

Music Education in Inclusive Contexts
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July 12th Reflection

Caught between the progressive thinking that is generated through thoughtful reflection and the concurrent yet conflicting reflexive nature of my teaching practices, I find myself lamenting the inability to challenge a seemingly systemic approach to music education that feels outdated and exclusionary. As a guitarist who found their initial footing through private lessons and informal learning (Green, 2017), I relished the opportunity to absorb culturally relevant material that served an unbeknownst and secondary function of developing my ear and musicianship, a skill set I continue to make frequent use of both as an educator and freelance musician. Within the realm of formal music training, I thrived in both the wind and jazz ensemble settings on a variety of instruments; however, when attention turned to post-secondary options, I was limited to jazz or classical guitar studies. This funneling of higher learning, in hindsight, planted an exclusionary seed that has grown formidable roots since its inception. Not having pursued an orchestral or wind ensemble instrument at the university level, I am not as familiar with the canon nor the techniques needed to feel confident in my instructional methods at the high school level. Imposter syndrome has quietly hovered over my shoulder as I navigate a framework for music education that has left me – and likely many of my students – feeling out of place. The Western canon and its associated privilege has led what Sensoy and Diangelo (2017) believe to be the “construction of what’s normal and not-normal by the dominant group” (p. 83), a phenomenon that has created an arduous current that is intimidating to work against.

How does one implement concepts of ingenuity and inclusion within the parameters of traditional practices that often lack critical reflection? Thankfully, the authors and guest lecturers introduced this week have shed light on possible inroads to a more inclusive, relevant

and rewarding experience for all parties involved. Though my training and experiences are different than those of Elizabeth Mitchell, our stories at times run parallel with each other in meaningful ways. Conflicted with her own formal training and the contradictory growth of community music therapy (Ansdell, 2014), Mitchell's (2019) implementation of participatory performance practices within a clinical setting maintains that "participation can be based on their authentic desire to perform without broader implications to their treatment while also articulating the event's clinical benefits (p.13). Where Mitchell felt compelled to adapt her practices as to allow for greater inclusion, so too do I feel as if we have missed a most important mark by emphasizing presentational performance and reducing self-expression to a means of evaluation.

Cathy briefly discussed the latitude with which we as music educators are afforded in our workplace, and I believe the conversations and ideas shared in this class allow for a different seed to be planted. One which accepts greater input from the student perspective and gives space for learning opportunities no longer bound or restricted by the confines of seasonal school concerts and classroom assessment. Our current pandemic – though detrimental on several fronts – afforded me the chance to explore digital composition in great detail with students of all grade levels, which in turn gave several students a new form of expression that was not possible on their chosen instrument. With September looking precarious at best, perhaps there is no better time to take a necessary step away from the method books, festivals and any other antiquated instructional tool we as music educators have been leaning on for too long. In doing so, students can be offered new musical experiences they identify with and contribute to. The challenge, as always, now becomes bridging innovative ideas with tangible action, an endeavor I am admittedly nervous to embark upon. I do not engage in the echo chamber that social media can become, there is no soapbox that I frequent to stake my claim. Instead, I tend to think inwards to grapple with the issues at hand – both personally and professionally – and am unsure

as to whether or not my temperament is one that should serve as a catalyst for these initiatives. Nevertheless, it is the engaging readings and dialogue of this past week that have brought these ideas back to the surface, and I am at the very least grateful to ponder them and expand my concept of inclusivity.

References

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- Mitchell, E. (2019). Community Music Therapy and Participatory Performance. *Voices: A World Forum for Music Therapy*, 19(1). <https://doi.org/10.15845/voices.v19i1.2701>
- Sensoy, Ö., & DiAngelo, R. J. (2017). *Is everyone really equal? An introduction to key concepts in social justice education* (Second Edition). Teachers College Press.