



## Music Makers: Choral

# Instructional Strategies that Challenge Dominant Pedagogy

By June Countryman and Leslie Stewart Rose

Change in music education practice is increasingly being urged so that music educators might deliver on the ethical responsibility for a curriculum of equity, diversity and social justice. These terms are often used interchangeably. Our aim in the delineation of these terms is not to offer a comprehensive definition, but to direct attention to, emphasize, and orient our goals around the ideas presented.

- *equity*: Equity-minded educators are concerned with who participates and who does not. Equal access in music class will require rethinking and reworking our reliance on middle class experiences with music. This might include not requiring, for example, private music lessons, concert dress, or other middle class experiences, habits, language, for full participation and success in music program. Equity does not mean equality, rather it means responding to differentiated needs. The pedagogical implications of equity might include such things as varied modes of assessment and multiple opportunities to demonstrate learning.
- *diversity*: Diversity-minded educators are concerned with who and what is represented. In our quest for diversity (or pluralism) in both content and pedagogy we must resist and challenge hegemony (the pressures that influence conformity to the dominant culture) and essentialization (reductions, for example treating “African Music” as a single static entity or “Aboriginal music” as a single static, historic entity).
- *social justice*: Social justice educators are concerned with identifying, challenging and breaking down barriers that limit equity and diversity and potential for all. Teaching for social justice includes teaching about systems of power and privilege to develop social consciousness and social critique.

We are critical, as many have been before us<sup>i</sup>, of the limitations that conductor-led, rehearsal-based music classes impose on student learning. More inclusive and democratic is a teacher-facilitated, inquiry-based music classroom. Central to this inquiry-based approach are ways that students make choices about how and what they learn. We promote a curriculum of diversity of content, values and knowledges, a curriculum which explores and embraces multiple ways of knowing and ensures access and success for all students. This approach challenges the hegemonic processes that marginalize and *push out* students in droves.

With 43 years of school classroom teaching between us, we recognize the performance pressures on school choirs; however, we argue for the choral/vocal classroom as a site of inquiry through music, with different instructional goals from those of a school choir. Choirs provide wonderful opportunities for students who choose to participate. Music classes, in contrast, seek to provide opportunities for all students to make music that they are interested in, in ways that resonate with their personal interests and experiences. Our work with teacher candidates and new teachers who find themselves in rehearsal-based, conductor-led programs leads us to interrogate steps toward change.

Change in music pedagogy<sup>ii</sup> takes place on a broad continuum. In response to the calls for change we are working with a series of prompts for personal reflection, for thinking about ways to change aspects of practice. It is by no means comprehensive but rather a starting point for reflection and dialogue. We acknowledge a significant risk in being read as suggesting that pedagogical change is easily understood and uniformly applied, that social justice work is simple, and, worse, that all of this reduces to a simple list. This is emphatically not our intent. We offer the following prompts to help educators develop spaces that nurture

independent music thinkers, music listeners and music makers within a peer-oriented community. We work toward a diverse, student-centered curriculum accessible to all.

### 1. Collaboration as an instructional strategy

- How do you share the power of decision-making and of leadership? Are students invited to experiment with solutions to a) technical musical problems and b) interpretative musical problems?
- How do you invite students to play with the music – inventing their own variations and contributing their own ideas in an ongoing way? How is student understanding of musical processes and concepts being developed through guided manipulation of the music?
- What roles can students play in musical and social leadership in the classroom?
- How do you engage students to actively create (i.e. arrange/improvise/compose) in both full class and small group settings?
- How do you help students make connections between school music and their personal musicking? How is the curriculum relevant to their personal lives?
- How do students learn about themselves, their peers, and the world around them?
- How do lessons make places for collaborations of musical styles (i.e. mash-ups and re-mixes; fusions)
- How do you encourage students to reflect upon both their learning and their ways of learning? (metacognition).

### 2. Self assessment as an instructional strategy

- What opportunities are made to value and celebrate accomplishment?
- What informs student skill development, i.e. what information scaffolds their learning?
- What information assists students to form and articulate their musical goals and criteria for assessment?
- What opportunities are students given to practice their assessment skills before evaluation?
- How are students provided with opportunities to observe and articulate their personal musical learning through describing their successes and their challenges? (metacognition)
- How are students invited to assess the group's performance and identify what is working and what needs improving and to suggest ways that improvement can be sought?

### 3. Formative assessment as an instructional strategy

- How does feedback build self-efficacy?
- How does feedback build self-esteem?
- How does feedback facilitate skill development? Immediate and specific comments (not just "good job") help motivate and develop the young musician.
- How do students collect feedback from a variety of sources: self, peer, teacher, family, friends?
- What opportunities are provided for students to develop skills and understandings in a variety of ways and many times in formative

assessment before summative teacher evaluation?

- In what ways are students involved in assignment design, assessment and evaluations?
- In what ways do activities and assignments reflect authentic life situations and meaningful, relevant learning?

### 4. Peer sharing as an instructional strategy

- How do you provide opportunities for individuals and small groups to demonstrate musical ideas?
- How do you arrange for more skilled peers to share musically?
- How do students hear/see your own passion for music? What opportunities do students have to share their personal interests and skills in class?

### 5. Classroom setting as an instructional strategy

- How do you vary the instructional setting? Are students always in the same seating formation? (e.g. number offs, random mix, circle facing in, circle facing out, far corners. . .)
- How do you use seating formations to honour the importance of each voice in the classroom? (e. g. opportunities for small groups and individuals to sing and receive affirmation and feedback)
- How do you explore a variety of acoustical spaces in your school (gym, hallway, school office, drama room, auditorium, cafeteria . . . ?

### 6. Use of metaphors as an instructional strategy

- How do you employ metaphors to help communicate musical ideas?
  - *kinesthetic* (e.g. spin the air with your forefingers while singing)
  - *visual* (e.g. use props: rubber band; puppet; Slinky. . . to illustrate expressive concepts)
  - *verbal* (descriptive images, e.g. last glimpse of the setting sun, the feel of gliding on cross-country skis. . .)
  - *tactile* (e.g. tap the beat or pulse (♩ or ♪♪) on the shoulder of the person beside you, switch from person on your left to person on your right at the beginning of each new phrase)
- How are student-invented metaphors incorporated into the learning?

### 7. Questioning as an instructional strategy

- How do you use essential questions (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005) to organize inquiry in the classroom? e. g. *How have innovations in technology affected the work of composers in the 1800's, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? How have musicians used music to protest political movements?*
- How do you use these big, open-ended questions?
- How are questions framed to maximize the active participation of everyone in the classroom?
- How are questions posed: to the full class or to individuals? How many people get to try an answer before the *right* answer is provided or agreed upon? (We tend to grab our notion of a right answer quickly and move on.)
- How do you engage all learners in pondering a question? Think/Pair/Share is a powerful pedagogical tool.

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- How do you provide ways for students to safely consider big questions before sharing their thoughts publicly? Are there questions that students are asked to ponder for next class?
- How do you use questions to focus students' attention on what skills to use and when to use them:
  - *What do you notice when...you change a physical action (e.g. posture)?*
  - *How did it feel/sound when you...Listen for...Lets see what happens when we...What difference do you hear between...?*

### 8. Repertoire (pre-composed and emergent) as an instructional strategy

- How are students involved in choosing and shaping the music explored in class? How do you create space for the music that students are personally interested in?
- How does repertoire choice affect/reflect pedagogy?
- How does the class repertoire offer opportunities to explore human expression and communication?
- How is the back-story/context for each piece explored? How does this exploration inform the music-making?
- How does the music offer ways into learning about political resistance, and the diversity of experiences and histories of people?
- How do you revisit repertoire from a previous year to deepen understandings?
- How does repertoire choice offer learning about a variety of communities? of practices? We caution about the dangers of essentializing cultures when discussing the context and history of a piece. We highlight the pitfall of normalization, which happens when Western European music is not named by ethnicity and social location.
- How does repertoire choice address and inform the exploration and connection to the real-world and the personal? CME

<sup>i</sup> See, for example Koza, 1994; Lamb, 2002, Gould, 2004.

<sup>ii</sup> See, for example Bartel, 2004; Shively, 2004; Bowman, 2007; Myers, 2006; Gustafson, 2008; Gould et al, forthcoming). Journals such as *Action, Criticism and Theory for Music Education and G.E.M.S* (both available free on-line) and *Music Education Research* (available through university libraries) are excellent professional resources.



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