Inclusive music education—an oxymoron? Reflections through the lens of social justice

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ABSTRACT

In a recent MEJ journal, Bergonzi (2009) addressed issues related to sexual orientation, including lack of space for identity to evolve as well as experiences in which identity can be solidified and embraced. From that article, one could conclude that we in university-based schools of music assume we are inclusive as a result of generating policies that structure environments and interactions aimed at ensuring inclusivity (or not). When we probe and examine, we realize that there is much face validity (regardless of our intentions). This article, plus other key writings jolt our thinking and cause us to question traditions maintained and changes that have occurred (or thought to have occurred) in response to policies generated and assumed to have been implemented. The purpose of this paper is to examine characteristics of educative and democratic environments. Within that theoretical framework, words as found in a university-based mission statement and resultant policies about inclusiveness of diversities will be examined. What would it mean to work in school- and university-based music environments that purport educative and democratic environments? Do such environments exist, and if so, do they exist as policy or policy that is actualized and embraced? If embraced, what would be necessary for environments to be inclusive of diversity? To answer these critical questions, I will narrow the lens of educative and democratic environments to examine educative interactions and social justice. Kozol’s (2005) inclusion of fairness and responsibility as two defining characteristics of educative interactions, and Dewey’s (1916) view of social justice as including sound reasoning and reasonableness in the way people are treated as well as his theory of experience, will serve as the theoretical framework for this paper.
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In a recent MEJ journal, Bergonzi (2009) addressed issues related to sexual orientation, including lack of spaces for identity to evolve as well as experiences in which identify can be solidified and embraced. Upon reflection, one is prompted to examine policies in university-based schools of music that guide and inform content, interactions and engagements, specifically with regards to supporting diverse cultures and communities. As the lens is focused, one might wonder if instances could be identified where words are in place but actions lack the intentions of the words. Bergonzi’s article, plus other writings over the last twenty years (e.g., Gould, 2008; Lamb, 1994, 1990; Morton, 2000), jolt our thinking and cause us to question traditions maintained and changes that have occurred (or thought to have occurred) in response to policies generated and presumably implemented as intended. Policies are often the result of numerous university committee meetings at which identified issues are discussed and problematized. We discuss and strategize knowing that we are ethically responsible to examine such policies that, in turn, guide content, interactions and engagements, negatively or positively, that influence inclusion or exclusion. Such a conference as this one provides spaces for critical examination and engagement of such policies, intentions, and presumptions can occur. Thus are policies convenient ways to provide a checklist or do some remain as inert objects that are not acted upon through implementation and evaluation?

As one critically examines any issue, we must self-reflect on one’s own disposition, in this case, to include; make welcome; or view as a person without identifying as someone of race, age, cultural, ethnic or orientation; such self-examination is critical before we begin to examine others (e.g., Dewey, 1916; Noddings, 2994; Schon, 1987). A self-reflection on my words, actions and ‘blindness’ as a white heterosexual female reminds me that an examination of my disposition to view individuals as persons without classification or judgment is critical, and something that I continued to grapple with as issues throughout the conference became more apparent.
PURPOSE and QUESTIONS

The purpose of this paper is to examine characteristics of educative and democratic environments. Within that theoretical framework, words as found in a university-based mission statement and resultant policies about inclusiveness of diversities will be examined.

What would it mean to work in school- and university-based music environments that purport educative and democratic environments? Do such environments exist, and if so, do they exist as policy or policy that is actualized and embraced? If embraced, what would be necessary for environments to be inclusive of diversity?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To answer these critical questions, I will narrow the lens of educative and democratic environments to examine educative interactions and social justice. Kozol’s (2005) inclusion of fairness and responsibility as two defining characteristics of educative interactions, and Dewey’s (1916) view of social justice as including sound reasoning and reasonableness in the way people are treated as well as his theory of experience, will serve as the theoretical framework for this paper.

Based on Dewey’s writings (1916) reasoning—involves logical thinking when finding results or drawing conclusions. As one thinks through a problem or situation, one identifies the issue, diverges while generating solutions, converges on a solution, and evaluates while implementing the solution(s).
Because one never accepts what is or what was without constant critical reflection, one becomes involved in a cycle that is recursive. This disposition to engage in critical reflection avoids becoming dogmatic or ideological that is, a cement block. It is the messiness of life that that is the reality and the messiness that reminds us of our differences and diversities (Jorgensen, 2008).

**Reasonableness** involves being capable of informed judgments. We, as humans, are capable of making such judgments; it is a human condition. The strength of this condition falls somewhere on a continuum for each individual and is dependent on one’s fund of experience and dispositions. Accepting that we all are capable, it is the responsibility of the educator to guide students in their growth as informed thinkers; this must be nurtured and expected, as we provide them with the knowledge and nurture so that actions and words are informed and understood. Without knowledge and understanding, we make judgments based on ignorance, a characteristic that often guides behavior that is intolerant and discriminatory.

With these frameworks, we examine our own educative environments and examine who is in our environments, and why, how, where, and what we teach. With such an examination can come a call for educational environments to be accessible and inclusive, and one in which being treated reasonably is reflected in our interactions. It does sound reasonable and straightforward, yes? Then why the continuing challenges, why have the challenges evolved and the experiences of those challenges remain recursive?

Before continuing, a few issues that arise from definitions as articulated above, specifically with the words inclusive and diverse need to be examined for possible dissonance (conflict, discord) and being characterized as a paradox (inconsistency, irony, absurdity). Should the title have been “Diversity in music education: An oxymoron?” Or should I examine the intent of using the word inclusive as inclusive of diversity? Or do they just not fit? As Liz Gould reminded me, (personal conversation, May 2010), the word inclusive is problematic because it reflects an assumption that all want to be included in the same group and reside at the same table. Whose table, whose group—who are the ‘who’ and what is the understanding and expectations of all that occurs within the group and at the table? The assumptions and my ‘blindness’ need to be the beginning points for conversations to occur. Intentions
and perceptions of what we mean by the word inclusive and diversity—not to include with the intent to normalize and standardize but to include for diversity to exist—need to be clarified in order for ‘diffusing through including’ can occur.

**MISSION STATEMENT**

I offer one mission statement and excerpts from a value statement for the purpose of attempting to examine the compatibility between the words and actions on the campus I currently reside. The mission statement is as follows:

“The mission of the [specific university] is to serve the people of [specific state] and the world through preeminence in creating, communicating, preserving and applying knowledge, art, and academic values, and in developing leaders and citizens who will challenge the present and enrich the future.”

*How is the mission statement reflected in our actions on a daily basis?*

**VISION STATEMENT** (excerpts)

The University is defined by a culture of interdisciplinary teaching and research, coupled with academic rigor. We encourage our students, faculty and staff to transcend disciplinary boundaries by tackling complex and vexing challenges facing modern societies at local, national and global levels.

We celebrate and promote diversity in all its forms, seeking the understanding and perspective that distinct life experiences bring. We proclaim ourselves a scholarly community in which ideas may be freely expressed and challenged, and all people are welcomed, respected and nurtured in their academic and social development.

We gladly accept the challenges and opportunities confronting us and understand that the University of Michigan must change, adapt and grow to meet the needs of a rapidly evolving society. We will always focus on the horizon.

*How is the vision statement reflected in our actions on a daily basis?*
Groups on campus for interests and identities are exhaustive however, are the conversations made public in Schools of Music and more specifically, departments of music education, compared to other departments on campus (e.g., women’s studies)? Do they occur outside of the groups? Does desegregation occur after what could be viewed as ‘segregation’ as a result of the formation of groups? Is that the desire or is the need for similar identities to meet and converse and share? Has it increased visibility and access? What might communities look like in which such questions can be asked? The next necessary process is to examine educative learning communities and compare those environments with what has been described above. Are those words actualized as such communities in our environments?

LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Dewey’s theory of experience is a framework that can be utilized when facilitating and strengthening communities in which social democracy is realized through interactions as described above. Dewey (1938) purports that the processes are guided by democratic principles that shape interactions as learning occurs. For him, democratic principles included all of the above—sound reasoning, reasonableness, fairness, and responsibility. Experiences are educative thus promote, as opposed to stunting, growth. Students are placed at the center as we gain understanding about who they are and the fund of experience they bring to the community.

These learning communities include interactions and exchanges that can shape notions of fairness and responsibility; invite or spurn ‘voice’; and form social and musical constructions. As notions of fairness, responsibility, and presence or absence of voice become understood, one begins to notice how issues of power structures, enabling forces, inclusion, exclusion, and standardization affect learning as the environments become solidified and/or continue to evolve. What would educational environments feel and look like if we began with the context, culture and understandings (the ‘who’) of that environment?

INTERSECTIONS IN SITUATIONS
As indicated above, an education that is rooted in social justice includes fairness, spaces for voices to be heard and diversity to exist, respect, and responsibility. Educative experiences produce sensitivity and responsiveness, connect with past and future, provide challenges that are accessible and yet evoke reflection, involve active and persistent inquiry that is mindful, and are organic as experiences are constructed and re-constructed (Bransford, J.D., Brown, A. L. & Cocking, R. R., 2000; Bruner, 1996; Noddings, 2004; Vygotsky, 1978). To learn and grow, experiences must be educative and involve critical inquiry that included reflective practice. The focus shifts from the ‘what’ to the ‘how’ and connections are made between the value of experiencing music and experiencing learning. In these described communities, students are transformed through active engagement with content that requires flexibility, adaptability, curiosity, and imagination (e.g., Dewey, 1938; Donovan, Bransford, & Pellegrino (1999); Eisner, 1998; Goodlad, 2004). Requiring students to question and inquire, and providing communities that value curiosity should constitute foundational aspects of communities of learning. As we re-think the words of mission and value statements as found in our respective institutions, we need to compare and contrast to determine similarities and dissonances.

THE WHO AND WHAT

Who, historically, were in music education environments that influenced the profession (specifically in singing schools, military bands, European orchestras, music class beginnings)? Who was included and excluded, marginalized, celebrated? Whose voices were heard as history books were written and stories were told and re-lived. Whose music was played and recognized? How has standardization and normalization created ideological notions of what is music and music making? Do we understand the solidification of ideological and dogmatic notions about music, musiking and music educators—the ‘what’, ‘who’, and ‘how’?

We perpetuate those who are like me—a heterosexual—who has never been excluded because of sexual orientation. We carry on the traditions and norms of what is ‘normal’ and what looks ‘normal’ in front of the classroom or ensemble (see Younker and Hickey, 2007). We are jolted when critical thinkers, like Goodlad (2005), remind us that ‘tradition’ in teaching and learning is often the denial of entropy past the point of being obsolete, and stubbornness to change towards something more
relevant! While marginalization and diversity occurs in multifaceted forms, we resonate with many of the students who are ‘like us.’

Often, who is ‘allowed in’ becomes the standard, norm and canon, and who does not make the initial cut, are not identified as music or musicians, nor can they enter our groups in later years of their middle school or high school experience. Those who do inquire about other modes of musical thinking and music making, and other kinds of music; who examine distribution of power (because of concerns for equity); and critically examine the norm tend to be marginalized while those who adhere to the norm have a sense of belonging and privilege. The resultant products include groups of students and teachers who are either considered privileged or who consider themselves privileged; they belong to a powerful ‘club’ who have defined and continue to define our profession at large, and interact within particular spaces of music making.

THE HOW

Focusing on how we think and act provides opportunities to reflect dispositions that involve treating people with reasonableness and fairness, and expecting reasoned thinking to be involved during interactions and a level of responsibility to participate in the communities in which we live, work, and play. It is this expectation of participation and responsibility that contributes to affordances of voices, demands reflection, and provides accessibility to all people and environments in which conversations occur.

What would educational environments feel and look like if we began with the context, culture and understandings (the ‘who’) of that environment and then began to make choices about what, where and how? How can schools be less normalized and more situated, with examination of the discourse and actions that occur in those environments?

In the process of writing this paper, it became clear to me that because of my ‘orientation’ blindness I can unintentionally marginalize the LGBT community as much as one who intentionally marginalizes. As one who is typically welcoming and inclusive, my ‘radar’ might not be up about how gay people perceive my intentions, and the assumptions I have that my intentions are perceived in ways that are intended. These are conversations that need to occur in our classrooms.
In addition, conversation need to included examination of the words ‘in place’ that articulate intentions of educational institutions, e.g., mission and value statements that serve as guides for policy, which in turn guide actions and implementation. Issues need to be identified and discussed in our classrooms, e.g., handling situations when conversations are homophobic. How would such conversations be felt in student teaching seminar? What other issues are related to interactions between our gay and straight students in which intentions and perceptions are misaligned, assumptions are made, and opaqueness occurs? When and how do conversations in our classrooms focus on issues related social justice, class environments, student-student and student teacher interactions, and philosophical topics? Re-think the words found in the mission and value statements in the previous pages. Do they resonate with thoughts above?

**DISPOSITIONS AND ATTRIBUTES**

Integral to the ‘whom’, ‘what’, and ‘how’ is the notion of reciprocity, and dispositions and attributes that contribute to learning communities as described above. Dewey (1916) defines reciprocity as “a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience” (p. 87). This experience would counter hegemonic experiences in which one is a master, the podium ‘determines’, and a methodology or theory ‘prescribes’. Engagement that involves reciprocity would be experienced as learning and teaching, and guiding and following, as informed and reflective individuals give back in meaningful ways to the community. Forming a reciprocal relationship through dialogue allows for insights and understandings of each other to occur, which in turn can dissipate perpetuating dualisms of ‘us and them’, Such a relationship includes knowing when not to ask and inform but when to listen, not to assume but support. The experiences gained during the forming of reciprocal relationships can afford spaces for growth to occur to next levels of understanding at both individual and collective levels.

Other dispositions and attributes that contribute to educative learning communities as described above include trust, honesty, capacity to respect, ability to self-reflect, curiosity, imagination, understanding of civic responsibility, and caring, (e.g., Colwell, 2007; Jorgensen, 2008; Noddings, 2004; Woodford, 2005). Such dispositions and attributes need to become part of our being and integral to whom we are as individuals. Making explicit the need for such characteristics while nurturing them and working with students as they reflecting on their growth need to interwoven throughout the
undergraduate experience. Attempting to ‘cover’ the content in one course in one semester—never to be encountered again—does not allow for the time it takes to experience growth across the degree and implementation in a variety of settings on and off campus. Time is needed to shape minds (Eisner, 1998) to be curious and imaginative; inculcate habits of mind to inquire, build trust and respect; and to grow as reflective practitioners and musicians.

**QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER DIALOGUE**

In addition to ensuring learning environments are educative and those in teaching roles acquire dispositions and attributes as listed above, what we need to continue the dialogue experienced at this conference, and in past writings. Much work in terms of making explicit the many issues that (still) exist and engaging our students in dialogue about those issues needs to be done. One idea might be to have sessions in which all participants of all orientations can ask questions of each other, particularly about issues for which assumptions occur; I would suggest this would be most beneficial for heterosexuals based on conversations I have had with LGBT friends over the last 25 years. There have been too many instances over the last few days at this particular conference when I find myself saying, “Really?” “Still?” While some of the issues are the same, there are others that have evolved as multiple identities are becoming more vocal about issues that are faced on a daily basis. The layers that exist and differ in terms of breadth and depth as issues and challenges are articulated are many, which makes the need for dialogue, awareness and understanding to increase.

As I reflect on questions, comments and issues presented over the last few days, the following come to mind for future research questions, and it is critical that we conduct this and other research related to LGBT issues. As we conduct our research we must make explicit the kinds of dialogue and communication that creates democratic communities in which participation includes reciprocity. We learn while learning and informing. Questioning, listening, and sharing are key actions if issues are to be understood across contexts and situations. As we intersect across our situations and reflect on that which causes us to pause, we must begin our inquiry with trust, honesty, and respectfulness.

There needs to be diverse points of views and experiences at the table so that the collective whole is richer and more varied. During the dialogues, identification of similarities and differences
across the diversity needs to occur so notions of us/them and either/or dualisms can dissipate. Recognition of life’s continuum on which we travel that involves varying degrees of diversity in all of its multiple shades and gradations reminds us that we do not live in a black and white world but one that is messy and continuous (Dewey, 1938; Jorgensen 2007).

So as we think about situations in which we intersect, interact, and connect—communicate as we build communities, what are offered below are possible topics for future dialogue that might be shared by all populations but with varying and differing experiences:

1. First and foremost, as mentioned above, we need to find ways to interweave related issues throughout the undergraduate experience so it is not part of a ‘content’ check list but, what I discussed earlier as a habit of mind to view issues through a critical lens throughout the undergraduate years.

2. The “professional closet” that which is accepted as professional presentation and representation is still within heteronormative spaces. What are the ramifications, emotionally and musically, of those who live in this professional closet and feel marginalized from an identity perspective?

3. What conversations can we have across our identities about what is acceptable in presentation and representation of self regardless of orientation. It is a topic that can cut across orientation and is relevant for all.

4. What are the long-term ramifications of those who constantly experience coming out? Recognition that one does not come out and stay out but must experience that process in each new context and situation one finds oneself (Lisa Furman, private conversation, May, 2010). What do we, as educators, do to minimize, with the goal to eliminate, the need for this to occur? What must occur for diversity to be ‘normal’?

5. What are the long-term affects of living dual lives, as being ‘out’ during one period of one’s life and ‘in’ in a subsequent life, as well as being ‘out’ in specific situations of one’s life and being ‘in’ in other situations? What are the affects of living paradoxically as each aspect of living the duality is dependent on place and space?

6. What are those socially constructed norms that define roles for all music educators regardless of sex, orientation, gender, age, race, and ethnic background? How does one navigate and negotiate the expectation that the roles will be adopted, particularly when they are in conflict
with one’s identity? What specific issues arise in heteronormative school environments, which can be extremely challenging and possibly confrontational?

7. How can we minimize the need to navigate work and social situations in which conversations revolve around topics typically associated with female or male interests, as well as topics that are associated with family, specifically heteronormative families?

8. How does one navigate and negotiate one’s leadership style as a male or female, straight or gay in environments that have constructed expectations of how one is to behave and lead, expectations that are in conflict with one’s style.

9. Where are the safe places and is the feeling of safety consistent across the experience of making music and the actual musical space? Are the spaces oppressive, and if so, why?

10. What do mission and value statements articulate and represent, and what evidence is there that they are actualized, implemented, and critically examined on a regular basis?

CONCLUSIONS

We all need to reflect on what privileges we have as a result of our sex, gender, orientation, age and social economic status. How do they shape our interactions and responses? How do they guide us as we reflect on who we think we are and how we think, act and feel? Why have these privileges evolved and where, when and how, and by whom? How are words chosen for mission and value statements, and what are the expectations of how they are enacted? How do we engage, interact, ask, listen, intend and perceive?

As humans we are fluid—not static—and live on a continuum of live experiences during which we encounter situations that cause us to pause, require us to reflect, and can contribute to our growth. We experience and construct our understandings—politically, socially, culturally sexually and musically. Our job as music educators is to understand our students and continue to work with them as they live and grow to be who they will be. Our actions and interactions with them will hopefully provide them with understandings about how to engage with their students in our continuous, messy, constructive world. During those engagements we need to nurture their level of critical inquiry as they challenge beliefs that are shaped socially, politically, culturally, sexually, and musically as they continue to build a fund of experience that is meaningful in all of their situated contextual settings (Bowman, 2005; Bruner, 1996; Jorgensen, 2003; Lave and Wenger, 1991; Vygotsky, 1978, Wiggins, 2001).
REFERENCES


