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Social Justice Issues and Music Education in the Post 9/11 United States

Cynthia L. Wagoner

East Carolina University, wagonerc@ecu.edu

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is two-fold: first, to examine the impact of historical socio-political events on music education, particularly post 9/11 with the intent of establishing a context for social justice issues; and second, how we might examine the broad implications to further music education research focusing on social justice. Issues of social justice are inextricably woven into the fabric of post-9/11 U.S. education, as evidenced through reform efforts aimed at job-related skill sets, standardized testing, national standards, and economic gridlock resulting in the diminished access or elimination of the arts in the public schools, including music. Traditionally music educators have attempted to remain politically neutral in an attempt to prevent marginalization, yet music education has played a significant role in enforcing cultural identities, validating specific Western musics, and maintaining exclusionary and unequal power relationships. An examination of the historical and sociopolitical context of current music education in light of 9/11 and educational reforms considers how research can move to support issues of social justice. Current research is synthesized to present future research areas of concern for American music education, including broad emergent themes of preparing democratic spaces, teacher education and social justice goals, and the musical voices of students.

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is two-fold: first, using an historical perspective, examine what impact school reform has had on music education post 9/11 with the intent of establishing a context for social justice issues; and second, how we might examine implications for future music education research to consider a social justice agenda. Though use of the term *social justice* can be ambiguous (Zeichner, 2006), issues of justice are inextricably woven into the fabric of post 9/11 U.S. education. As such, it is important to present a definition and context through which social justice in music education might be both understood and challenged. The final synthesis of this paper will discuss future directions of research in music education with respect to social justice.

Definition of Social Justice

Social justice issues are considered fluid, dynamic, and rooted within a contemporary context of social life (Gerwitz, 1998). For the purposes of this paper, issues of social justice will seek to examine not only the complex relationship of formal and informal power, but also to uncover the types of power relationships reinforced through institutional means (Gerwitz, 1998). In education, power relationships are found on the

macro level, for example, in the development of educational policy, and the micro level, such as social interactions within a particular school, classroom, or between individuals. The relationship between macro- and micro-levels of educational policy and practices increase tensions that are further impacted with institutional perceptions of sameness and difference: for example, stereotypes can be unduly reinforced when sameness is the presumed outcome. Perceptions of sameness and difference extend to the marginalization of particular forms of knowledge, such as the arts, when a common knowledge base, for example, common core, is promoted (King, 2004; North, 2006).

Careful consideration of the institutional and organizational relationships that exist both formally and informally in schools, work to either advance or impede equity and equality within the educational system of which music teachers are a part. For the purposes of this paper, I use Theoharis's (2007) definition of social justice as "actively engaging in reclaiming, appropriating, sustaining, and advancing inherent human rights of equity, equality, and fairness in social, economic, education, and personal dimensions" (p. 162). In music education, such a definition can encourage thoughtful discourse about what music education could be.

Impact of School Reform

Post 9/11 United States

The events of 9/11 are certainly not unique in that tragedies continue to befall civilizations in profound ways. It was however, a moment in our history when politics and power intruded into the daily lives of ordinary people (Denzin, 2009; Gunn, 2004; White, 2003), altering our global perceptions. It is my intent to discuss how 9/11 has served in a variety of ways as a lightning rod for the country—focusing primarily on its impact on music education. In the fourteen years since the 9/11 crisis gave rise to national solidarity and a surge of patriotism, what is left in its wake has been an ongoing, bleak prospect of continued war, a mistrust of immigrants, and new levels of intolerance and racism bred from blame and fear (Allsup & Shieh, 2012; Fennimore, 2011; Osanloo, 2011; Southern Poverty Law Center, 2001; White, 2003).

On the heels of national crisis and war, the financial meltdown began (Rothstein, 2011). The effects of the great recession caused many Americans to lose their homes, jobs, medical insurance, and retirement benefits (Fennimore, 2011; Hurd & Rohwedder, 2010). Indeed, the ever-widening gap in wealth and opportunities, the increase in poverty creeping into the middle class, and the continuing unemployment crisis has laid bare the overriding mistrust of civil leadership. At the same time, both crises exposed the myth of the American Dream; that is, work hard and you will have an equal chance to be rewarded (Deaton, 2011; Fennimore, 2011). The effects of war, recession, and lingering economic sluggishness have increased budget cuts that continue to siphon funds away from children and families, including public schools (Aber & Chaudry, 2010). Increasing economic neglect of education is ongoing, functioning in tandem with the prioritization of high-stakes testing

further threatening school arts programs (Allsup & Shieh, 2012, Osanloo, 2011).

Yet, within this bleak description, opportunity exists to provide new directions for social justice concerns in the arts. Denzin (2009) calls for us to use the current moment to find “morally informed disciplines and interventions that will help people recover meaning in the shadows of a post 9/11 world” (p. 258). As the arts offer ways to gain alternative perspectives of the world and describe the complexity of the human condition, it is possible to use the arts as a place to explore contradictions found within the stories we tell of historical events in the United States (Zwim & Libresco, 2010) and the healing intervention Denzin (2009) speaks of. When the role of the arts in schools empowers both students and teachers to pay close attention, listen, perceive, and act on any social concern, these performances become acts of social justice (Allsup & Shieh, 2012). To empower students, teachers must adopt pedagogical strategies anchored with an ethic of care (DeCoste & Boyd, 2009; Noddings, 1984, 2010), cultural responsiveness (Butler, Lind, & McKoy, 2007; Richards, Brown, & Forde, 2011), and critical consciousness (Abrahams, 2005; Freire, 2003). If we are to heal the societal rift widened by the events of 9/11, Jorgensen (2007) calls for us to do more than remember; she implores us to teach our students how to celebrate the preciousness of life. The difficulty of doing such is that schools in the United States have long struggled with the role of social change agent—and the current wave of reform has increased concerns about justice issues (Lipman, 2006; Woodford, 2005).

Agenda of Education Reform

Shaull, writing in the forward of Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2003) said, “there is no such thing as a *neutral* educational process. Education either functions as an instrument that is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, *or* it becomes ‘the practice of freedom,’ the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world” (p. 34). American education has been fraught with reform for the better part of the 20th and 21st centuries, and the discussion of reform is therefore not new (Ravitch, 2000). Part of the educational reform agenda of the 1960 – ‘70s was meant to equalize achievement across all socioeconomic and cultural divides in society, spurred by the civil rights movement, and was not limited to, but included the desegregation of schools, school funding, opportunities for women, and teaching students who were other-abled (Nussbaum, 2006). Efforts did not fully succeed, partly because they were too limited to address the more deeply rooted causes of complex social issues (Weiner, 2007).

Fundamentally, failure to equalize achievement may be connected with a deficit paradigm operating within schools that continues today (Gorski, 2011; Guo, 2012). The deficit paradigm begins with the assumption that any student difference is the equivalent of a deficit or defect (Cooper, 2006; Gorski, 2011; Guo, 2012; Weiner, 2007). Remediation is then proposed for the deficient student, frequently without consideration of political or

economic factors affecting individual student achievement, the school system itself, or the greater social context that has contributed to the problem (Cooper, 2006; Gorksi, 2011; Weiner, 2007). The deficit paradigm as described may also be applied to current views of the teaching profession and the evaluation of teachers. Using this paradigm, effective teacher characteristics are considered concrete and thus the individual teacher can be deemed defective and therefore, must be remediated or removed. Blame for the defects is cast wide, aimed most currently at teacher training institutions and teacher unions as defenders of the defects, and therefore, responsible for the lack of reform progress made in public schools (Ingersoll, 2003; McIntyre, 1997; Strunk, 2011; Weiner, 2007).

Reform since 9/11 has led to deeper privatization of public services to curtail public expenditure on education all while a protracted war and economic distress further squeezes the available funds for schools. Perhaps more troubling has been the growing list of educational reform measures eroding access and support of arts education in the process. The elimination of central regulation across teacher hiring and the onslaught of corporate curriculum and professional development has resulted in fragmented services and eliminated much local control for schools (Weiner, 2007). Reformers have touted the use of standardized testing to gauge academic achievement of students and have simultaneously determined teacher quality as the only valid measure of learning (Kumashiro, 2012; Weiner, 2007, 2012), thus further marginalizing subjects not directly tested, including music.

Reflecting on the 1950s voucher movement, which had been a reaction to desegregation (e.g., Pearsall Act of North Carolina, Carlson, 2011; Scott, 2013), the renewed call for vouchers as part of school reform took root in the 1980s when funding for public schools was also more limited, and today further threatens the financial stability of public schools (Levine & Au, 2013; Minor, 2002). Today there is no one universal voucher system plan; voucher system supporters in the United States operate under a plethora of often opposing viewpoints (Ladd, 2002; Wells, Grutzik, Coarnochan, Slayton, & Vasudeva, 1999). One most frequently publicized viewpoint is that of using vouchers to empower minorities to abandon failing public schools. Opposition to this viewpoint sees this kind of reasoning as a much broader and systematic market attack on education (Barber, 2004).

Reformers have not limited their focus to public K – 12 schools, nor has the historic isolation of universities from the K – 12 system insulated schools of education from economic, open market-based plans. Alignment of the K – 12 curriculum to minimum standard requirements for factory and service sector employment, with pressures to teach for employment, have extended to higher education, proposed as a way to cure economic woes (Giroux, 2008; Livingstone, 2004). In teacher education, fast track programs to allow candidates to bypass traditional teacher education preparation have grown exponentially (Barber, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 2010). Granting licenses to new teachers has spawned a new market for corporations to develop standardized tests for teacher licensure and continuing education credits through in-service training, particularly by linking the corporate-designed products to the promise of higher student test scores (Harris & Sass, 2011). For-profit institutions of higher education have also gained a foothold in the

marketplace, despite criticisms of exorbitant tuition and poor student outcomes (Lewin, 2012; Nussbaum, 2012). The current reform climate may indeed have reached a crisis point for teacher education in the United States (Wiseman, 2012).

Reform efforts aimed at, but not limited to, job-related skill sets, standardized testing, teacher training, and national standards all fail to address the greater social issues of injustice and inequality in the United States public school systems that teachers deal with daily such as poverty, minority status, gender, racism, sexual orientation, and issues of exclusion. Further, reform agendas and political and economic gridlock has culminated in diminished access to or elimination of the arts in the public schools, including music (Baker, 2012). In light of these complexities, the need to attend to issues of injustice is intensified for music educators.

Reform, Social Justice, and Music Education

U.S. public school music educators worked to establish a disciplinary foothold post-WWII, primarily citing aesthetic ideals of music. Music as aesthetic education became the predominant philosophy in the 1950s (Mark & Madura, 2014; McCarthy, 2002; Reimer, 2003; Scott, 2013). The philosophical premise is that of absolute expressionism, where transformation for students happens through the study of the best musical literature the Western canon has to offer, with art performed for art's sake (Reimer, 2003; Rideout, 1995; Schmidt, 2005). Developing the aesthetic senses of students involved in music classes resonated in the work of philosophers such as Bennett Reimer (1989) as a way to express how "music civilizes us, harmonizes us with our world, and makes us whole, thereby fulfilling us" (p. 25). Aesthetics as a basic value for music education served as a strong, unifying philosophical force in the profession (McCarthy, 2002).

Yet the 1990s led to a rise in praxialism, sociology, and cognitive psychology that have challenged the aesthetic philosophy and advocacy for music education in ways that continue to be crucial today (Alperson, 1991; Elliott, 2005; McCarthy, 2002; Regelski, 2011). Aesthetic theory in music education practice has played a significant role in enforcing cultural identities, validating specific Western musics, and maintaining exclusionary and unequal power relationships, perhaps reinforcing the traditional stance for music educators to remain politically neutral (Chavez-Reyes, 2010; Gould, 2007; Kozal, 1993). The philosophy of praxialism has grown in followers who have called attention to the importance of being involved in the making of music, and challenges aesthetic philosophy as inadequate for the ways in which all people engage in music (Alperson, 1991; Elliott, 2005; McCarthy, 2002; Regelski, 2011). Particularly since 9/11, critical pedagogy has been called into service to examine how students and teachers can establish democratic spaces in which they can recreate their musical worlds and how we might begin to challenge ourselves as music educators (Schmidt, 2013).

Challenges

Against the political and cultural backdrop described, music education continues to struggle with a double-pronged issue of both access and participation, particularly at the secondary level. Music education programs in the U.S. today favors middle class children who have the social and economic availability to participate in musical opportunities (Elpus & Abril, 2011; Wright, 2013). Elpus and Abril (2011) found that in both rural and urban schools, where the largest gaps exist between resources and financial allocations, higher rates of poverty are found as well. The same study found schools with a high percentage of black/Latino students have a probability of poverty six times higher than schools with a high percentage of white students (Elpus & Abril, 2011). It stands to reason that schools with fewer resources and limited finances also retain fewer career teachers, and as a result, music teachers with the least experience end up in job situations that have demands that may seem vastly different from their previous experiences in school and student-teaching (Howard, 2006).

The lack of access to musical study opportunities is also evident by looking at major orchestras, where the absence of black and Latino musicians reflect the kind of membership found in American high school large performing ensembles (DeLorenzo, 2012). Youth from disadvantaged areas have less opportunity and lack the economic availability to pay fees associated with musical studies, thereby lowering their chance of getting accepted into a university music program and attaining a professional music career (DeLorenzo, 2012). Though psychosocial issues (e.g., friendships, self-identity) and the individual music teacher can affect student musical participation, the issues of how race and socioeconomics play into what students believe they can or cannot do should not be ignored.

Schools tend to maintain socio-economic status quo, yet are becoming more and more limited to reproduction of skills and social relationships, due to focus of reform efforts in testing and job skills in particular (Heuser, 2011; Schmidt, 2005). Music education has adhered to these practices particularly at the secondary level, maintaining an elitist curriculum centered on expert knowledge of music disengaged from the cultural and social constructs in which it was created (Benedict & Schmidt, 2013; Schmidt, 2005). For example, large school music ensembles, mired in historical expectations, have not been receptive to change or restructuring in order to create more democratic spaces (Allsup, 2003, 2004, 2012; Dammers, 2012; Heuser, 2011; Kratus, 2007; Miksza, 2013; Younker, 2003).

Deeper fissures have developed as practice is further separated from theory, and research from action (Jorgensen, 2007; Schmidt, 2005). For example, NAfME hosts a National In-Service Conference each fall, devoid of research posters or higher education issues—and hosts a separate biannual research conference for higher education devoid of actual music making or musically engaged pedagogical practice. Empowering all music teachers, regardless of teaching assignment, with a wider knowledge of the world is impossible without interactions between the musical spaces of researcher, performer,

creator, practitioner, and those who hold council in all those musical spaces, thus preventing the profession from fully realizing what music education could be.

Traditional formal learning in the music classroom has been further challenged by the rise in informal music learning, impacting the way students view their formal music training (Dammers, 2012; Green, 2001, 2008; Griffin, 2011; Jaffurs, 2004; Martignetti, Talbot, Clauhs, Hawkins, & Niknafs, 2013; Wright, 2013). Ruthmann and Dillon (2012) indicated that “in many cases, teachers may not be aware of how our traditional processes of teaching may help or get in the way of our students’ agency as learners” (p. 538). Technological advancements have increased personal engagement with music allowing new levels of agency to develop in students (Dammers, 2012; Ruthmann & Dillon, 2012). The challenge of informal music learning also offers opportunity, as the intersection of formal and informal learning may afford new democratic spaces to form in the music classroom, e.g., by putting students in charge of their own musical learning, thereby increasing student and teacher critical consciousness (Freire, 2003; Jaffurs, 2004; Martignetti et al., 2013; Wiggins, 1999/2000; Wright, 2013). For example, Green (2001) and Wright (2013) suggest that informal learning in the classroom may focus on how students locate and produce musical knowledge, or on learning in groups according to the need and skill across musical areas of performing, composing, improvising, and listening. Democratic spaces, experiential learning, and informal music learning segments may also enhance awareness of and respect for differences, a central tenant in teaching for social justice. The question remains: How can music educators best enable spaces for positive and supportive environments with social justice in mind?

The role of music and the other arts in a post 9/11 world might be one born of respect for cultural and international diversity, reflecting open-mindedness and emphasizing the healing role the arts can play in human life (DeNora, 2000; O’Brien, 2007). Certainly at the very least, our students should see their musical selves reflected in our music programs (Wright, 2013). For music education to step away from traditional identities and current marginalizing practices, examining *whose* musical image is reflected and *what* possibilities music holds for *all* students becomes key. Indeed, Allsup and Shieh (2012) suggest that the process of critically examining music education involves recognizing that students “are not in our classes only to learn musical skills or established traditions from us; they are in our classes to *shape* musical traditions and social traditions that live and breathe and transform the world in which we live.” (p. 50).

Where Might Research Take Us?

The broad social justice issues presented in this paper not only highlight deep concern for American music education in light of historical and current socio-political milieu, but also illuminate the lack of synthesis between theory and practice across the research literature. Such synthesis should include strong connections between theoretical/philosophical explorations of social justice with approaches for integrating

these issues into practice within the school music setting (Cochran-Smith, Shakman, Jong, Terrell, Barnatt, & McQuillan, 2009; Vaugeois, 2007). The lack of synthesis leaves the practitioner disconnected from the thoughtful social analysis of justice issues and the researcher caught up in the esoteric realm of the theoretical, with few opportunities to explore meaningful discourse for connections to happen. Without synthesis and discourse, it is difficult to offer any optimism that appears to be connected to reality (Kinceloe, Hayes, Rose, & Anderson, 2006). Therefore, directions for future research and implementation in music education within this paper are suggested, pulling together philosophical and theoretical discussions with discourse opportunities providing strong designs of qualitative and action research.

Synthesis

Throughout this literature review, many authors mention democratic practices without providing a guiding definition. Teaching and learning may be understood through Jorgensen's (2007) description of democratic practices as dialogic, resulting in a collaborative environment where teachers and students share in decision-making and learning. As an interdependent activity, teaching and learning are not simply dependent on communication, but also on the depth and breadth of knowledge the teacher brings to the classroom. Closely connected with democratic action is the reciprocity and ethic of care (Noddings, 2010), creating a place for students to express themselves creatively with and through music (Allsup, 2004). The contrasting classroom would be the authoritative, teacher-centric classroom; for example, when authoritative methods are used to direct the majority of musical activity in the classroom. In the authoritative classroom, teachers are demarcating what knowledge they hold that the student does not, creating an insider v. outsider scenario (Claire, 1993/1994).

Yet in order for a democratic space to be valued and students to be included as insiders in the music making process, music teachers must have a deeper understanding themselves of how music teaching philosophy and practice are performed through the selected classroom activities. Large ensembles tend toward traditional authoritative practices with little regard for pedagogical insight that might increase critical consciousness in the classroom (Green, 1993; Heuser, 2011). This is not a public school problem alone: institutions of higher education, responsible for the transmission of values, knowledge, and pedagogy for the next generation of teachers, have not challenged a traditional curriculum of Western musics and the authoritarian pedagogy of musical expert and apprentice. However, the authoritarian model spanning more than a century of public school music is more frequently found in school music classrooms and pervades the structure of school performance organizations (Green, 2001; Heuser, 2011), where the hierarchy of power is most clearly delineated (Allsup, 2003). Music teachers of all levels must begin to examine the music curriculum to challenge long-held belief systems. At the

intersection of curriculum, beliefs, and practices, one can most naturally begin to address issues of social justice.

It would seem that a democratic music classroom might begin by breaking down old power structures that separate the vibrant ways students engage with music in their personal lives with school music classes. Allowing students to express their musical voices in school, not just outside of school, should also apply to higher education and the teaching of music teachers. Therefore, I offer three themes through which synthesis and discourse might take place within the music education profession: 1) preparing democratic spaces, 2) teacher education and social justice goals, and 3) musical voices of students.

Preparing democratic spaces

Music classes should be places where all students can be viewed as competent. Any other-abledness should be viewed as human difference, and should allow an expansion of the ways in which students and teachers can perceive the capacity of human life. Using action research, partnering with practitioners to do so, and looking beyond the boundaries of current music education practice can expand the possibilities of democratic spaces and provide opportunities to assess the effectiveness of such spaces in the music setting (Allsup, 2004). It would be valuable to connect practitioners with researchers and researchers with practitioners to tell the stories of how diversity exists in musical practices and curriculum, and what it takes to challenge the status quo to find new ways to engage students in music experiences. Certainly accomplishing such goals are limitless, from examining ways to engage with globalized musics, to engaging students who are other-abled (Goodman, 2011; Nussbaum, 2006; Stauffer, 2012). As we search for new ways to connect research with pedagogy, using stories offers a way to most effectively share what Stauffer (2012) refers to as the “self-making, re-making and replacing [of] ourselves” (p. 11).

Research also needs to be disseminated in a wider variety of ways, from researcher to pedagogue to administrators, parents, communities, and politicians. It is wonderful to publish and present to like-minded people, but that is only a beginning. When researchers fail to disseminate the seeds of their work themselves, they risk the work being co-opted into a sound bite that may or may not be true to the results of the particular study. Sharing research findings and potential for the future with a variety of stakeholders should be a priority, particularly when faced with the strong voices coming from a call for reform.

Research provides opportunities to place renewed political pressure to rethink the data-driven mania that has overtaken schools. Research can bring the focus to respect for all students' emerging identities and therefore, engaging all students in positive musical-social interactions is one desired result (Fennimore, 2011), but sharing those results across the broader profession and community may be much more important.

Teacher Education and Social Justice Goals

As it is currently unclear how university engagement in social justice issues impacts a future teacher's attitudes toward such (Bieler, 2012; Hatch & Groenke, 2009; Hellman, Buzan, Wagoner, & Heuser, 2015; Han, 2012, 2013; Goodman, 2011; McKenzie, Christman, Hernanadez, Fierro, Capper, Dantley, Gonzalez, Cambron-McCabe, & Scheurich, 2008), looking specifically at ways to impact preservice teachers' attitudes toward social justice goals will need to be expanded. As the music education landscape needs to evolve to include both formal and informal learning spaces, exploring how music teacher educators can provide that in university training is crucial (Abrahams, 2005; Allsup & Shieh, 2012). How might we assist music teachers in developing new identities about what it means to be a music teacher in the future?

Perhaps most importantly, music teacher educators need to look within the structure of the university for opportunities to support social and institutional change (Ballantyne & Mills, in press). Collaborations across the faculty within a school of music, all liberal arts, and teacher education with music educators can develop new perspectives on bringing research to practice, and expand the reach of the arts. Reaching out to parents, communities, and school officials by those in higher education is necessary if the corporate challenge to education is to be met. If we are to be the beacons of what a better society can be through music education, we must each personally be dedicated to the ideals of social justice and the public good (Anton, Fisk, & Holmstrom, 2000; Ballantyne & Mills, in press; Grant & Agosto, 2007; Weiner, 2007), modeling the behaviors we wish to see in our students.

Musical Voices of Students

Student's musical experiences should be one of our greatest concerns as music teachers. Understanding where and how all students experience music and what draws them into musical play is crucial for music educators. Drawing on students' musical experiences and interests can serve to facilitate meaningful musical instruction in the classroom (Griffin, 2013; Thies, 2013). As we listen to our students' voices, it should be with a careful ear for those who are marginalized. Low socioeconomic status, minority status, gender, sexual orientation, and issues of exclusion should be considered carefully. Research areas are endless and might include such foci as access to the arts, programmatic and fiscal cuts to the arts, portrayals of women in pop music, exclusion of students with special abilities from large ensemble settings, the treatment of multicultural musics in the classroom, or why students avoid or opt out of school music classes (Constantine, 2011; Elpus & Abril, 2011).

Conclusion

The broad strokes painted here of the socio-political context of reform post-9/11 in the United States serves to help conceptualize social justice issues in music education. As Vaugeouis (2007) shares, we cannot explore our engagement with injustice without locating ourselves both historically and politically. As reform continues to impact the marginalization of music and in turn, the availability and access to music for millions of school children, we do not have the luxury of assuming the music we select, and the projects we direct, are steeped in neutrality (Woodford, 2012; Vaugeouis, 2007). The very ways in which we speak of our music programs has a specific frame of reference. For example, as shrinking resources and growing student needs (Wayne & Au, 2012) challenge music educators to justify the existence of music classes, advocacy often comes in the form of defensive sound bites without careful consideration of historical or philosophical context (Elpus, 2010). Without a deeper contextual knowledge or philosophical inquiry to situate an argument, music educators inadvertently continue to enforce specific cultural identities and exclusionary and unequal power relationships in music education. Additionally, thoughtful application of the most current research is lost in the smaller bites of information, and therefore, music advocacy continues to draw heavily on what is status quo for school music programs (Bowman, 2005).

Regardless of the steady growth of strong research in the music education community in the past 40 years (Price, 2004), research in music education struggled to find a foothold with practitioners in the classroom (Jorgensen, 2007; Schmidt, 2005), further fragmenting how research is employed in the name of advocacy (Bowman, 2005; Elpus, 2010; Regelski, 2005). Music education professional organizations remain bifurcated along lines of researchers/higher education and practitioners/K – 12 education—with the division reaching beyond grade levels between fields of music study, for example, performance group, general music, music theory, music literature and ethnomusicology. The lack of synthesis and sharing among experts in the music field does little to amend the already daunting problems of music access and participation in school music programs.

The future of music education depends on attitudes within the profession toward interrupting barriers and encouraging greater communication among sub-groups within the profession. Opportunity to develop democratic spaces to engage students, educators and music teacher educators across formal music classes, for example, using informal music making activities, gives our students an opportunity to express themselves more fully through music. Collaborative research designs such as action research, an inquiry intended to answer specific questions about teaching and learning (Conway & Borst, 2001), and qualitative research, and more specifically narrative inquiry (Barrett & Stauffer, 2009), are particularly well suited to engage practitioners in collaborative partnerships. Research partnerships might begin to inform music teacher educator practice, and serve as rich grounds for examining issues of social justice in the music classroom, as we do not enter the profession with ideas on how to change it or question our prior musical experiences (Sands, 2007).

Increasing music education research foci on empowering students and teachers, encouraging musical expression opportunities for *all* students, threaded with philosophical inquiry and situated in historical context, can serve to expand how the profession proceeds in attending to the future. Research should serve to encourage music teacher educators to do more than deliver curriculum—and work toward what Woodward (2012) states as “empowering teachers and students to reclaim ownership over the design and direction of their musical lives by helping them see and hear the world with critical eyes and ears” (p. 98). Using critical eyes and ears can help us challenge issues of poverty, minority status, gender, racism, sexual orientation, and issues of exclusion within music education, and provides hope for social and personal transformation (Schmidt, 2005). We must take the critical examination of pedagogy, theory, and philosophy from music teacher education into the music classroom, and the broader profession as a challenge for research and practice.

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About the Author

Cindy Wagoner is an Assistant Professor of music education at East Carolina University, specializing in instrumental music instruction and pre-service music teacher education. She holds a B.S. and M.S. from Indiana State University and a Ph.D. from the University of North Carolina Greensboro. Prior to earning her Ph.D., she spent 27 years in Indiana

teaching high school and middle school instrumental music and was a summer fellow at Northwestern University. Dr. Wagoner is active as a guest conductor/adjudicator, holds membership in Society for Music Teacher Education, and serves on the North Carolina Music Education Association board in the areas of teacher education, mentoring, and higher education. Her research presentations have taken her across regional and international stages in the areas of music teacher identity, social justice, mentoring new teachers, and pedagogy.