Fear and Loathing In Education: A Reflection of Week #2 and of the Music Education In Inclusive Contexts Course

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Abstract

For this reflection, I start by examining the values music has on humanity and ask why do we then treat the subject as an elective. I propose that the answer to this is fear at some level. I focus on how each of the readings involve the aspect of fear when it comes to their implementation in professional practice within the education system. The first fear is that of going against what we know as the Western cannon and embracing cultural musics, which we as educators may be unfamiliar with. The second fear is of personal responsibility and how this may put individuals in awkward situations. Lastly, the fear of repercussion when being open with our students to our own religious experiences. The paper concludes by listing my fears for myself, my students, and society.

Keywords: bipoc, Rawlings Approach, intrinsic, extrinsic,

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I do not think it is wrong to acknowledge the power that music has on us as individuals. Every culture in the world experiences and celebrates music in a sacred and/or secular way. Music is personal and communal. It is private and shareable. It is intrinsic and extrinsic. It is emotion and action. Those who wield the power over music as teachers can use that power to make or break someone's love of the subject and how it shapes their identity. Knowing that music is an area of study that connects with humanity on such a deep level, why is it then so easily pushed aside as a throwaway subject, devalued, and in some recent cases, cut? I think one of the answers to this question lies in one thing: fear. Fear of the unknown, expression, cost, or the fear of teaching something you know but don't *really* know. Reflecting on this week's articles, my philosophies, and my practice, I see fear as being a huge motivator in the barriers these authors are addressing within the structural institutions of our schools and society.

<u>Fear of Culture.</u>

Through DeVito (2020), Bradley (2012), Chavez (2019), and Stanton (2018), the fear is based around cultural musics. This is due to our lack of understanding of them (and subsequent potential appropriation) and their place in a society that has built itself upon the Westernized ideals and values of music. To quote Bradley, "To avoid the trap of epistemological colonialism, philosophies mould continually interrogate the assumptions upon which they are built." This quote speaks to me because I feel it encompasses the big picture of these articles. I also feel it requires us to look at our learning and personal practice to acknowledge that Western music and its music teachers have been systematically elitist, and that any other expressions of music are

unworthy of contribution or meaning. In one particular example, I was interested when Don DeVito talked about his school and the Rawlings Approach, but worried that music was portrayed simply as a vessel to teach literacy skills. The reality of the situation in this case is that the school was in danger of being taken over by the state, which would end in the arts programs being cut in favour of literacy and numeracy regardless. The fears teachers may have had about addressing other cultures were outweighed by the scenario the school was in, though I do think that this study demonstrated exactly how important, if not instrumental (no pun intended), music actually is when accessed for student learning. Not to say his results couldn't be done using a different subject, but I would be very interested in seeing this study replicated with a student's cultural understanding using the vessel of math or physical education.

Fear of Responsibility.

In Nichols' (2013) and Palkki's (2018) articles, the fear is of personal responsibility. This fear takes shape in two ways. Firstly, if one is being asked to support someone whose personal beliefs tell them they are 'wrong', and secondly, if one is being targeted as an ally in a system that may not support their practices. Personal experience, as well as the articles by Nichols and Palkki, reinforce exactly how important and transformational a music class is on the lives of its students, and the detriments they can have if students are not openly and consistently supported in those spaces. For many, music class is a place where they can feel safe and supported while living and expressing their truest self. From personal experience, I am happy to say that I work in a board that openly advocates for LGBTQ2SI+ expression and acceptance, but these sentiments cannot just be echoed without followthrough. This followthrough needs to come from societal change, not just individual change.

Fear of Repercussion.

The Benedict (2021) and Sensoy (2017) outline the reflection's final fear: the fear of repercussion for speech. In response to the "yeah..but" or "so I have to watch everything I saw now?" scenarios, Sensoy quotes the following. "When we begin to realize that contrary to what we have always believed, categories of difference (such as gender, race, class, and ability), rather than merit alone, *do* matter and significantly shape our perspectives, experiences, opportunities, and outcomes, we can feel overwhelmed." One category of difference not mentioned here, but plays a significant role in my own teaching, is the difference of religion. The Benedict chapter asks us to use religion as a talking point to acceptance and rapport, but I will admit that for me religion in the classroom is one of those personal areas of unease. During my teacher training and experience in the public board, I have been wary of stepping out of line and saying things that may be contrary in fear of repercussion; especially when taking into account my status as a long-term occasional teacher rather than permanent. If I am seen as being a teacher who 'stirs the pot' or has parents calling to complain about personal philosophies and ideologies being spoken of in my class that are offensive to their sensibilities, I will simply not be hired by that administration in the future. Addressing areas of my own shortcomings, I know that I come into this being able to talk more freely with my students about LGBTQ+ topics than those of religion. Upon reflection, I feel that a significant part of this is the open and accepting nature of myself wanting to make all students feel included, especially regarding something they cannot change, like their sexuality. When it comes to religion, I've talked about it in class as a way for students to understand the context of a text or a piece of music before, but never as a way to build rapport. I understand now that it is another way to have the students feel seen and, after listening to

Cathy's explanation of how she utilizes this strategy, I feel more at ease with it. I will admit that a small part feels hesitation about these conversations based on my own experiences with the church, religion, and its exclusionary beliefs and practices. I also admit that I am genuinely looking to connect with my students and be a caring adult, which in the end, is a much bigger part of who I am as a human being and who I want to be as an educator.

My personal realization after this week and this course is that I am, and have been, afraid. As a young teacher I am afraid that I will not be taken seriously; both because of my age and because of my 'optional' teachable. I am afraid to say the wrong thing and offend because of my unintentional ignorance. I am afraid that, in my practice, I have put someone in a situation where they felt they could not approach me and voice their concerns about my classroom because I hold a position of power over them. I am afraid that the system, that I have thrived in so much that I chose it as a career, is systematically stacked against bipoc and individuals with exceptionalities in their formative years. I am afraid that the cycle of poverty perpetuates on within this system and that our governmental leaders see their proposed bandaid solutions only as political strategy rather than addressing the systematic barriers that could actually solve the problem. I am afraid of a world that doesn't understand its individuals but feigns ignorance on how their ideologies and systems of oppression have led to it, and instead, asks them to assimilate or stop complaining. I am afraid of what I don't know. But I will not let that stop me. The fear of the unknown, which sends many into shock, sets me into action.

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