practice, however, they empty the voice and influence of teachers and schools, and consequently, impoverish their capacity for language and creative practices (Darling-Hammond et al, 2005).

Another palpable result of the power of art is the continuation of our educational endeavors centered upon the social and cultural legitimacy derived from the presentation and performance of ‘quality repertoire’ or acknowledged ‘masterpieces’. In spite of what is presented as the undeniable benefit of ‘quality programs’ what remains hard to deny is our professional avoidance of the contextual and adaptable; our field continuously prefers technical/artistic quality over relevance quality (see Schmidt, 2009; Johansen, 2009). We seem happy to maintain our ‘distinction’ (Bourdieu, 1984), blind to its diminishing social and symbolic capital, as we engage in acts that veil the potential irrelevance of music education to the social and economic diversity of our 21st century society (Myers, 2008).

The consequence of hierarchical distinctions of taste that are intrinsically transmitted by the lifeworld of institutionalized music is that they re-energize and reaffirm the didactic valorization of technique as the moral and ethical representative of what one knows and ought to know. Moreover, what is rarely articulated is the fact that teachers, who lead and coordinate modes of production such as the rehearsal or classroom instruction, are also alienated in such processes. These teachers are made, voluntarily or involuntarily, subordinates to the owners of social and cultural production, that is, institutions/organizations and their sponsors (Benedict, 2009). For instance, in our conversations with early career educators, one constant complaint is their inability to implement changes in their newly acquired positions. Their struggle sometimes yields results, but often they discover how illegible to others a different discourse can be and they too conform to established patterns or, worse, leave the profession. Attrition in music does not escape national averages where 40% leave the profession within 5 years.

Accepting the premise that the central questions and objectives of the musical presentation or production—the performance—are said to transcend the geographic, communal, economic, or political needs or interests of students, it would not be farfetched to argue that students and sometimes their teachers, become the necessary, albeit inconvenient actors of the (mis)educative realities that an education in music can generate. This is why we argue that both teachers and students, in the sense that they cease to be co-constructors, can be considered dispensable, and are effectively made invisible. Thus, in this context, the political ideal behind ‘quality repertoire’ (vastly western-classically based) fetishizes a product that is generated not merely despite the absence of human agency, but at its cost. Isn’t this what drives institutionalized performances and their mode of production, characterized, for example, by the traditional rehearsal techniques with which many of us are so familiar?<sup>11</sup> If we accept this premise then we might also ask: why do these practices garner such wide acceptance?

Pondering these questions leads us to a second given: The over-valorization of certainty and sequence. Just as pedagogical concerns in general education such as whole language, constructivism, contexts of historical meaning, functional literacy, and differentiated instruction are familiar to those in other fields, methodological approaches such as Orff, Kodaly, Gordon and Suzuki are familiar to any individual inside the field of music education. However, unlike the debates regarding prescriptive teaching in general education (including the very public debate of the history standards in the US Senate), the music education community has experienced little space for discussion. In fact, in music education, the vastly accepted perception is that these methods ‘work’. And in fact, they do.

The Kodaly Method, for example (in which after three summers of study one can become a ‘certified’ “Kodaly teacher”), regulates music education according to a sequence of ‘prepare, present, practice.’ We would argue that such methods ‘work’ for they explore, or exploit, three mainstays in music education: 1) teacher training as the development of classical musicianship skills; 2) interpretation of pedagogy as efficient sequentialism (the three Ps mentioned above); and 3) the use of pre-established curricula acquired through a very specialized training process. One of the impressive results of methods is that they play a passive as well as an active role in curtailing, or rendering silent, possible behavioral and musical ‘disturbances’ caused by the students. Certified teachers, implementing tightly planned activities and transitions, are ‘prepared’ for any contingency, and classrooms go according to plans; methods act as a mode of ‘managing bodies and managing the classroom’. For instance, in a classroom in which Orff instruments are used (small wooden and metal barred instruments such as xylophones) and steady beat keeping is stressed, teachers are able to remove any bars that are not part of the

musical frame of the activity, rendering any ‘wrong’ notes impossible. In a process such as this, for example, it is hard not to notice how students/musicians are disciplined and alienated from innovative processes and the necessary dialogue that may lead to critical or creative endeavors.

Our experiences in the field (one of us has ‘training’ in both methods and the other has both a Level III Orff certification and a Masters degree in Kodaly) suggest that methods powerfully restrain other possible pedagogies that might question or transgress said musical engagements. Regelski (2002) posits a similar idea but in different terms. He suggests that the engagement with methods and their doctrines leads to “the unreasonable reverence and blind faith that amounts to idolatry” and subsequently refers to such modes of action as “methodolatry” (p. 111). Methodolatry functions in similar terms to the politics of religion; a political space is created by ‘school music’ with students participating in the myth of music as ‘universal language’. Methods become ‘color blind’ and a pathway to ‘even the playing field’ for students. Consequently, an over-reliance on methods to ‘train’ students and teachers masks and denies the possibility of seeing the situatedness of school cultures and environments. It also prevents a critical account of practices such as multiculturalism, repressing visions where difference can remain different, rather than being simplified, acculturated or made into tokenism. Subsequently, the limitations and constraints of the approaches and even the positioning of privilege, goes un-interrogated.

### The Place(ing) of Schooling in Music

It is a rhetorical given that inside schools the arts are the place in which one can be creative and free to express; that is, the arts are the constructive setting par excellence, set apart and differentiated from what education might look like in the ‘basic’ disciplines. While we have examined the problematics of ‘performance’ as educational goal and parameter, we have not yet fully articulated the way in which its preeminence is derived from the naturalization of the ‘undeniable value’ of the arts and its performance. If to be educated is to think critically, and we have addressed the trappings present herein, to be a musician is to make music. Even if we momentarily agreed with that prerogative, forgoing the daily musical interaction of multitudes who ‘do’ music without ‘making’ it, we must consider that the making of music is bound not merely by context, but by the political forces of the spaces where musics are allowed to happen.<sup>12</sup> In other words, an instrumentality of how music takes place is often made to precede the individual and the communal and, for better and for worse, defines how music enters one’s life.

This leads us to another differentiation between making and doing music, exemplified by the instrumentation of the space of schooling, from the ideological to the physical, and how it leads to very particular ways of ‘doing’ music. We argue that these are mostly non-spontaneous or self-generative, with performances only filling school spaces in winter and spring concerts. The ‘specialness’ of these events belies the absence of music making as a constant, interactive, generative and communal enterprise. Beyond the efficiency of individuals actively behaving toward a determined goal, the traditional school space actively generates a particular kind of music. Performance, in this sense, does not differentiate between participation and intentionality, the collective from the communal. Examples abound in band or chorus environments, where irrespective of the intentionality of the classroom activity, a ‘kind of music’ is produced (Benedict & Allsup, 2009). Music in schools then often searches for cohesion and

unity, is often seen as vocational, presents clear distinctions between genres, determines practice in terms of performatic categories, is disciplinary (pertaining to one subject) and serves to manage the bodies of students. For instance, in many music classrooms musical “activities” are sequenced and broken down into manageable segments. The use of tools such as repeated ostinato patterns, improvisatory tone sets defined by a 5-note scale, or 4 beats of eight note and quarter note rhythm patterns, manage students’ musical gestures and thinking and hence, the possibilities of music making. Band, orchestra and choral rehearsals are dictated by a rationality that is interested only in producing ‘right notes’ and interpretations determined by the millennia of tradition, or simply the conductor. Students must be at attention at all times, bodies poised and ready to ‘perform’ for the director who wields, what O’Toole (2005) names, “conventions of . . . pedagogy [that are] designed to create docile, complacent [musicians] (p. 2).

While music outside school does not necessarily present ‘the other side of the coin’—it is not always disruptive, individually focused, progressive, liberatory, etc—a greater intersection with these practices would help us to understand the effect and extent to which music in schools is often an unarticulated segment of another disappearing act: that is, music as a part of a curriculum that helps to establish an ethical and social individual.<sup>13</sup> In this way we are left with a music curriculum that obfuscates our capacity to identify instances where ‘making music’ serves purposes other than those immediately perceived by the doer and her audience. In the case of students, said curricular structures often foster conformity, while trumpeting self-expression. If we doubt this possible, consider creativity. Creativity is the musical analogue to critical thinking; it not only requires critical thinking but it also surpasses it. For one often adds a certain *je-ne-sais-quoi* to the qualities and qualification of critical thinking; an intangible quality that is at creativity’s core. As an example, consider the widespread acceptance of the correlation between ‘innate talent’ and creativity. Here, musical engagements are seen as naturally creative and music teachers consequently endowed with such proclivities. The first step to conformity, however, is apparent un-deniability, and creativity through music, has plenty to offer.

These assumptions, including the creative endowment of music teachers, seem to descend (again) from an *a priori* determination that the arts are ‘good’. Yet, believing music teachers to be creative just because they teach music is akin to suggesting that all mathematics teachers are inspired mathematicians, that all history teachers are socially conscious, and that all reading teachers conceptualize literacy beyond functional goals. Assuming this, upholds the ideological view of the positive power of art, as we saw above, serving to veil the deleterious aspects such as the way music is malevolently used (as an instrument of torture for example<sup>14</sup>) or how the arts are historically tied to acculturation or political colonization. Music comes to embody an emotive slogan that teachers, students, principals and parents embrace, however bereft of the pedagogically sound engagements, particularly since, “the slogan may suggest reform while actually conserving existing practices” (Popkewitz, 1980), p. 304). The effectiveness of affective education grows from the slogan recited, to the banner wore, to the identity embodied. Music education thus becomes the affective *in* education (its representative) and in accepting itself as such it not only defines itself and the modes of learning that can or should take place inside its classrooms, but also constrains that which does or does not qualify as affective in schools and schooling. Thus, disciplines and disciplinary knowings are named: creativity, fun, self-expression, as well as rigor, seriousness, precision, logic; each group failing to recognize that naming the other serves to preclude that which they could become (Althusser, 2001).

This naming, and the acceptance of the naming, not only reproduces what counts as



knowledge, but also the necessary conditions for the continuation of we-they engagements (Althusser, 2001). While also forming a political discourse this particular positioning constructs pedagogical narratives and a discourse of salvation (Popkewitz, 2001). As articulated above, the discourse of truth that constitutes the salvation narrative is one where musical norms are presented as noble and moral. The nobility of teaching that strives to teach notes and thus build literacy (never mind the disregard to socio, geographic or personal needs) is but one example. Others can be found in the academic nobility of technique development that marches on in public and higher education regardless of physical injury (tendinitis, carpal tunnel syndrome, etc.), social injury (issues of inclusion - you either do well or don't), or psychological injury (feelings of inadequacy, self-esteem, misconceptions of "talent", etc.). Such structures, while veiling the doctrine of control by which music often functions, continue to thrive on the back of a narrative that depicts the salvation of many by the grace and glory of music. Such salvation discourse, once implemented, is fortified by an ensuing morality that its controlling elements produce. This in turn, allows the institutional apparatus of schools, conservatoires and higher education institutions to make decisions that avoid questions such as, who regulates the ethics of these processes, and what kinds of subjects (individuals) are 'produced' by salvation discourses?

Many continue to assume that education in and through a discipline refers to the discipline itself: to its content. In the same form, many assume that the content of education in and through music is, without argument, music itself. What is not articulated in such arguments is that music in this instance is a metonymic device where the lifeworlds of techniques and cultural-economic representation of 'chosen' musics are hidden. That is, we often speak of music as a social enterprise, but as practitioners and academics, we remain committed to technical specificity. Think of it this way: when we speak of school music what is actually meant or implied is western music, enacted under the subtext of a social contract based upon hierarchy manufactured by taste and competition, born out in regional and state 'festivals' in which groups perform and are rated on music that has been pre-determined and designated in a 'handbook', that in many cases is not free of charge. However deleterious this might seem, particularly in face of the globalized realities of today, a grand narrative of salvation makes disruptions disappear by co-opting internal institutional behavior. The reason is this: music education lives in a self-protective cycle of survival where doubts about the relevance of our implemented curricular norms are entertained but quickly dismissed or discredited. This, of course, bares relationship to high-stakes test and efficiency performance currently witnessed in general education.

### Multiculturalism and Tolerance

One may ask, however, what about multiculturalism and other musics present in classrooms across the nation? Aren't they a response to westernized or dominant versions of curriculum? Indeed, music education ideology today guarantees varied musics inside the classroom and such musics do appear as an illustration of multiculturalism. These musics also and often behave, however, as a vehicle for the exploration of 'musics that exist outside the classroom', and so remain marginal, presenting us with another disappearing act. As argued above, prevalent multicultural practices in music education do not place otherness as a difference that remains different—seeing it as a constructive possibility. Rather, we would argue that Other

or ‘illegitimate musics’ (in the sense that these musics exist outside the parameters of western music) are often sanitized in much of their classrooms existence. For instance, songs have verses that are often left out or modified, in essence depoliticizing the original intent. Woodie Guthrie’s, *This Land is Your Land*, is often performed without the verse that references class oppression (Morton, 2001, p. 38). It is also not unusual for ‘multicultural’ songs to be watered down by the use of stereotypical rhythmic or melodic gestures that “give the feel” of ‘other’ cultures. Gendered stereotypes and racialized discourses too continue to abound; one need only consider the music of Disney films such as *Aladdin* and *Snow White*, the jungle rhythms to be found in the most recent *King Kong* film (see Abramo, 2007), or linkages constantly made between Hip Hop music and violence.

Moreover, the threat they could pose to the canon, that is, a real set of alternative musical propositions, is extinguished by tokenism and a measured ‘awareness’ of the exotic, rare and occasional. Multiculturalism in music, while intently political in its inception has been domesticated and consequently made irrelevant. Nevertheless, these musics remain present as a pseudo-political response to on-going cultural-social challenges and play a central role in the above mentioned salvation narratives. Granted that examples of careful and critical multiculturalism do exist in the field, they are unfortunately overwhelmed by multicultural practices that offer no meaningful impact, and more perniciously, present the illusion of change. These practices enact and legitimate a ‘distant tenderness’ that is put in use through the music of the Other.<sup>15</sup> Then, if as Brown (2006) states, “tolerance does not resolve but manages antagonism or hostility toward difference,” it shouldn’t be hard to consider that such acts of personal or cultural magnanimity are “always a privilege of those who have power” (p. 28).

Indeed multicultural music in education has aptly linked tolerance to patience, deftly avoiding a critical stance that questions it as “...necessitated by something one would prefer did not exist.” This becomes significant if tolerance in fact “involves managing the presence of the undesirable, the tasteless, the faulty—even the revolting, repugnant, or vile” (Brown, 2006, p. 25). Marcuse (1965) too speaks of tolerance and the ways in which these acts are ‘determined’ by the status quo, while Marx would see the ‘schooled’ act of tolerance as one that has been fetishized; one in which humans and human agency is made abstract. Thus, rather than affording the space in which students may exercise agency with and through musical engagements that present divergent human, social, intellectual and sonic relations, musical behaviors are made tolerable and managed when we ‘translate’ the complexities of said musics back into westernized technique, vocal quality or aesthetic structure. In these actions, care is neither reciprocal, nurturing, nor sustaining (Noddings, 2003), but rather a mechanism for control.

Salvation, tolerance, and othering all designate and deflect the possibilities of engaging in acts that would challenge and interrogate the normative practices and purposes of educators, or in other words, elements that would explicitly make education a political act. In turn, the absence of the latter prevents the question: From what exactly are students being saved? From their cultural and environmental surroundings, heritage, ethnicity, race, gender, class? Such stances could be seen as what Delpit (1985) has called “cultural genocide” (p. 30), making music educators handmaidens to a cultural capital that benefits neither the student nor the music educator. This hegemony is constituted through “a posture that softens or cloaks the overt, authority and normativity in the act of tolerance” (Brown, 2006, p. 26), thus deferring critical pedagogical engagements and limiting the possibilities for music education as something other than the affective, the technical or measurable. As with all disciplines the purpose of music in our students’ lives is not to “reinforce patterns of domination or patterns of cultural

reproduction” (hooks, 2000, p. 391). Rather, it should be one in which dialogical engagements challenge the common-sensical, where we experience conflict as much as agreement, and contradiction as much as rationality. Education in and through music with such directives is not inexistent, of course, but it remains a minority practice. We propose that its expansion requires a critical consciousness of our own failings, fears, and inaction.

### Critical Pedagogies: Welcoming the Contradictory

Schooling has and continues to prepare students for basic skills thought to be essential. In music, schooling is determined in terms of musicianship, vastly defined according to parameters based upon recognition and response. This in turn predicates ‘good’ musicianship according to the ability to sight-read and sight-sing. This, of course, is directly related to notions of functional literacy that are framed by current political discourse of efficiency, standards, and market education. All which brings ‘quality music education’ much closer to capital than our artistic and humanist dispositions would like to admit.

On the other hand, the goals and ideals embedded in the use-value of musicing, of music as a praxis, refutes the notion of knowledge-at-first-sight, and serves as an apt metaphor for educational engagements where “insight and comprehension are seen as performative - always a strategy for constructing knowledge and never a moment of pure mirroring of the text in the reader” (Ellsworth, 1996, p. 139). At center, then is a shift from ‘performance’ to a performativity. That is, from a ready made set of learning practices based upon reproduction developed by rehearsed readings, to practices that are predicated upon interactions between invention and interpretation, between improvisation and adaptability, between acuity and critique.

An education centered upon the political economies of music is not simply formed in antinomy to technicism. Rather, it generates a dialogical space where ideology is repressed in favor of conflict and divergence. The challenge is not to see dialogue as “some abstract space where we leave positionality, power and body behind and engage with an ‘unclouded’ intellect, as if that were ever possible” (Carlson, 2005, p. 164). It is to pedagogically position risk, doubt, and even discomfort as possible for an education in and through music.

The main challenge might be to overcome our fear of seeing ourselves as ‘other’ – the ones that might not know, the ones in search instead of certain. However unarticulated, the fear of finding ourselves as subordinated people that cannot speak (Spivak, 1988) is real and present. What would happen if students, by finding validation in outside-school musical knowings, would render the hard won expertise of the classroom content meaningless or secondary? What happens to me as a teacher, if splicing and sampling are given the import of art? If they are imbued with the same nobility now only available through the delayed gratification of the ensemble, who am I then?

As mindful general educators desire to engage and honor the worldview of students, the central task becomes to facilitate those ways in which educators (both inside and outside institutions) can enact musical-political processes that celebrate musical praxis. It is also important to grapple with curriculum and pedagogy in such a way that students can come to challenge ‘legitimate’ positionings that are institutionally conferred. Desiring complexity and contradictions, rather than consensus and false acts of charity - made manifest by techniques and methods - necessitates renouncing the positions we take as arbiters.

Our hope is that we may tone down claims of how music may ‘empower’ students as we work diligently to create spaces where power is indeed shared, contested, and disputed. This means to engage in actions that are “always contingent, where circumstances are highly complex and variable, and where the ends of the action are never self-evidently given” (Bowman, 2000, p. 14) Taking this seriously might lead us to link political action to ethical necessity and acknowledge that how and who we are, in what ways and why we desire, are implicated in the constancy of the choices we make.

Marx’s words are perhaps a poignant manner to conclude:

Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly found, given, and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living. (1852/1978, p. 595)

These words remind us of the constantly formative nature of political and educational life, while emphasizing the challenge of unburdening ourselves of our traditions. Throughout this paper we have suggested that a significant way to reengage education in and through music in institutional settings is to reconfigure our understanding of the political possibilities of music as well as how politics are denied by structural and spatial confines of schooling. The work is ahead of us.

### Notes

1. These music ‘methods’ are didactic approaches to music teaching and learning based upon sequential and programmatic representations of skill acquisition. They are named after the men who developed them, namely, Zoltan Kodaly, Carl Orff, and Sinichi Suzuki. These methods are wide spread, have national and regional associations build around them, and are key in the structuring of basal series books in the field of music education.
2. We are considering these two notions of literacy particularly through critical theory notions regarding competency-based and skills-banking approaches sponsored, for example, by Donaldo Macedo (1994).
3. While we acknowledge that consumption has an ‘active’ and even ‘participative’ element in terms of labor and capital, as well as communal engagement and personal expression, consumption remains differentiated as a force that tends to restrict agency.
4. Performativity interpreted according to Judith Butler (1988) and not as a mode of efficiency as Stephen Ball (2003) has defined it.
5. One case in point would be how proponents of “authentic assessment” often cite performance models and situations as examples with little attention given to the high stakes and one-shot nature of these practices.
6. It is interesting to note that the first of such arguments connecting music to proficiency in math or English, where studies of the now infamous “Mozart Effect”. Not by coincidence, this research was funded and advertized by NAMM (National Association of Music Merchants) and later disavowed as seriously flawed.
7. It is important to differentiate pedagogy from didactics here: understanding pedagogy is viewed as encompassing more than functional and practical questions, but also having an implication upon curricular, ethical and philosophical elements.
8. In music education Tom Regelski, has addressed the ‘devotional’ manner in which methods are carried on by some teachers, and the near ‘religious fervor’ that they incite. This is the metaphorical starting point for the notion of methodolatry.
9. See *National Standards for Arts Education: What Every Young American Should Know and Be Able To Do in the Arts*. (1994). <http://www.menc.org/resources/view/national-standards-for-music-education>
10. John Mahlman *et al.* (1996) argues that the full investigation of parameters for Standards, based on real research and dialogue, would have not only delayed the formation of National Standards for the Arts, but would have worked against the profession as a whole.

11. A few feminist arguments have been developed on this issue in music education. Here it is particularly worth reading the work of Roberta Lamb, Liz Gould and Patricia O'Toole.
12. A wider discussion about the active (or not) properties of listening, sampling, mixing or otherwise manipulating music has been developed elsewhere and are beyond the scope of this article.
13. This is the instrumentality that leads us to 'do' music without 'making' it.
14. Susan Cusick addresses this topic of music used as "acoustic weapons" and "acoustic bombardment."
15. This is at the center of what Freire has called 'false charity'.

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