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## Rethinking Music “Appreciation”

By

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### Abstract

*This study reflects upon and explains the strategies developed in teaching music appreciation in a large urban secondary school. These reflections were developed through an action research study that took place during the 2005-2006 school year.*

*Taken in the broadest, possible view, this study is a small example of how globalization and its offshoots – diversity and multiculturalism – are inherently paradoxical. Fundamentally, these phenomena are characterized by trans-national flows of capital, labor, communications, and culture that tend to unite and broaden many aspects of peoples’ perspectives and identities – personal, creative, and musical. However, the same forces that power uniting and broadening can also divide, and erase local and personal identities. Such threats often fuel the determination of “marginal groups” to assert their independence negatively or positively – through all forms of creativity. As a music teacher, my task is to help students resist and replace negative forces with positive personal and cultural agency. Hence, the purpose of this study: to examine and describe the factors that contributed towards the resentment and discomfort my music appreciation students experienced at the start of the school year. It became evident that such emotions were the surface symptoms of issues related to social justice, diversity, democratic teaching and learning, and multiculturalism.*

### Introduction

In *Conventional Wisdom*, musicologist Susan McClary unravels the roots of several music-historical beliefs. However, under close scrutiny, these beliefs are not conventions of a musical nature, but rather, problematic formations of ideologies. I

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suggest that the same may be true in music education. I begin this paper by reflecting on selected “conventional wisdoms” within music education in order to suggest a few reversals. In doing so, I interrogated my practices as a “music appreciation teacher” and reflected on some strategies I have developed to move beyond conventional wisdom.

### **Problem**

There are a number of loaded terms within the field of music education. By “loaded” I am referring to terms that rest on a system of ideologies that loom in the background of our teaching. Such terms include music, appreciation, education, pedagogy, knowledge, and community. All of these words “mean” in relation to assumptions and, in many cases, unexamined ideologies. Thus, and depending on one’s ideological stance, each of these words deserves careful scrutiny and deconstruction. Because I cannot interrogate all of them here, I will focus on “appreciation” as it relates to music education.

To many music educators, music appreciation implies the teaching of “great” works. As Woody and Burns (2001) write:

A common approach to teaching music appreciation involves instruction about basic elements of music and historical review of Western music. In this approach, students are introduced to terminology for basic musical elements (e.g., rhythm, pitch, timbre) and then learn to identify the different uses of these elements while listening to classical music. (p. 58)

To Regelski (2006), music appreciation, as a paradigm, assigns

...reverent, informed, disciplined seriousness of connoisseurship established in connection with the aesthetic paradigm of 'appreciating' classical music – namely, studying history and theory and other information 'about' the music that...teachers have come to believe is the prerequisite 'training' for 'understanding' and thereby properly 'appreciating' *any* music. (p. 285)

Currently, Rice University offers a free, online introductory music appreciation course, designed to give adults "a new way to learn how to listen to music" (p. 8). The course utilizes musical compositions "as diverse" as Bach's *Brandenburg Concerto No. 5*, Beethoven's *Symphony No. 9*, and Schoenberg's *A Survivor From Warsaw*. The author claims that, although the course concentrates on Western musics, "the concepts taught in each lesson can be applied to jazz, folk music, popular music and other styles" (p. 8). In other words, one can learn to "properly" appreciate music by being educated through an elements-based curriculum because, supposedly, the elements cross stylistic boundaries. However, an education about the elements in Western classical music may not yield an appreciation for "other" musics. As Nettl (1995) notes: "musics differ greatly, at least in quantity, length of units (pieces, songs), and number of desirable timbres such as instruments, variety of available textures, and, most or all, size of repertory. Beyond that, a polymusical person may participate in a variety of musics to very different degrees and in very different ways" (p. 88).

Another convention is to view and teach music appreciation as a passive process. In other words, students in music appreciation classrooms usually "sit and listen" to Western classical music. While I certainly do not have an aversion to Western classical

music (I was trained as a classical flutist), this restricted educational practice leads to a second major problem. How can a music appreciation teacher teach for multicultural awareness, social justice, and critical pedagogy by means of such a rigid process and its concomitant context? Is it possible to alter convention in order to make a place for these issues and aims in music appreciation?

When I began teaching music appreciation during the winter of 2005, I thought: What a wonderful opportunity. I will teach my students Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven. I will show them “my” glorious world of music, from Debussy to Rachmaninov, musical symbolism to expressionism, Louis Armstrong to Terence Blanchard. I was optimistic that my students would be enthralled by the music I chose and presented, due to the sensuous nature of the sounds themselves, the “innate meaning” in the profound structural designs, and the rich historical contexts of these sounds. As it turned out, I was a victim of the “music appreciation convention,” which had its roots in: (1) my background as a classical performer; (2) my inherited common sense of music appreciation as the teaching of classical masterpieces; and (3) the text books I encountered that focused on teaching the structural elements of classical pieces. As it turned out, my students quickly became bored, resentful, and disconnected.

### **Methodology**

In an attempt to improve my pedagogy as a music appreciation teacher, I undertook a one-year action research study that took place during the fall of 2005 and the spring of 2006 at Long Island City High School in Queens, New York.

I applied various types of assessments throughout this study to gather data. My formative and summative assessments included students' daily music-listening journals, weekly quizzes, monthly tests, and research projects. Formal assessments were weighted equally alongside formative assessments of students' performance projects (including performing, composing, arranging, and conducting, some aspects of which will be explained below). Taken together, these forms of assessment and data collection allowed me to (a) gather evidence of students' growth in musical understanding, receptivity, self-knowledge, and levels of involvement, and (b) code themes in these (and other categories) that emerged during the study. In addition, I audio-taped my full-class lessons (daily), interviewed my students (semi-structured), coded students' self-assessments (which I also audio-taped), and used other qualitative tools, such as student questionnaires and student surveys. I also kept my own journal during the research process.

To foreshadow some emergent themes, it became evident early on that my students' resentments of and discomfort with certain styles of music, and my teaching thereof, were symptomatic of much deeper issues related to issues of social justice, diversity, democratic teaching and learning, and multiculturalism.

According to Sagor (2005), action research is an investigation that is "conducted by the person or the people empowered to take action concerning their own actions, for the purpose of improving their future actions" (p. 4). Carson and Sumara (1997) write that action research is "a lived practice that requires that the researcher not only investigate the subject at hand but, as well, provide some account of the way in which the investigation both shapes and is shaped by the investigator" (p. xii). Mention of "people"

and “lived practice” leads me to discuss the place of subjectivity in qualitative research. That is, we need to remind ourselves of a crucial issue that was first emphasized by John Dewey and that is now endorsed by the vast majority of contemporary neuroscientists and cognitive psychologists: human beings are embodied creatures; that is the mind is at one with the body. Or, as the saying goes among today’s leading scientists of mind, “no body, never mind” (Johnson, 2007). In short, the dualist assumption of a mind-body split, which still permeates much experimental and qualitative research methodology, has been debunked; body, brain, mind, thinking, feeling, and consciousness are unified (Damasio, 1999; LeDoux, 2002). Thus, all processes of human thinking and decision-making are imbued with emotion; humans are incapable of emotionless observation. It is therefore impossible to eliminate subjective reactions and descriptions from qualitative research. Moreover, neuroscientists (e.g., Damasio and LeDoux) assure us that emotions are observable – we can physically see evidence of sadness, joy, anger, and so on – and we have language, which enables us to communicate about our emotions. On the other hand, of course, our feelings of anger, happiness, and so forth, are always internal and unique. The upshot is that to eliminate subjectivity from qualitative data gathering and data analyses (even if this were possible) would be to eliminate a fundamental aspect of a researcher’s selfhood and his/her students’ human nature and behaviors in classrooms. Also, since the interdependence of music and emotion is universally acknowledged, it makes no sense to ask that subjectivity be omitted from qualitative studies of music education.

### Initial Reflections

One entry in my diary reads:

*Monday, September 26<sup>th</sup>*

Music Appreciation is the most difficult class I teach – and it's not because of my knowledge in the subject. Still, I must be doing something terribly wrong... Today I taught dynamics. Many students were totally removed from the discussion. I looked out over the room and saw a sea of blank stares. A few students had their heads down on their desks. When I asked them to join the rest of the class, one student said under her breath: "What for?" Why aren't students enjoying the musical selections I play? Why don't they respond (emotionally, intellectually, physically) to Bach's Brandenburg 5<sup>th</sup> Concerto? The reasons had to lie much deeper than Bach's music as "innately meaningful aesthetic structures."

*Wednesday, October 5<sup>th</sup>*

It seems like we are all wasting each other's time. Students who love rap want to listen to rap. Those who love R&B want to listen to R&B. They "tune out" all types of musics they don't immediately know or like. They even judge musics according to the artwork on CD jacket-covers. It seems that I'm only exposing students to "sounds." This is not education.



These initial observations of my problematic situation took place during my first weeks of teaching. I began to ask my students: Why don't you like this music? The students' answers were invariably the same, no matter their ethnicity. Many of them said they didn't understand it, or that it all sounded the same. But of course, this is a major challenge of music education – to make the unknown and unfamiliar more lucid, perceptible, and thereby, one hopes, more enjoyable, if not a pathway to an expanded universe of musical experiences. Nevertheless, the response that seemed most telling was when Angelique said: “That's white people's music. How is that going to help me?” Indeed, what was this music “good for” in these students' immediate lives and cultural contexts, which I describe in more detail in a moment. Why *would* my students want to respond to this music? Why *should* they show this music any respect?

These questions caused me to reflect on my personal attitudes and prejudices. In addition, I queried the white, European, classical prejudices inherent in the “conventional wisdom” of music appreciation. I then asked myself the following questions: Perhaps if I respect their music, they'll give my music a chance? What will happen when I vary the music listening assignments? What will happen when I engage them in listening, performing, composing, arranging, and conducting their musics and my musics? Will this increase the gap between us or bring us closer together?

I began an action research study with the hopes of breaking down the borderlines that existed between my students and I. In doing so, my aim was to unite us as a community within the walls of our classroom. I wanted to make my classroom, “Room 192,” a place where musics of all kinds filled the minds and spirits of everyone, where students felt comfortable discussing the musics they enjoyed and became inspired to

welcome musics that were unfamiliar to them. To improve my work and answer key questions, I had to move quickly beyond my role as “teacher” to teacher-as-researcher. I wanted my students to be at the center of learning “music,” in the broadest sense. To achieve this, I needed to become a more refined self-observer, and teacher-learner participant.

### **Context**

Built in 1995, Long Island City High School is a very large, urban secondary school. Originally intended to hold 2,500 students, the building housed approximately 4,300 students and staff in 2005-2006. It is nearly three blocks long and six stories high. In addition to all the normal academic courses, the school’s offerings include film studies, jewelry making, opera productions, ceramics, Latin, culinary courses, (to name only a few) and provides art studios, an auto-shop, science labs, a swimming pool, a state-of-the-art kitchen for teaching future chefs (all of which back onto a picturesque view of Manhattan).

The Principal of Long Island City High School, William Bassell, is an active proponent of the arts and a staunch believer in a well-rounded education for all. A former English teacher with an incomparable knowledge of opera, specifically, and classical music, generally, he teaches an opera class at 7 a.m. on Mondays and Fridays in addition to his administrative duties. It is because of him that the school’s offerings are so varied. Our library has collections of films, CDs, and journals and magazines for almost any trade or hobby. We have popular novels and classics in a half dozen languages. In spite of this depth and breadth of offerings, my school is not located in a rich, white suburb. On

the contrary, Long Island City High School is located in a low, socio-economic, urban neighborhood of Queens, New York.

The culture of the school mirrors its outside world. The school offers instruction in diverse languages ranging from Bengali to Spanish, Greek to Chinese. Our student population is equally diverse. In 2005-06, the population statistics were: 18% Asian; 15% Black; 52% Hispanic; and 16% White. The population of my music appreciation class was no exception. In addition to the many ethnicities present in my classroom, 10% of my students needed special Instructional Support Services and 20% were at varying levels of ESL. The Latino students, especially those that were not native born, preferred to listen to Latin-based musics (salsa, bachata, and the ever-popular reggeaton). The black students tended to download the latest crazes in hip-hop and rap; they could argue critically about subtle differences among rapping styles and the rappers who show linguistic mastery. Collectively, the girls and boys who had lived in the U.S. for more than five years loved J.Lo; newly arrived students had yet to learn who she is and what kind of music she produces.

For example (and returning to my classroom as I experienced it in the present tense), Eduardo<sup>i</sup> is an average teenager. He has an iPod, a portable DVD player, a Nintendo portable game-boy, and a Nextel flip-phone – all at his disposal once he steps away from school property. On his iPod he has Juelz Santana and Bow Wow, among other rappers. He has no interest in reading books, but he enjoys flipping through *Car and Driver Magazine* to check his favorite automobiles. He takes pleasure in going to the movies to see films like “The Omen” and “X-Men: The Last Stand.” As his “music appreciation” teacher, I have less than six months to introduce Eduardo to the

multifaceted world of music. At the end of the semester, he can decide to return to his much loved world of hip-hop, or embrace other musics from the past and present. What will he choose, and why? I feel a professional responsibility to broaden my students' personal and musical identities; on the other hand, I feel an equal responsibility to protect and enhance their abilities to develop musical expressions of their self-identities, as these are manifested in their local, racial, gendered, socio-economic, and political circumstances.

### **Diversity and Its Concomitants**

In his book, *American Education*, Joel Spring (2006), a professor of Education at the New School University, writes: "The U.S. student population will increasingly be more diverse with regard to race, ethnicity, and language as a result of changes in U.S. immigrations laws" (p. 103). But what does he mean by "diverse"? And does diversity mean inclusiveness, or exclusivity?

Race is one way to conceptualize diversity. If I think about my music appreciation class in terms of race, it is undoubtedly diverse in so far as my students are African-American, Black, Hispanic, Asian, and White. Some are very recent immigrants; some have been in the U.S. for a longer period. Some are from middle-class families; most are not. Some speak English well, some not all. What do these characteristics mean for me as a teacher? How can we, as teachers, support all our students? And how do students learn empathy? How do we honor differences while bringing people closer together? These are profound ethical and moral questions. Many educational theorists and scholars apply

the highly contested concept of “multiculturalism” to celebrate distinctiveness and separateness while maintaining an inclusive stance towards education and citizenship.

Nelson, et. al. (2003) write: “Multiculturalists agree that people see the world from slightly different perspectives. Everyone brings understandings to events based on their personal and academic experiences and on other interpretive lenses through which they view the world” (pp. 282-83). According to Nelson, multiculturalism is a matter of seeking respect through knowledge and understanding. To say the least, the United States is a dramatically diverse and divided country today. At its simplest, multiculturalism is asking that diversity be problematized through action and reflection – through praxis – in the context of education. For example, many teachers seem unaware that their bias toward a Eurocentric curriculum discriminates against a variety of people and ethnicities. Nelson, et. al. write:

Multiculturalism is a call for fairness and a better representation of the contributions of all Americans. Multiculturalists....recognize schools must ensure *all* students preserve, as well, their individual ethnic, cultural, and economic identities. (p. 284)

Spring emphasizes the “empowering” factor in multicultural education. He notes that studying the cultures, ethnicities, and economic identities of other cultures through the lens of other cultures raises both personal and humanitarian consciousness. He writes: “Ethnic studies can empower dominated and oppressed immigrant cultures by creating an understanding of the methods of cultural domination and by helping to build self-esteem” (p. 135). Multiculturalism for social empowerment, according to Spring, tries to preserve

cultural identity while helping to promote social justice and social action (p. 136). Nieto (1992) discusses the nature of multicultural empowerment. Nieto (2003) writes:

Despite my great support for these philosophies, however, I am also concerned that they can be used in simplistic ways that fail to address the tremendous inequities that exist in our schools. For example, to adopt a multicultural basal reader is far easier than to guarantee that all children will learn to read; to plan an assembly program of ethnic music is easier than to provide music instruction for all students; and to train teachers in a few behaviors in cultural awareness or curriculum inclusion is easier than to address widespread student disengagement in learning. Although these may be valuable activities, they fail to confront directly the deep-seated inequalities that exist in schools. Because they are sometimes taken out of context – isolated as prepackaged programs or "best practices"—multicultural education...can become band-aid approach to serious problems that require nothing short of major surgery. (p. 2)

Nieto refers to achievement gaps, equity, access, social justice, racism, discrimination, and so forth. But as a “music appreciation teacher,” what steps do I take to promote an antiracist and anti-discriminatory atmosphere when so many of my students provoke the “clashing of cultures”? Educational philosopher bell hooks (1994) notes that despite current discussions of multiculturalism among practitioners, scholars, politicians and policy makers, the teaching profession still lacks the commitment and practical know-how needed to transform classrooms into sites of true multicultural

education. How can my classroom be transformed so that learning is inclusive? hooks writes: “on all levels, from elementary to university settings – we must acknowledge that our styles of teaching may need to change” (p. 35). She continues:

Let’s face it: most of us were taught in classrooms where styles of teachings reflected the notion of a single norm of thought and experience, which we were encouraged to believe was universal....As a consequence, many teachers are disturbed by the political implications of a multicultural education because they fear losing control in a classroom where there is no one way to approach a subject – only multiple ways and multiple references (pp. 35-36).

In other words, hooks asks educators and students to transform the classroom to one that deliberately strives for different ways of knowing and learning. When educators accept this kind of teacher-student mutuality and openness, I believe we can “teach in ways that transform consciousness, creating a climate of free expression that is the essence of a truly liberatory liberal arts education” (hooks, p. 44).

Of course, there is no shortage of skeptics. Nelson warns that multiculturalism may be “divisive and destructive.” At first glance, one might think: How can including everyone in a classroom, and celebrating diversity, be destructive? Nelson’s point is that while multiculturalists spend most of their energy revising the curricula in order to avoid Eurocentrism, they fail to be honest about the fact that schools cannot teach everyone everything. In other words, “curriculum is a zero sum game; if a school adds something, it also must take something else out” (p. 291). So, how many perspectives do we teach?

Only those that correlate with the ethnicities represented in our classrooms? This question raises another problem. Albert Shanker points out that to the degree we limit our teaching to the cultures and circumstances of the students in front of us, multiculturalism becomes racist: “it assumes that [say] every single African American child shares the same perspective, as do all members of any religious and/or ethnic group” (in Nelson, et. al., pp. 292-93). Where is the democracy in this?

And what about problems of language? Immigrants are constantly entering the United States. Bell, Joshi, and Zúñiga (2007) write: “Language interacts with race as well to affect status in the United States” (p. 149). They note, through Nieto’s *linguicism* and Dardar’s *language domination*, that there is “prejudice and discrimination based on language” (p. 149). Let us assume we have eliminated all the problems involved in a multicultural curriculum. Let us assume we have succeeded in making it democratic and that we have the know-how to teach for difference and diversity, celebrating heterogeneity everywhere. How do we deal with the daily reality of students who are not fluent in English? In my class, a few students were newly arrived immigrants with no English language skills; a number had very limited English language ability. If we are a democratic society, we must understand this problem and work to alleviate the situation toward empowering all our students. Within this situation, Long Island City High School is very fortunate. We have a program that partners bilingual students with students in need of English language assistance. However, this does not and cannot accommodate everyone – scheduling conflicts, personal conflicts, subject-knowledge conflicts prohibit our best intentions.



Spring's solution for alleviating some of these challenges is bicultural education. His approach would enable immigrant students to cope with and maneuver through different cultural worlds. For example, in bicultural education a Mexican-American student would retain his/her Mexican heritage and language (i.e., culture and identity). S/he would not be forced to surrender one culture and language for another. To Spring, bicultural education is democratic because it adds Western culture to a student's pre-existing culture, without trying to subtract anything. In this way, a student gains and retains heritage.

Like multiculturalism, bicultural education sounds positive. But even if Americans accepted this form of democracy in schools, who will pay to prepare teachers to teach in more than one language? How many cultures are we prepared to work with? Two, four, a dozen? And if we cannot accommodate everyone, are we being democratic?

The above issues bring us to the following set of questions: What is the role of public education in a democratic society? What is the purpose of schooling? What are the roles of schooling in regard to the economic and social structures of society? In attempting to answer such questions, Cochran-Smith (2003; 2004; 2005) has coined the term "New Multiculturalism." For her, many problems within the teaching profession rest in traditional models of teaching and teacher-education. While she approaches these problems from a teacher-education standpoint, many of her points can be applied to the practical know-how needed to "succeed" in today's educational environment. She mentions the following assumptions (2004):

American schooling (and society) are meritocratic (Goodwin, 2001;

Ladson-Billings, 1999; Weiner, 2000); racism and sexism are problems that have been solved (Gay & Howard, 2000); tracking systems and high-stakes tests are neutral ways of organizing for learning and assessing merit (Oakes, 1988); and the purpose of schooling is to assimilate all students into the mainstream and thus into the labor force in order to support the nation's place in the global economy<sup>ii</sup> (Apple, 2001). (p. 17)

To combat these assumptions, the "New Multiculturalism" aligns itself with critical pedagogy and social justice. The "New Multiculturalism" not only combats the above-mentioned assumptions, it attempts to prepare prospective teachers to construct curriculum, implement instruction, and interact with students in ways that support today's critical concerns with social justice. The goal of teachers, according to Cochran-Smith is to "contribute" to the social movements "in essential ways by being part of collective projects and larger communities for social justice" (p. 19).

But how can teachers do this? Bell, Washington, Weinstein, and Love (2007) propose nine prerequisites for teaching for social justice. These are: being aware of our own social identity; confronting previously unrecognized prejudices; responding to biased comments in the classroom; overcoming doubts and ambivalence about one's own competency, needs for learner approval, and fears of ethnically diverse students; dealing with emotional intensity and concerns for control over the classroom; monitoring tendencies to disclose personal beliefs and personal experiences in class; negotiating power and authority issues; and attending to institutional risks and dangers. Cultural, racial, and ethnic knowledge about one's self and others needs to be carefully developed. It is through these types of understandings that we can better serve the quest for a more

inclusive classroom and society. In an article called “Rethinking Education in the Global Era,” Marcelo Suárez-Orozco reinforces the primacy of these professional obligations: “An education for globalization should aim for nothing more – and nothing less – than to educate ‘the whole child for the whole world’” (p. 212). Suárez-Orozco discusses the need to educate students both socially and emotionally. He states that education must do the above for:

...cross-cultural work: empathy and learning with and from others who happen to differ in race; religion; national, linguistic, or social origin; values; and worldview. They are all our brothers and sisters on the ever more diverse, interconnected, and global family (p. 212).

### **My Praxis**

Returning now to the context of my teaching-learning actions and experiences, I found that using the traditional approach to music appreciation in the context of my diverse classroom population was ineffective and objectionable on both pedagogical and racial bases. The problem with the conventional approach lies in its implicit assumptions about the social network that exists between the musics and the students in a classroom. That is, the traditional approach assumes that the aim of music listening instruction is the fostering of conservative/Western/male connoisseur value-stance. In stark contrast, the students in my classroom automatically conceived Western classical music as music for “rich people” and “white people” who “live in mansions.” In fact, the students’ “labeling” highlighted set of social/political assumptions that were not entirely wrong.

Whether this is an example of “reverse discrimination” or not, it is not the issue. Rather than argue with them that my music was worth listening to, I needed a way for my students to join me in challenging stereotypes of all kinds.

I found that working from the text-book (e.g., *The Enjoyment of Music* by Machlis and Forney for example) did not guide us toward interesting forays into musical-emotional experiences, or alert us to musical self-expression by performers and composers, nor did it aim at or achieve inclusivity. Another problem with prescribed music appreciation curricula is that, for the most part, they don’t consider two important variables: the classroom’s dynamic – social, political, economic, and emotional, and various aspects of music’s interrelated themes. For example, by working from a strictly historical or structural standpoint, a teacher cannot tie together (say) the profound connections between *La Susanna* by Alessandro Stradella (1639-1682), an Italian composer of dramatic music, with a performance of “Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross,” sung by the Swan Silvertones (see Susan McClary, 2000).

Thus, and for all these reasons, I sought ways (through this study) to (a) teach music in terms of musical/cultural/social systems, (b) bring a wide range of musics into our musical classroom conversation, and (c) acknowledge my students as active participants in our mutual teaching-learning process, as rather than passive receptacles waiting to be filled with musical knowledge. However, I had one basic operating principle. All students must respect “otherness.” By this I meant that everyone’s musics and musical cultures are of equal value and should be respected accordingly.

I devoted the first week (or so) of classes to laying a philosophical foundation by engaging my students in probing the basic question: “What is music?” To answer this

question, I employed musical actions and reflections in relation to pieces that I deliberately choose for their unusual nature. For example, I involved my students in rehearsing, performing, and listening to Gabriel Charpentier's 20<sup>th</sup>-century piece *Permutations 1,2,3,4*.<sup>iii</sup> We followed this by listening to Steve Reich's *Clapping Music*, which bears similarities to *Permutations*. We created our own percussive pieces using 20<sup>th</sup>-century "soundscape techniques." At that point, we attempted to answer the question: "Was this music? If so, why? If not, why not?" Krist argued that "clapping can't be music," while Brian, who enjoys playing the drums at home, said "a drummer can make music with beats: isn't clapping sort of the same thing?" From there, we began to move through a number of different musical styles. Fundamental to this process was deliberate mutual musical respect and openness. For example, I had the students bring their favorite pieces to class. I established a pattern of reflection we use each time: Explain why you like this piece. What is special about it? What meaning, emotional or otherwise, does it hold for you?

In the process, I utilized Elliott's (1995) way of explaining music by using his three visual variations on the word music: MUSIC, Music, music. The students began to think of and approach music in a multidimensional way, as: understand that music is (1) MUSIC – a worldwide human phenomenon; music is something that people do everywhere according to different kinds of cultural-musical knowledge and style preferences in their musical communities; (2) Music – stands for one specific musical style; and (3) music refers to specific kinds of musical products, such as compositions, improvisations, and so forth. Elliott writes that a specific style of music is an identifiable outcome of a particular musical community that shares a tradition, principles, standards,

and musical preferences (pp. 43-44). After the students understood the “multiple” nature of “music,” according to Elliott, we reviewed the Charpentier, Reich, and other percussive pieces. Krist said: “OK. So, the clapping music IS music, but it’s not music I would listen to when I’m at home alone.” This comment brought up “stepping.” Many of the students are excellent “steppers.” Given that this type of music is percussive dance music in which the participants’ entire bodies are used, students compared the Charpentier, Reich, and their own pieces to this African-American school-yard competition. We watched some of the stepping scenes in “Drumline.” Using Elliott’s ideas, the students concluded that, yes, stepping is “music.” And if stepping is music, and is listened to and performed by certain sets of people, the same would go for the 20<sup>th</sup>-century percussive pieces we learned in class. Krist said: “OK. Well, I like our pieces and Reich’s piece better than Charpentier’s.”

I guided my class through various types of music in order to connect questions such as, “What makes jazz sound like jazz?” Or, “What makes hip-hop different from rap, considering the social and cultural contexts in which these musics are made and used?” These processes engaged my students in musical praxis – critical action and reflection toward deeper and, possibly, “revised” thinking and feeling – in regard to musics that were both unfamiliar and familiar to them. This teaching approach seemed to engage my students in various musical actions and cultures more effectively and enjoyably than my initial efforts.

My diary reads:

*Wednesday, March 2<sup>nd</sup>*

I was so happy to read Dhariana's music listening journal today. While listening to a movement from Bach's B-minor Mass, she wrote: "The track seems to start off sad but then gradually it begins to show a romantic side to it. I feel this because the dynamics are swelling like waves, as if two lovers were seeing each other after a long time of not seeing each other, spending time with one another. I think this music has a lot of feeling to it." I saw her in the hallway later that day and said: "You know, when we listened to a different movement of the same piece earlier in the semester, you said: 'Bach was for old people.' What changed your mind about his music?" She shrugged her shoulders and said: "That was before you showed us pictures of King Louis's Versailles. I loved looking at those pictures of his bedroom. And the fountains. And those mirrors everywhere. When listening to Bach's music, I thought of the pictures you showed us and imagined myself sleeping in that bed. Maybe Bach slept in a bed like that before he'd be performing for some King? And maybe he would miss his own bed and his wife? And maybe those kinds of thoughts would make him write his music?" She said she couldn't talk more as she was late for class. I stood in the hallway for a moment to process our encounter. And I realized I was smiling.

To offer another example, allow me to share some strategies I used to help "*my students and I*" learn the differences between dance rhythms. I use the words "*students and I*" purposely, as you will see in a moment. Yes, we learned formal information –

definitions of minuet, reggae, tango, waltz, melody, harmony, and so on. This formal information was filtered into the actions of daily lessons. We listened to examples of many different dance rhythms. We all moved as we felt the inclination to do so. The students began to familiarize themselves with the rhythmic patterns and “feels” of the dances through listening. For many music teachers, there is nothing new in this, I know. But for my students, this variety was radical. At this point, I took a survey of the class to find out the different types of dances that the students were able to do themselves, and that they could teach the rest of us. After surveying the students’ abilities, I shared my knowledge with them. I taught them the musics and dances of the waltz, jazz swing, the twist, and the Charleston (my ballroom dance lessons at NYU finally paid off). Then – and here is the key point – *they taught me*. Through my students, I have learned how to salsa and merengue. A Tibetan student brought a video of national Tibetan dancing to show us the enchanting moves of her culture. A Bengali student brought Indian hip-hop music and taught us the dancing that goes on in clubs in India.

The students became very comfortable with me, and I with them. We reached a place where everyone felt welcome, where no one’s music was better than another, only different, and where everyone’s music was always welcome. In each class, the last ten minutes were dedicated to listening and learning from CDs that the students brought to class, or that they wanted to hear again from a previous class.

What I found was that when I introduced the students to unfamiliar musical territory, like castrati singing, or the differences between French, German, and Italian Baroque music, or Beethoven’s evolutionary and revolutionary role in the history of Western Classical music, they were more open and eager to learn because we grew



together. I was not the only teacher in the room. They were excited and proud to teach me their knowledge of “their musics.” Thus, a lesson on musical virtuosity was not dedicated only to Liszt or Paganini; they brought in the rapper Eminem. I introduced them to Wynton Marsalis; they brought in Daddy Yankee. I played and discussed Vladimir Horowitz; they brought CDs by Christina Aguilera. I brought CDs of Ella Fitzgerald. I did not replace their cultures; I embraced them. I did not neglect their cultures; I tried to enrich them, as they did mine.

Recall my student Eduardo, who I mentioned earlier in this paper. At the end of our course, he had downloaded Mozart’s “Jupiter Symphony” and Beethoven’s “Moonlight Sonata” onto his iPod because, he said, “I like them.” He did not replace Nas with Mozart; he simply added to the number of possible selections available to him.

### **Conclusion**

It is difficult for me to summarize all of the results of this study in one paper. Too many exchanges, transformations, transferences, and “value evolutions” took place. Also, the positive effects of this study could be due to several variables. Perhaps the students developed respect for other people’s musics because I accepted the students and their musics “as they were.” Perhaps it was because I tried to find where the students were, and began the process of learning there. Overall, I think it was because I moved beyond the conventional wisdom embedded in traditional “music appreciation.” Of course, I cannot be sure. What I can say, however, is that this study had a lasting effect on the students and me. We created a learning community where everyone, and everyone’s music

mattered; we valued each other; we were working and learning together through and because of music. I also believe that we will never forget the memories of our time together, having experienced a respect for sameness and otherness through the praxis of music making and listening. We enacted themes of social justice in the “time and space” of musical-social experiences. As Holt (1970) writes:

We can only grow from where we are, and when we know where we are, and when we feel that we are in a safe place, on solid ground...

We cannot be made to grow in someone else’s way, or even made to grow at all. We can only grow when and because we want to, for our own reasons, in whatever ways seem most interesting, exciting, and helpful to us (p. 25).

The following year, Zena, a student who was a participant in my action research study, said:

“Dr. Silverman? Remember last year when you showed us how Billy Joel borrowed Beethoven’s melody?”

“Yes, Zena, why? What’s up?”

“Well, what’s the name of that Beethoven piece? I forget.”

“It’s the second movement of Beethoven’s ‘Pathetique’ Sonata.”

“Do you think I can find it on the Internet to download it? I keep coming back to that melody over and over again in my head. I really like it.”

“Sure. You won’t have a problem finding it on-line. Come find me if you do and we’ll look for it together.”

This particular student originally informed me that there would be “no way” she’d “ever get into classical music.” Yet, somehow, it happened.

Seen in the broadest view, my study is a small example of how globalization and its offshoots – diversity and multiculturalism – are inherently paradoxical. That is, while globalization can unite and broaden many aspects of peoples’ perspectives and identities, (personal, creative, and musical), globalization can also overwhelm, divide, and erase local and personal identities. Such threats often fuel the determination of “marginal groups” (like my students) to assert their independence negatively or positively – through all forms of creativity (e.g., language, ritual, dress, and, of course, music). My task, I believe, is to help my students resist and replace negative forces with positive personal and cultural agency. I believe this can be achieved because inherent in the same agency with which students protect and cherish their “received” cultural identities are the dispositions and skills they need to broaden and navigate many different self-and-musical identities.

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<sup>i</sup> All students' names are pseudonyms to protect anonymity.

<sup>ii</sup> While these are conclusions drawn by the authors (as cited by Cochran-Smith), they are stated in opposition to the educational establishment. For example, Michael Apple (2001; 2003) is criticizing American education. He argues that many schools are not interested in their students' best interests, but in the interests of the schools. Schools have shifted from "student needs to student performance and from

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what the school does for the student to what the student does for the school” (p. 6). Gay and Howard (2000) note that students in teacher education programs claim that race and ethnicity are not important issues because “people are more alike than different” (p. 3). Oakes (1992) states that due to tracking, students, depending on their race and social status, have very different educations. She notes: “our perceptions of ability tend to run along lines of race and ethnicity” (p. 20).

<sup>iii</sup> This piece can be found in R. Murray Schafer’s book *The composer in the classroom*.