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## Critical Pedagogy as a Pedagogy of “Love”

### ABSTRACT

*Thanks in part to the research and scholarship of Frank Abrahams (e.g., 2005, 2006, 2007, 2019), his welcoming of scholars into the field, as well as his dedication to the development and growth of the music education profession, music teaching and learning maintains particular positions connected to critical pedagogy and the work of Paulo Freire. The purpose of this paper is to extend Abrahams’ work by examining critical pedagogy as a pedagogy of “love” (e.g., Darder, 2000, 2011, 2017; hooks, 2004; Martin, 2004). Additionally, this paper examines personal and political natures of critical pedagogy as love for music teaching and learning.*

### Keywords

critical pedagogy; love; Frank Abrahams; Paulo Freire; music education; liberation

This experience of genuine love (a combination of care, commitment, trust, knowledge, responsibility, and respect) nurtured my wounded spirit and enabled me to survive acts of lovelessness. I am grateful to have been raised in a family that was caring, and strongly believe that had my parents been loved well by *their* parents they would have given that love to their children. They gave what they had been given—care. Remember, care is a dimension of love, but simply giving care does not mean we are loving. — bell hooks, *All About Love: New Visions*<sup>1</sup>

The feminist and civil rights activist Carol Hanisch popularized the phrase, “the personal is political.” This phrase became one of the slogans of the second-wave of feminism in the United States. Hanisch meant that all matters—e.g., educational, historical, pedagogical, musical, cultural—showcase personal histories, stories, and problems within public arenas. I hope it comes as no surprise, then, that this reflection is personal and political. It is personal because

<sup>1</sup> hooks (2000, pp. 7-8).

what follows attempts to link my experiences to the larger context of scholarship in music education; it is personal because of the relational dimensions of my own coming to terms with the foundations of my own teaching-and-learning; it is personal because of the ways my own subjectivities manifest in everything I engage with and through; it is personal because all I think and do are imbued with my life's values given my experiences to this point. Additionally, what follows is simultaneously political because I am sharing all of that; more foundationally, what follows is political because of relational ways of being in the world. And, importantly, if I consider myself a professional, I recognize the “reflexive interpretations” I make occur not only through the lens of my theoretical understandings, but also “through the mirror” of my subjectivity and my feelingful embodied self (Manning-Morton, 2006, p. 42) within the very political domain of education.

My first formal introduction to Frank Abrahams occurred in 2006 at the MayDay Colloquium hosted by Westminster Choir College of Rider University in Princeton, NJ. It was the first MayDay Colloquium I attended—however solely as an observer. I wanted to get a sense of the group—and I was exceptionally nervous. I knew that some of the researchers, scholars, and writers I revered most would be there. However, amidst the snack tables and lunch meetings, bottles of water and homemade pretzels, it was Frank<sup>2</sup> who made me feel most welcomed and “at home.” Because of this meeting, I put my hat in the ring and presented at the 2008 MayDay Colloquium in Boston.

Additionally, and prior to that, I gave a paper at the 2007 College Music Society's Northeast Chapter Annual Conference held at Rider University. After presenting there as well as at a few other local-to-New York/New Jersey conferences, in 2008, Frank invited me to sit on the Editorial Board for *Visions of Research in Music Education* (VRME). Upon publishing with the journal, and guest editing a Special Issue (2012) on John Dewey and James Mursell's influences and impact to music education, in 2015, Frank invited me to become Associate Editor of VRME. I worked alongside Frank in that capacity for six years.

Thus, since 2008, Frank and I have been colleagues in a number of capacities, whether as editor of VRME, author/scholar, or through our connections in higher education in New Jersey. By way of examples, David Elliott, Gary McPherson, and I invited him to contribute a chapter to our co-edited volume, *The Oxford Handbooks of Philosophical and Qualitative Assessment in Music Education*. In 2018, Frank and I co-hosted *Visions of Research in Music Education: The Conference* at Westminster Choir College. Clearly, we've interacted in varied ways over the years. I consider myself fortunate to have experienced Frank's generosity of spirit and dedication to the growth and development of the music education profession. Additionally, were it not for his own research agenda, I may never have fully found my own. How so?

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<sup>2</sup> My hope is the reader will understand the use of a first name here, given my working relationship with Frank Abrahams. It simply feels off-putting to refer to him in the formal “third person.”

## ABRAHAMS AND FREIRE: CRITICALLY PEDAGOGICAL

The first time I visited Rider University and Westminster Choir College, “critical pedagogy” and other Freirean principles foundationally supported and framed the music education course work (at both the undergraduate and graduate levels). Then I learned that Frank traveled to Brazil where he studied Freire’s work, so it made sense to me that I examine closely his findings in relation to his higher-education curricular work, as well as his scholarship and more practical writing for public school music teachers (e.g., Abrahams, 2005a, 2005b, 2007, 2007b).

I read Frank’s examinations of Freire’s principles with an equal amount of enthusiasm and skepticism. I felt enthusiastic because of the challenges Freire’s pedagogical principles welcomed me to invoke and evoke in my teaching practices, especially for me as a (then) public school English and music teacher. I held onto a similar degree of skepticism for the same exact reason. I often uttered the phrase, “Where is the critical in critical pedagogy?” With this question I meant: In what ways are Freirean pedagogical principles critical of those same pedagogical principles? I continued to search for clarity in Frank’s work and, therefore, the source: by critically feeling my way through Freire’s volumes, by attempting to create spaces for myself that challenged my own schooling in order to attempt similar acts of freedom with the students in my care (e.g., Silverman, 2013). As Giroux (1988) noted, Freire himself would have wanted it this way; his work was never “meant to be adopted unproblematically” (p. 114). Therefore, I questioned and requestioned both Freire’s pedagogical principles, as well as the questions I posed of them. Through this examination, through living with and living through Frank’s scholarship as well as Freirean principles and potentialities (more details below), I came to understand the following basic tenets for my teaching:

- that all learners possess potentials;
- that we are all learners and teachers;
- that personal experience is knowledge;
- that learning showcases feeling, thinking, and doing;
- that knowledge is power; and
- that self-knowledge is empowering.

Relatedly, critical pedagogues ask four interrelated questions when planning and while teaching: “Who am I? Who are my students? What might they become? What might we become together?” (Abrahams, 2005a, p. 63). Such questions are spirally bound, and answers are contingent upon contexts, circumstances, experiences, and more. Notably, the process of asking and answering such questions never ends. Thus, the critical pedagogue doesn’t seek “once and for all” declarations that address each question. Rather these four questions recognize that: education is always personal and political; conversations, dialogues, and, above all else, listening, informs all teaching and learning

encounters and iterations; the more teachers know themselves, the better equipped they are to learn, grow, and transform, and therefore engage as those who are in a constant state of becoming; and teachers have as much to learn from students as students do from their teachers. As Freire (1998) acknowledged, “education does not make us educable. It is our awareness of being unfinished that makes us educable” (p. 58).

Given that numerous publications (e.g., Abrahams, 2005a, 2005b, 2007a, 2007b) inspired my teaching habits, dispositions, and reflective practices, I felt myself leaning into Freire’s writings more and more. And the more I reflected upon the implications for education, generally, and music teaching and learning, specifically, the more I understood that there was much more to be gleaned and interpreted given the confines of schooling and the professional “habits” of music teachers and learners. Because of this, I revisit some of Freire’s contextual and pedagogical details with the aim of providing clarity and hope. Thus, towards the end of the paper, I provide the additional lens of love for music teachers’ consideration.

## **FOUNDATIONS OF FREIRE’S CRITICAL PEDAGOGY**

According to Freire, education is simultaneously personal and political (Giroux, 2017; Freire, 1970). It is political because education offers “students the conditions for self-reflection, a self-managed life, and critical agency” (Giroux, 2017, p. xii). It is personal for the very same reasons. For Freire, pedagogy, and the education it hopes to instill, does not indoctrinate, nor does it seek to train students into particular ways of thinking and being (Darder, 2017; Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2017). Additionally, all good pedagogy is personal and critical—both in the sense of being important and centered on questioning and thereby transformation—because it yields students analyzing their worlds, their own positionalities, and the power-structures therein.

Indeed, Freire’s critical pedagogy set alight and fueled a revolutionary turn in education. He felt that education is political action for human liberation from oppression and social injustices of many kinds. As Giroux (2010a) put it, critical pedagogy is an “educational movement . . . to help students develop consciousness of freedom, recognize authoritarian tendencies, and connect knowledge to power and the ability to take constructive action” (para. 1). Thus, critical pedagogy offers opportunities for students to engage in ethical ways of being in the world; it “provides the knowledge, skills, and social relations” (Giroux, 2017, p. xii) that help students explore being more fully oneself in relation to others. But how? And where did this postcolonial emancipatory promise emerge?

To understand the “why,” “how,” and “where” of Freire’s critical pedagogy, consider the following aspects from his biography. Although from a middle-class, Christian family in the Brazilian port of Recife, the Great Depression significantly impacted Freire’s family, and drove them into poverty. Such traumatic conditions affected Freire’s abilities in school. As a result, some of his teachers labeled him unfit for school: “I didn’t understand anything because of my hunger. I wasn’t dumb. It

wasn't lack of interest. My social condition didn't allow me to have an education. Experience showed me . . . the relationship between social class and knowledge" (Freire cited in Gadotti, 1994, p. 5). Such schooling and cultural/social contexts "motivated Freire to dedicate himself to transforming the lives of the poor, the marginalized, the politically and economically oppressed, and the personally and socially abused" (Elliott & Silverman, 2015, p. 138).

By way of further background information—and likely review for readers of this journal—while Freire toyed with becoming a priest (Kirylo, 2011), instead, he studied philosophy and law at the University of Recife. Returning to where he attended school, he taught at the Colégio Oswaldo Cruz (Oswaldo Cruz Secondary School) in Recife. There, Freire began developing his celebrated approach to teaching reading, which later evolved into a lifelong commitment to adult literacy education. Freire believed that literacy—largely conceived—empowers learners to exit a "culture of silence" in order to more fully and knowledgeably understand and therefore voice mistreatment and injustices (Freire, 1985, 1996). As a result, Freire's literacy programs enabled numerous farmers to read for the purpose of activating their critical thinking and problem posing abilities in order to help them challenge and question the social, economic, and political contexts of their lives, which in turn helped them participate as fully as possible in the gradual democratization of Brazil (Boyd, 2007, 2021). Please note: For Freire, reading and therefore literacy acted as "a process of apprehending power and causality in society and one's location in it" (Price, 2006, p. 902). Therefore, Freire's teaching of literacy worked towards the "emancipation and liberation of the oppressed through grassroots, revolutionary educational processes that empowered people to liberate themselves from colonial domination and thereby restore their indigenous cultures" (Elliott & Silverman, 2015, p. 138). Freire's work did not go unnoticed. As Kirylo (2013) explained, the establishment questioned Freire, which resulted in prison time and exile. Thus, in 1964 and for sixteen years, Freire left Brazil for "Bolivia, Chile, Harvard, and onto the World Council of Churches in Geneva, Switzerland" (Kirylo, p. 50). During this time in exile, he completed his seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

Numerous scholars have noted the Christianized Marxist humanism that sits at the foundation of Freire's theories (e.g., Boyd, 2012; Giroux, 1985). As Freire stated:

When I went first to meet with workers and peasants in Recife's slums, teach them and to learn from them, I have to confess that I did that by my Christian faith. . . I thought that I should do something, and what happened is that the more I went to the slum areas, the more I talked with people, the more I learned from the people. I got the conviction that people were sending me to Marx. The people never did say, "Paulo, please why do you not go to read Marx?" No. The people never said that, but reality said that to me. The misery of the reality. The tremendous domination, the exploitation . . . Then I began to read Marx and to read about Marx, and the more I did that the more I became convinced that we really would have to change the structures of reality, that we should become absolutely committed to a global process of transformation. But what is interesting in my case - not the case of all the people whose background

is similar to mine – “meetings” with Marx never suggested to me to stop “meeting” Christ... you ask me, then, if I am a religious man, I say no, I’m not a religious man... I would say that I am a man of faith. (Horton & Freire, 1990, pp. 245-246)

It would be a mistake, then, to assume that Freire’s positionality was neutral. In fact, he knew neutrality was a non-starter. Instead, his Christianity fueled his liberatory aims and pursuits. At the same time, as Kirylo (2011) pointed out, “existentialism, phenomenology, personalism, humanism, liberalism, and Marxism” influenced Freire’s philosophical thinking (p. 125).

Freire’s philosophy conceives liberation as a concrete social *praxis*—critical reflection and action, action and critical reflection—that unmask and unpacks the structures that support domination and that works to imagine and create revolutionary change: “To speak a true word,” says Freire (1970) “is to transform the world” (p. 68). For Freire, people possess the ability to transform their existence—their existential reality; however, this comes about only through critical reflection and action.

What this means for teaching and learning is that teachers and students focus on *problematizing*—on unpacking and daring to interrogate not just the strengths and weaknesses of an issue or situation, but the invisible networks of power and hegemony that cause injustice and inequality. Freire’s problem-posing yields students examining their reality as a situation or “problem” to be questioned, critically reflected upon, and therefore transformed. However, the structures and habits of schooling—e.g., standardized testing, equating “knowledge” with basic skills and competencies, ringing bells, over-crowding—tend to constrain and inhibit transformative potentials (Darder, 2017). Because of this, schools as institutions of learning needed to be problematized from the ground up, as well.

One such barrier came about through “banking education”; Freire viewed this kind of teaching as a major impediment that blocks potential transformation. Banking education assumes that students do not already possess any knowledge; their “bank accounts” are helpless, “empty heads.” Under such conditions, students learn to believe that teachers (i.e., “oppressors”) possess knowledge, as if it were a gift. This leads to students being conditioned to believe that if they are docile, unquestioning, and unassuming, the teacher will deposit the gift of knowledge in the student. However, “this so-called gift of knowledge is a false gift, because it serves only to maintain the oppressor’s domination of the oppressed” (Elliott & Silverman, 2015, p. 139). Such “transactional approaches” to teaching and learning shut down students’ critically reflective abilities as well as their curiosity, imaginative capacities, and creative ingenuity. Moreover, under such conditions, students cannot develop “critical-conceptual tools, enlightened perspectives, motivation, and hope needed to problematize and transform their life goals and social-political circumstances” (Elliott & Silverman, 2015, p. 139).

Freire’s work has received its share of criticism. Critics have complained that his views are too utopian; though as Freire and Shor (1987) explained, a utopia is a “dialectical relationship between denouncing the present and announcing the future”;

in education teachers and students “anticipate tomorrow by dreaming today” (p. 187). Still, some condemn Freire’s emphasis on revolution, emancipation, and freedom as simply utopian dreaming. Others resist his Christian and therefore “religious” influences. Some postmodernists are uncomfortable with the universal tendencies in Freire’s theorizing, and his presumed failure to account for the mutability of oppression: For example, a teacher being oppressed by a fellow coworker can become an oppressor at home. As Freire (2000) wrote, in the beginning, “the oppressed, instead of striving for liberation, tend themselves to become oppressors, or ‘sub-oppressors’” (p. 45). Thus, even with the best intentions, Freirean principles and pedagogies do not always transform oppressive habits, systems, and genealogies. Additionally by way of criticism, some feminists argue that Freire’s writings showcased his propensity for sexist language (e.g., hooks, 1993; Rockhill, 1988; Weiler, 1991). That said, and related to being “critical of critical pedagogy,” Freire was continuously responsive to critiques of his work; he amended its weaknesses and refined his arguments.

Notably, and to reiterate in light of the above-mentioned criticisms, problem-posing education (or “problematizing”) is a liberatory process where teachers help students critique their specific social-cultural circumstances. This process, as Darder (2002) explained, provides ways for students to develop “their critical abilities . . . to unveil ideological beliefs and practices that function to inhibit their democratic voice and participation” (p. 102). In such instances, Freire (1970) stated, “education is thus constantly remade . . . In order to *be*, it must *become*” (p. 86). For Freire, “good” education “is found in the interplay” of “permanence and change. The banking method emphasizes permanence and becomes reactionary; problem-posing education—which accepts neither a ‘well-behaved’ present nor a predetermined future—roots itself in the dynamic present and becomes revolutionary” (p. 84).

The revolutionary acts of education lead to empowerment. What does Freire’s “empowerment” involve? According to Darder (2002):

empowerment is a process that we as individuals must willingly and freely undertake for ourselves. Within the classroom, this entails participation in pedagogical relationships in which students experience the freedom to break through the imposed myths and illusions that stifle their empowerment as subjects of history and the space to take individual and collective actions that can empower and transform their lives. This dialogical process . . . is not just an individual phenomenon, but takes place within the solidarity of relationships with others. (p. 110)

As Freire (1970) reminded us: “while no one liberates himself [or herself/their self] by his [or her/their] own efforts alone, neither is he [she/they] liberated by others” (p. 53). Teachers cannot empower students by means of authoritarian, top-down instruction (Darder, 2017; Freire, 1970); instead, teachers deploy their educational expertise and power judiciously, with “an ethic of care” (Held, 1993, 2006; Noddings, 1984, 2010; Tronto, 1994, 2013, 2015), to organize, facilitate, and guide classroom interactions that support students’ reframing of and critical reflection on received



wisdom. Teachers create “the dialogical conditions, activities, and opportunities that nourish this developing process within students, as both individuals and social beings” (Darder, 2017, p. 97).

It is in problem-posing education (Freire, 1970) that students can find the self-actualization needed to promote personal and social change. Problem-posing education pivots on empathetic “communion” or “dialogue.” In order to engage in dialogue, said Freire (1998), one needs a “capacity to love.” As Darder (2017) wrote, “throughout his life, Paulo Freire affirmed the revolutionary power of *teaching as an act of love*” (p. 80; italics added). Freire (1970) asked teachers and students to keenly observe their environments and, moreover, the classroom, for “in the absence of a profound love for the world and for people . . . No matter where the oppressed are found, the act of love is commitment to their cause – the cause of liberation” (p. 89). Thus the liberatory potential for praxis is found in the care, consideration, and concern—the love—“for the critical development of a collective consciousness” (Silverman, 2013, p. 261).

## **CRITICAL PEDAGOGY AS “LOVE”**

To consider critical pedagogy as love, we first need to understand what Freire means when he utilizes the word “love.” For Freire (1998), love acts and is enacted when teachers are committed to a shared humanity; when teachers assume that they—themselves and students—are “social, historical, thinking, communicating, transformative, creative persons; dreamers of possible utopias, capable of being angry because of a capacity to love” (p. 45). Indeed, as Darder (2011) noted, Freire’s love is not a romanticized, sweet generosity, feel-good-notion found across most greeting cards and Hallmark holidays. Instead, it is a “fighting love” that strives to “denounce, and to announce”; a love that is simultaneously “lively, forceful, and inspiring” while also “critical, challenging, and insistent” (p. 179).

Thus, according to Freire (1970), as critical pedagogues, teachers aspire towards “the creation of a world in which it will be easier to love” (p. 40). This means teachers who engage as critical pedagogues are actors of “armed love” (Darder, 2002, 2011) toward emancipatory potentials, toward freedom in, with, and through education. Through educational encounters, through listening, through dialogical meetings, teachers—as well as students—realize their state of becoming. Thus, teachers—as well as students—are not fixed beings, with fixed identities, interests, habits, hopes, and dreams. Instead, when teachers engage with students and recognize their in-flux natures, they imagine the possibilities of tomorrow, of dreaming for the world they hope to live in. Moreover, ethically tuned teachers consistently consider the kind of person it is “good to be” in the hopes that, even when they fail, they maintain the hope that they can and will do better towards a more just and loving future.

According to theorists, social critics, and scholars most impacted by Freire and his work (e.g., Antonia Darder, Henry Giroux, bell hooks, Peter McLaren, and Cornel West), critical pedagogy as love can exist because of the following characteristics and

attributes of dialogue: humility, hope, and solidarity (Miller, Brown, & Hopson, 2011). Through dialogical humility, teachers consistently open themselves up to new ways of understanding, experiencing, and creating a collective world. Through dialogical hope, teachers recognize that tomorrow can be "better" than today; that growth is possible. Through dialogical solidarity, teachers and students have "destinies that are interconnected. They work in union towards better life conditions for all" (Miller, Brown, & Hopson, 2011, p. 1086). Freire's pedagogy of love through dialogical humility, hope, and solidarity are not "add-ons," nor are they emotional stances that should be turned on and off depending on the situation or circumstance. These dispositional turns enact ways to reframe educational discourses that cause teachers to consider and reconsider the "who" of teaching and learning, as well as the *why and to where* of educational means and ends (Miller, Brown, & Hopson, 2011).

Given the dialogical imperative that pursues a critical collective consciousness, Freire (1993) asked that teachers transform their educational spaces, and open up experiences and ways for all students "to create, to take risks, to question, and to grow" (p. 39). Because of this, as Giroux (1988) noted, "Freire's work is not meant to offer radical recipes for instant forms of critical pedagogy, it is a series of theoretical signposts that need to be decoded and critically appropriated within the specific contexts in which they might be useful" (p. 114; also cited in Miller et al., 2011).

What might this mean for musical engagements? "Dialogue" in music classrooms and rehearsal spaces are not "one size fits all." A "dialogue" in musical spaces affords multiple ways of being musical and multiple musical perspectives; dialogues encourage hope and solidarity through those musical ways of experiencing the world. Additionally, teachers, community music facilitators, and students recognize that a Freirean "dialogue" in musical spaces can take multiple forms in, with, and through music. Thus a dialogue in a musical space can be verbal; it can also be eye contact between music makers, trading fours in a jazz improvisation session (Elliott & Silverman, 2015), musically reacting and adjusting to another's phrasing and dynamic shading while playing chamber music, group compositional contributions through an online Digital Audio Workstation (DAW) like Soundtrap (Clauhs, et al, 2019), or listening to and reacting to the lead drummer and the dancers in West African drumming and dancing (Silverman, 2018).

Thus, the above examples of love-in-action through musical "dialogues" is a start to grappling with the potentials of a music education built on a pedagogy of love. However, what implications might this kind of care, commitment, trust, knowledge, responsibility, and respect hold within music education? More specifically, what might this genuine love look like in music teaching and learning?

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR MUSIC TEACHING AND LEARNING**

Within the education professions, Freire's philosophy has been held in high esteem during the last forty years (e.g., Apple, 1999; Giroux, 2010b; Shor, 1987). And,

specifically within music education and community music facilitation (e.g., Allsup, 2003, 2016; Coppola, 2021; Elliott & Silverman, 2015; Hess, 2013, 2019; Schmidt, 2005), we are indebted to the work of Frank Abrahams. As examined by Frank and others, critical pedagogy for music teaching and learning pivots on mutual respect, trust, and “communion” between the music teacher who learns from students and the students who teach their teacher and others. Freirean pedagogy emphasizes reciprocal, music teacher-student dialogues—in, with, and through music—and a form of critical thinking called *conscientization*. It seeks to raise students’ awareness of society as a “problem” that can be probed and that must be transformed to achieve social justice.

Based on Freire’s pedagogy of love, the music teacher should be decentered. However, when teachers “decenter” themselves, they do *not* fade completely into the background or conceal their views from students (Elliott & Silverman, 2015). Teachers and students are co-creators of knowledge, as well as “co-workers and co-researchers in deconstructing received wisdom, common sense, and the lived experiences of the students” (Elliott & Silverman, 2015, p. 138) in relation to their experiences and their worlds. As Price (2006) stated:

Freire conceived of authentic teaching as enacting a clear authority, rather than being authoritarian. The teacher . . . is not neutral, but intervenes in the educational situation in order to *help the student to overcome those aspects of his or her social constructs that are paralyzing, and to learn to think critically* . . . All experiences—including those of the teacher—had to be interrogated in order to lay bare their ideological assumptions and presuppositions. (p. 900, italics added)

So, why is a pedagogy of love important? At its core, and within research, scholarship, and policy for music education, likely the most crucial dimension of social justice that is frequently overlooked in the theory and practice of music education is *love* (Silverman, 2012). Freire argues that there can be no social justice without love, and no love without justice (see also hooks, 2000; King, 1968). What this means, in part, is that teachers should not avoid seeing that which is difficult, or that which has no easy solution (Freire, 1970).

Earlier in this paper, I mentioned that hooks was an early critic of Freire’s work (i.e., due primarily to sexism). Indeed, she wrestled within herself to find the means to “frame critique” of the sexist language, “yet maintain the recognition of all that is valued and respected in the work” (1993, p. 147). Attending a lecture of Freire’s, and as she sat in the audience, others openly “attacked” some of hooks’ concerns. Instead of simply agreeing with the critics of feminist critiques, Freire could not dismiss the sexism in the language, and thus said he would address them. She wrote:

I loved him at this moment for exemplifying by his actions the principles of his work. So much would have changed for me had he tried to silence or belittle a feminist critique. And it was not enough for me that he owned his “sexism.” I wanted to know why he had not seen that this aspect of earlier work be changed, be responded to in

writing by him. And he spoke then about making more of a public effort to speak and write on these issues—this has been evident in his later work. (p. 151)

Despite her apprehension, hooks met with Freire's work—and Freire himself—where he was; still, with hope and a critical appreciation that his principles and pedagogical practices contained and maintained an openness towards liberatory possibilities (hooks, 1993). Freire showed and continued to show that he was educable—a perpetual student; learning, growing, and transforming—and one ready to take action and showcase change through that kind of "fighting love." Such is the foundation for growth, change, civil rights, and social justice.

Therefore, and aligning with Freire, hooks (2000) wrote: "Until we live in a culture that not only respects but also upholds basic civil rights for children, most children will not know love" (p. 19-20). I have argued, as did hooks (2000) and Freire (1970), that the ethic of love is essential in any holistic concept of care, as well as in any conceptualization of both education and social justice, and therefore music education (Silverman, 2012; in press). As Liston and Garrison (2004) examined, love is integral to teaching and learning (pp. 1-19). Martin (2004) made the same point when she argued that, in Western societies, love has been conceived wrongly, as an obstacle to educating children "for life in the public world..." (p. 27) Arendt (1961) wrote: "Education is where we decide whether we love our children enough not to expel them from our world and leave them to their own devices, but to prepare them in advance for the task of renewing a common world" (p. 196). With equal emphasis, hooks (2000) emphasized that we must learn to love, because with love we exist *for* others and *with* ourselves. In short, hooks conceptualized and asked teachers to actualize love as a verb—as *action*—rather than private feelings.

So, engaging in reciprocal teacher-teacher and teacher-student dialogues and discourses through socially just ways of being that privilege love as action is essential to the future of music education. Music teaching and learning with love supports the intellectual and political ideals of social-constructivist practices and education for communal, "democratic" engagement (Silverman, 2012). Music teaching and learning with love does not mean teachers avoid teaching musical techniques in order to solely teach for social and emotional learning through music making; nor does it mean that a music classroom is an "anything goes" environment. Instead, it means that curricular decisions are questioned and addressed in consultation *with* students; that multiple ways of being musical occur and are shaped and reshaped depending on the particular needs of students, the school community, and beyond; and the outside world of classroom community matters, and should be examined through musical engagements of many kinds. Thus, "when music teachers love those around them, they more openly and willingly assume responsibility for, and accept accountability within, the human relationships in their professional spheres of action" (Silverman, 2012, p. 158).

Merging both critical and feminist pedagogies, hooks (2000) stated the obvious when she noted: "the heart of justice is truth telling, seeing ourselves and the world the

way it is, rather than the way we want it to be” (p. 33). Because of this, music teachers and community music facilitators must sometimes focus on issues, concerns, and domains that possess no easy solution. Additionally, and relatedly for Freire (1970), “dialogue cannot exist in the absence of a profound love for the world and for people . . . Love is at the same time the foundation of dialogue and dialogue itself” (p. 89). What might this look like in music teaching and learning? How can dialogue between students, teachers, community members, and the world at large occur through musical engagement? Beyond the work of Hess (2019), Hendricks (2018), and others, what follows is a “small”—yet simultaneously large—example of what is possible through a pedagogy of love in music teaching and learning.

In 2017, the PS 22 Chorus of Staten Island, NY—a public school chorus of 50-60 fifth graders—covered and sang Martina McBride’s “I’m Gonna Love You Through It.” The song is about a woman who is supported by a loved one as she battles breast cancer. Lyrics such as, “I know that you’re afraid and I am, too / But you’ll never be alone, I promise you” and “I’m gonna love you through it” show dedication, commitment, and care. The chorus sang, recorded (live), and gifted this song to one of their school’s teachers, Adriana Lopez, who herself, was battling breast cancer.<sup>3</sup> The YouTube video created of this group’s performance has been shared and re-shared, and has reached millions of people world-wide. Performing this song, and recording the video of this performance, certainly transformed the life of this teacher battling cancer if, for only, the moments of experiencing her students sing; additionally, it transformed the lives of the students in the PS 22 Chorus, as well as the school community. The PS 22 Chorus dialogically sang “love-as-action” (hooks, 2000) towards a member of their school community; they enacted goodness towards another. The students, the chorus teacher (Gregg Breinberg), the school community, and beyond—including Martina McBride herself who experienced the PS 22 version of her song—are hope-filled *with* one another in the world. And this hope-through-song—this dream of a better tomorrow—is a small act of subversion in, with, and through music. The students of PS 22 learned from their teacher, their teacher learned from his students, and they all learned through the complex situation of being present for another during her grief and healing. All of this occurred through humility, hope, and solidarity, through a pedagogy of love.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

Upon being asked to contribute to this special issue in honor of the work of Frank Abrahams, I spent some time re-reading Frank’s writings. I recalled numerous conferences, especially those where Frank attended as audience member. He more often listened than spoke. In combination with my memories and revisiting Frank’s work, I have attempted to examine Frank’s identity as a scholar and practitioner in

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ITd5pesVjpY>

pursuit of music education's potentials. The words that came to mind were some of the same words we can find across Freire's writing, specifically a "passion for learning and teaching." Freire (1998) stated:

My openness to caring for the well-being of my students has to do with my openness to life itself, to the joy of living ... Teaching, which is really inseparable from learning, is of its very nature a joyful experience ... Joy does not come to us only at the moment of finding what we sought. It comes also in the search itself. And teaching and learning are not possible without the search, without beauty, and without joy. (pp. 125-126)

I am grateful to Frank—specifically, through his work with critical pedagogy—for showing me a way towards caring for the world. I am grateful to Freire (2005) who helped me understand that “knowing has everything to do with growing” (p. 171), and that this habitual sense of incompleteness is the foundation for potential and meaning-making in music education. So, circling back to the beginning of this paper, as connected to what I learned through “being-with” Frank’s scholarship, all learners possess potential; simultaneously, we are *all*—music teachers and students alike—learners. Once we recognize our incompleteness, especially when music making, we gift ourselves the potential to be more than we thought we could be. Relatedly hooks (2012) states: “The function of art is to do more than tell it like it is—it’s to imagine what is *possible*” (p. 281, italics in original). This sense of “possibility” is as much about art as it is about ourselves; moreover, and according to hooks (as stated above, 2000, p. 33), such truth telling is crucial to enacting feminist pedagogies. Thus, the learning we do is personal as well as political because it alters ourselves and potentially those around us. Notably, learning through music making is experiential and occurs because of the relationships we form within the spaces and places we occupy, care about, and care for through music (Silverman, in press). Moreover, learning music as a means for understanding our life experiences exemplifies all we contingently know through the relationships—e.g., social, cultural, musical relationships—that we form and create when music making. Once we recognize feeling, thinking, and doing as knowledge and, therefore, as power, we are ripe to understand that relational self-knowledge when music making is potentially empowering.

Likely most importantly for me, through this search for being and becoming a music educator, “it is impossible to teach without the courage to love, without the courage to try a thousand times before giving in...it is impossible to teach without a forged, invented, and well-thought-out capacity to love” (Freire, 2005, p. 5). And so, teachers—music teachers—who engage in critical pedagogy dare to love because they dare to teach and learn; they dare to teach and learn because they dare to love.

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