Vernacular Music and Theories of Change: Transformation on Intersecting Paths

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ABSTRACT

Vernacular music-making continues to be a prominent topic in music education discourse. However, the degree to which school music teachers choose to implement vernacular music practices is unclear, as are the factors that inspire change in teaching practice. This four-part article highlights the complexities surrounding curricular innovation and implementation, as well as the interplay between theory and praxis in music teaching and learning. Specifically, this inquiry features the precepts of three change theories and how their tenets can be applied to vernacular teaching practices in school music settings. A college-level vernacular music class is presented as one model for preparing preservice music teachers to meet the needs of 21st-century students. Considering the ways in which music teachers apply vernacular practices to school settings could help to illuminate the intersecting paths of theory and practice in an evolving music education discourse.

Keywords: change theories, curricular reform, informal music learning, music education, popular music, vernacular music

Introduction

School music teachers consider myriad factors when planning for instruction. Musical, social, and skills-based attributes can play crucial roles in music teachers' decisions regarding repertoire and student creativity (Froehlich and Smith 2017). While many music teachers might strive for a balance in programmatic offerings and outcomes, questions of

musical breadth and depth remain (Mercado 2019, Froehlich and Smith 2017). One approach that music teachers often weigh is vernacular music-making. As O'Flynn (2006) noted, vernacular music "can be regarded as [a] broad musical-cultural field encompassing many genres and practices" (141). Thus, the term *vernacular* has been a wide-ranging yet imprecise label for synonymously naming a variety of musical activities such as informal music-making (Waldron et al. 2018, Waldron and Veblen 2009, Green 2008, Folkestad 2006), pop music (Sorenson 2021, Mercado 2019, Randles 2019), hip-hop (Hess 2018, Kruse 2016), modern band (Gramm 2021, Powell 2021, Randles 2019), songwriting (Giotta and Kruse 2022, Randles 2022, Kratus 2016), composition (Kaschub in press, Kerschner and Strand 2016, Stringham 2016, Kaschub and Smith 2013, Randles and Stringham 2013), improvisation (Siljamäki and Kanellopoulos 2020, Biasutti 2017), and online music learning (Waldron et al. 2020, Waldron 2012). Given these extensive skills and practices, the term *vernacular* will be used in the current investigation as a way to refer to the breadth of terminology surrounding teaching and learning practices that parallel and intersect Western classical practices (e.g., informal, popular, folk, rock, jazz, indigenous).

However, it is unclear how and why music teachers might choose to incorporate vernacular music-making in their classrooms. Why do some teachers integrate vernacular activities in their classrooms while others do not? How do music teachers negotiate the balance of Western classical traditions and vernacular traditions in their classrooms? How do music teachers guide their students toward thinking and musicking (Small 1998) in new ways? Moreover, what compels music teachers to examine their current practices and reimagine additional ways of teaching? In other words, how and why does change occur in school music programs, and what fuels it? Such examination lies in the paradoxical space between research and practice.

To honor the often contradictory relationship between theory and praxis, the structure of this article reflects an hour-glass shape in four discreet yet interconnected sections. The outer sections represent broad, theoretical contextualization and synthesis, while the inner sections represent specific examples of practice. The first part (*theory*) contains a review of vernacular musicianship and the school-based teaching practices that

teachers and researchers have explored. The second part (*theory toward praxis*) contains a review of change theories as a way to situate their potential relevance to teaching and learning practices in schools. The third part (*praxis*) encompasses a narrative description of a college-level vernacular music course that was designed to assist preservice music teachers in considering various types of music-making with their future students. The fourth and final part (*theory*) returns to a discussion of curricular change and vernacular music-making in schools and teacher preparation programs, and includes implications, challenges, and possibilities surrounding this type of coursework. The purpose of this article's four-part, hour-glass shape is to highlight, in some small way, the complex associations between theory, practice, and change in music teaching and learning.

Part I: Vernacular Music and School Contexts

Scholars have attempted to define and situate vernacular music within the larger gestalt of music-making (Caswell and Smith 2009, L. Green 2008, Folkestad 2006, O'Flynn, 2006, A. Green 1993, Scholten 1988). A common interpretation of vernacular music has been that it reflects primarily non-Western classical forms of music in society, such as popular, folk, rock, jazz, and global musics (O'Flynn, 2006). Early on, Scholten (1988) and Green (1993) traced the roots of the term *vernacular* and its connection to American music. Green (1993) speculated that the labels—or "bins" (35)—that scholars have used to categorize music can be insufficient for capturing the broad range of what constitutes music from stylistic and situational perspectives. In fact, Green (1993) questioned whether the term

> *American music* serves as a naming bin spacious enough to hold classical, avant-garde, folk, and tribal [sic] material. Charles Ives, Marian Anderson, Irving Berlin, Louis Armstrong, Aunt Molly Jackson, Lydia Mendoza, Gene Autry, and Madonna all qualify as composers or performers of American music. What singular thread binds them? By conjuring metaphors of naming bins and binding threads, we confess difficulty in linking Carnegie Hall, Tin Pan Alley, Blue Ridge Mountains, and Mississippi Delta. We question our premises in running together Kodiak Island, Bourbon Street, Music City, and MacDowell Colony. (35, italics in original)

Similarly, O'Flynn (2006) noted the "generic distinctions" (141) that music scholars have assigned to particular styles of music (e.g., informal music, folk music, popular music, traditional music) and advocated for more dialectical, contextually-based approaches for naming the array of vernacular music practices that exist. Despite vernacular music's inclusive underpinnings (Green 2008, Folkestad 2006), dualistic philosophical debates persist with regard to curricular relevance and the relationship between participatory and performative practices (Waldron et al. 2018, O'Flynn 2006). It is perhaps Green's (1993) metaphor of "naming bins and binding threads" (35) that can be most problematic for school and university music teachers who attempt to incorporate vernacular music practices. That is, how can music teachers choose from a variety of stylistic bins and still reinforce cohesive curricular threads?

Vernacular music and its association with popular music in schools has been a specific area of inquiry (Powell 2021, Sorenson 2021, Rolandson 2020, Mercado 2019, Isbell 2007, Woody 2007, Folkestad 2006). Researchers have noted the tension between Western classical music and popular music practices in school settings (Woody and Adams 2019, Isbell 2016, O'Flynn 2006) and in the contested spaces between Western classical and popular musics in international settings (Moore 2022, 2012, O'Flynn 2009). A recurring theme across this literature has been the hazard of privileging one music genre over another and how that relates to students' out-of-school music identities. Regardless of level (e.g., PK-12, university), music teachers' curricular and pedagogical choices can shape students' experiences in and out of school and can influence how students make connections between Western classical, vernacular, and popular musics (Woody and Adams 2019, Moore 2012). Folkestad (2006) reasoned that the debate surrounding whether to include popular music in schools can be a false dichotomy, because popular music is already a part of schools' social-cultural landscapes. As Folkestad asserted,

> the question of whether or not to have…popular music in school is irrelevant: popular music is already present in school, brought there by the students, and in many cases also by the teachers, as part of their musical experience and knowledge… The issue is rather: how do we deal with it? (136)

Further, Woody (2007) maintained that "[t]he best way to learn about popular music is to make it" (34), which speaks to the vernacular skills that can be fostered in group settings (e.g., autonomy, democratic learning, functional aural skills). These composite notions align with the formal and informal situations, practices, and ways of learning that Folkestad (2006) espoused and highlight the possibilities of providing diverse curricular offerings in school music programs (Rolandson 2020).

Researchers have explored how teachers have enacted popular, informal, and vernacular music-making in school settings. Scholars have studied musical creativity (Abramo and Reynolds 2015), functional aural skills (Woody and Adams 2019), informal learning (Kastner 2014, Folkestad 2006), songwriting (Giotta and Kruse 2022, Vasil 2019, Kratus 2016), and modern band (Gramm 2021, Powell 2021, Randles 2019). Still, there is a lack of consensus as to the value and appropriateness of vernacular music in the classroom, especially as it relates to Western classical traditions and large ensemble settings (Weinstein and Haning 2022, Hamilton and Vannatta-Hall 2020, Elpus and Abril 2019, Davis and Blair 2011, O'Flynn 2006). Striking a balance between process- and product-oriented classroom activities can appear particularly elusive to music teachers (Vasil 2019, Isbell 2007), as can maintaining philosophical parity between aesthetic and utilitarian perspectives (Hess 2020, Jenkins 2011, Caswell and Smith 2009).

A related consideration is preservice music teachers' preparation in facilitating vernacular approaches. Blackwell et al. (2022), Sorenson (2021), and Isbell (2016) collectively found that while preservice music teachers generally held positive associations with informal music learning, they also reported a lack of confidence and potential reluctance to incorporate such activities in their future classrooms. Part of this reticence may be linked to the unpredictability of vernacular teaching practices and the unstructured approach to student-led learning (Vasil 2019). However, sustained experience in integrating popular music, learning multiple instruments, and incorporating technology has helped to build confidence among music teachers as they create prolonged programming with their students (Blackwell et al. 2022, Vasil 2019). Providing recurring opportunities for preservice and inservice music teachers to experience applications of informal, popular,

and vernacular music could bolster educators' readiness to teach in expanded ways (Kruse 2023). Such approaches could support Woody and Adams' (2019) position of preparing preservice music teachers who can meet the demands of musical diversity in a variety of settings. Still, questions remain as to what inspires music teachers to change their perceptions of vernacular music-making, and what factors lead to actual change in teaching approaches, curricular offerings, or both.

The background literature in this section has shown broad considerations related to vernacular music-making in schools and music teacher preparation programs. Future research could illuminate further this growing discussion as well as the circumstances that can lead to curricular and pedagogical change in school music settings. Exploring what inspires music teachers to pursue curricular change—and how they negotiate that change—could provide additional perspectives for providing novel school music offerings and classroom activities. The next section shifts to a review of change theories and the ways that scholars have couched how change occurs in groups and organizations. The following principles could be useful in helping music educators to envision stages of change in their own programs.

Part II: Theories of Change

The ways in which organizations, structures, or practices transform over time can be understood through a variety of change theories. Theories of change can help to explain how change occurs across a series of progressive stages and, ultimately, how it produces renewed practice. As Serrat (2017) wrote,

> a theory of change is a purposeful model of how an initiative—such as a policy, a strategy, a program, or a project—contributes through a chain of early and intermediate outcomes to the intended result. Theories of change help navigate the complexity of social change. (237)

Theorists like Serrat (2017) have challenged narrow, preexisting interpretations of organizational learning and their limited relation to social change in favor of more expansive, socially-situated views (e.g., Engeström 2015, 2001). Such views have been

beneficial in examining curricular change in music teaching and learning (Randles 2020, 2013). Because schools and school music programs encompass their own social structures and practices (Froehlich and Smith 2017), theories of change could be useful for visualizing how music teachers make curricular and pedagogical modifications, and how music students might respond to those adjustments (e.g., Williams and Randles 2017, Randles 2013). Although many change theories stem from the field of organizational management (Hussain et al. 2018, Johnson 2016, Pietrzak and Paliszkiewicz 2015, Gupta 2006, Hiatt 2006, Lewin 1947), the three theories introduced below were selected because they have been used as frameworks in other professions, including healthcare (Shirey 2013) and music education (Kladder 2020). These theories are (a) Lewin's change theory; (b) the PDCA (plan-do-check-act) cycle; and (c) the ADKAR (awareness-desire-knowledge-ability-reinforcement) model. While presenting complete profiles of these three theories is beyond the scope of this article, brief synopses of each framework are outlined below to introduce the core attributes of each theory. These principles will be applied to music education more specifically in subsequent sections of this paper.

Lewin's Change Theory

Kurt Lewin's (1947) change theory has become a leading business management model for examining organizational change. Lewin posited that social interactions and group dynamics shape behavior, and that these forces impact the degree to which organizational stakeholders accept or resist change. Focusing on the process of change rather than on specific corporate steps, Lewin's theory "explains the movement of an organization from the known (current state) to the unknown (desired future state)" (Hussain et al. 2016, 123). This three-stage model is based on the shape-shifting properties of a block of ice as conditions change (unfreezing → movement → refreezing) and illustrates a sequential progression:

1. **Unfreezing**: Dismantling the existing status quo, or the equilibrium state; increasing group consensus for change by reducing and breaking resistance to change.

2. **Movement:** Moving toward a new equilibrium through action, motivation, and group collaboration; understanding the benefits of adopting a fresh perspective.

3. **Refreezing:** Establishing a new equilibrium through integrated changes, policies, and procedures; opposing forces return to a balanced existence. (Kladder 2020, Hussain et al. 2016, Lewin 1947)

A strength of Lewin's progression is the vivid imagery of melting, reforming, and reconstitution. Each stage can be helpful in delineating the lifecycle of change, and how motivation, action, and trust can build group consensus and cohesion. Lewin's classic "changing as three steps" model also has drawn criticism, particularly because of its linear progression, absence of detail, and lack of applicability to modern-day work environments (Cummings et al. 2016, Hussain et al. 2016). Cummings et al. (2016) also noted that Lewin's theory likely was reconstructed following his death, and that the theory that exists today may not be what Lewin imagined originally. Still, this particular change theory has been a useful tool for visualizing how change can occur in organizations. Lewin's model also has been used in education research, including that by Kladder (2020), who used Lewin's framework to examine institutional change in music education. Specifically, Kladder investigated curricular change in two preservice music teacher programs, highlighting how change can occur in a traditionally unchanged professional curriculum (see also Williams and Randles 2017). Among Kladder's findings was the addition of vernacular music practices as a way to expand preservice music teachers' musicianship. Given that Lewin's change theory has been a prominent fixture in research, its precepts could be applied to a variety of education settings, including music education.

PDCA Cycle

In the 1920s, Walter Shewhart from New York's Bell Laboratories developed the precursor to the PDCA (plan-do-check-act) cycle to establish quality control in the wake of expansive industrialization (Gupta 2006). Shewhart originally conceptualized the process of monitoring manufacturing output and creating action plans through four steps: plan, do,

inspect (or sample inspection), and act. In the 1950s, W. Edwards Deming revised Shewhart's initial model and renamed it the PDCA cycle. In essence, the PDCA model includes the following four steps:

1. **Plan:** Recognize an opportunity, and plan the change.
2. **Do:** Test the change.
3. **Check:** Review the test, analyze the results, and identify learnings.
4. **Act (sometimes referred to as Adjust):** Take action based on what you learned in the check step. If the change was successful, incorporate the learnings from the test into wider changes. If not, go through the cycle again with a different plan. (Johnson 2016, 45)

Deming's revised, iterative cycle aimed to mitigate potential variations between preferred performance and actual performance in business settings. Since its inception, the PDCA cycle has been called the Shewhart cycle, the Deming cycle, or the PDSA cycle ("S" for study) (Johnson 2016); however, regardless of the name, its tenets have been used in contemporary discussions as a "model for managing processes and creating process-oriented thinking" (Gupta 2006, 45). The PDCA cycle allows organizations to reflect on their goals, productivity, and outcomes, which, with proper planning, can lead to improvement or change in organizational knowledge. Consequently, Pietrzak and Paliszkiewicz (2015) theorized that PDCA could be used as a viable learning method: "The circle goes round and round—the fundamental principle is iteration. By repeating the cycle, the plan is confirmed or negated, our knowledge is getting richer, and process managed on the PDCA framework is continuously improved" (154). Thus, the iterative attributes of the PDCA cycle and its focus on improved knowledge could be germane to school contexts.

ADKAR Cycle

Jeff Hiatt (2006) pondered why some institutional changes succeed while others fail. After extensive research, Hiatt posited that change failures were attributed to more than inadequate communication or ineffective organizational structures, and that instead, they rested in the neglect of individual stakeholders. "The secret to successful changes," Hiatt

wrote, "lies beyond the visible and busy activities that surround change. Successful change, at its core, is rooted in something much simpler: How to facilitate change with one person" (2006, 1). Hiatt ultimately developed the ADKAR (awareness-desire-knowledge-ability-reinforcement) model to focus on change at the individual level. The framework includes five elements or "building blocks" (2006, 1) that individuals must recognize and accept in order for change to be successful:

1. **Awareness** of the need for change as well as the risks of not changing.
2. **Desire** to support and participate in the change; a personal choice.
3. **Knowledge** of how to change; utilizing resources to implement change.
4. **Ability** to implement required skills and behaviors.
5. **Reinforcement** to sustain the change; external and internal motivators.
   (Hiatt 2006, 2-3)

According to Hiatt (2006), the ADKAR lifecycle begins once an individual identifies a change on which to focus and continues progressively throughout the framework's sequence. The proper series of elements is also key, as each step leads to the next; an element cannot occur without the previous one having been acknowledged and resolved first. For example, reinforcing an altered practice or policy (Step 5) cannot occur without first having acquired the ability to face such a change (Step 4). Similarly, conceptualizing how to change a structural issue (Step 3) cannot occur without first having acquired the desire to be an active participant in organizational reform (Step 2). ADKAR's people-focused approach to facilitating change is distinct from other change models that encompass a broader view of organizational development. Such a position appears to complement student-centered classroom settings.

Section Summary

The change theories presented in this section represent only a portion of extant theories on how groups and organizations negotiate change. However, Lewin's (1947) overarching theoretical framework, PCDA's iterative cycle (Pietrzak and Paliszkiewicz 2015), and

ADKAR's individual-level focus (Hiatt 2006) hold potential for school music settings and the teaching practices that music educators adopt. A more complete discussion of how these change theories could be applied to vernacular music-making is addressed in the final segment of this document. The next section shifts to a praxis-based, personal narrative on curricular change and the creation of a college-level vernacular music class. This narrative represents, in part, a longitudinal review of the course's applicability to the current teaching positions of program alumni and illustrates macro-, meso-, and micro-level changes in pedagogy, musicianship, and autonomy (Froehlich and Smith 2017).

Part III: A Vernacular Music Course Narrative

Structure and Plasticity

In 2015, the music education faculty at my institution, a medium-sized Midwestern university offering undergraduate, masters, and doctoral degrees in music education, committed to curricular updates that better reflected the changing landscape of music education (e.g., Giotta and Kruse 2022, National Association for Music Education 2022, Mercado 2019, Abramo and Reynolds 2015, Green 2008). One of the proposed changes was the addition of a vernacular music course that would be folded into the existing curriculum. Together with previously-established courses in global music and music technology, we hoped the vernacular music class would offer students additional perspectives they could apply to their school music teaching practices. In Spring 2016, I designed and launched *Vernacular Music in Education* (VMIE), which currently is offered every spring semester as a required class for music education majors and as an elective for Bachelor of Arts students (see also Kruse 2023).

An overarching premise of VMIE is how informal learning techniques (Mercado 2019, Isbell 2016, Green 2008, Folkestad 2006, Green 2002) can be used in school music programs and large ensemble settings such as bands, choirs, and orchestras. Over the course of the semester, students learn how to transfer experiences on their own instruments to a variety of secondary instruments (e.g., drum set, electric bass, guitar, voice, 'ukulele[1]), all within the context of developing culturally-responsive approaches to music

teaching (Bond 2017, Lind and McKoy 2016). Students also navigate creating, composing, and improvising on these instruments as a way to deepen their pedagogical tools and to place themselves in the positions of their future students. The depictions below illustrate some of the decision-making skills that students have employed in weaving together attributes of formal and informal music-making—as well as formal and informal learning (Folkestad 2006)—during songwriting modules. The following pages also highlight specific examples of students' musical projects over the years, which they created autonomously, without my assistance.

However, I would like to offer two introductory disclaimers. First, the musical activities that students have undertaken in this class are not necessarily groundbreaking, and some of the musical "assignments" have not been my invention entirely. As the course instructor for VMIE, I have borrowed and adapted concepts from numerous researchers (e.g., Hill 2019, Woody and Adams 2019, Isbell 2016, Kratus 2016, Hartz 2015, Allsup 2011, Green 2008) and am simply riding on the coattails of those who helped to set this undertaking in motion. Second, it is important to note that while songwriting is a component of this class, we do not make music "all of the time." Due to other curricular requirements, this course houses foci outside of—but certainly complementary to—active vernacular music-making, such as lesson planning, assessing creativity, reading and applying research, and addressing diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility in education. Between academic content and music-making, we negotiate the fabled continuum between formal and informal, and between structure and plasticity. *Structure* being the musical, social, and often familiar elements that undergird much of our understanding of music. *Plasticity* being the level of malleability in adapting to new musical settings, particularly when the unexpected occurs. Learning to explore, respond to, and exist in multiple musical habitats are critical skills to blend in this course. In this way, structure and plasticity have served as opposing yet parallel guides in the creative process.

Students' Musical Creations

At varying points throughout the semester, students learn to navigate structure and plasticity through musical experimentation. The semester typically begins with singing a variety of folk and pop songs. Many tunes are straightforward and predicable, which is an intentional choice, given that they are familiar songs that students can latch onto quickly and feel comfortable exploring. At first, students sing the melody while I accompany them on 'ukulele, then they figure out the tune by ear on their own instruments and finally add harmony lines until the song is complete. *Structure*.

However, this sense of accomplishment is challenged once we begin to look at other arrangements of tunes and examine more closely the lyrics, histories, and meanings that can be derived from such tunes (e.g., oppression, othering, persecution, sexuality, stereotypes). Suddenly, a once familiar tune is unfamiliar. This approach is purposeful, so as to begin a larger dialogue about issues of social justice in music, and to reinforce the idea that folk and pop tunes are not that simple at all. They are highly complex, layered, and carry both hidden and mixed messages. *Plasticity*.

The students' first independent musical project is a group cover tune. The students collectively select a song of any genre to replicate by ear and perform, as close to the original as possible, duplicating all major parts of the song on their primary instruments. *Structure*. Past groups have covered Adele's "Rumor Has It," KT Tunstall's "Suddenly I See," and The Zutons' "Valerie," complete with spontaneous choreography and hallmark "pop faces." Students have felt that this project is a step up from their folk song experimentations.

The second group musical project is a change of style assignment in which students select a song and perform it in a different style. Students explore what is "furthest away" from the original setting in order to create an entirely different feel. The lyrics and overall form of the original tune are retained, but students adjust the musical elements to fit the new style and must incorporate both primary and secondary instruments. *Plasticity*. One cohort took Carly Rae Jepsen's 2012 hit, "Call Me Maybe," and mutated it into an ethereal, minor-keyed, Latin fusion feel, which made it magically unrecognizable. Another

cohort chose Evanescence's "Bring Me To Life," a dark and gritty gothic metal song from 2003, and transformed it into a barbershop-style doo-wop song in saccharin-based major. Conversely, another group performed Jason Mraz's upbeat "I'm Yours" and twisted it into a sinister, modal take on love and affection that included beatboxing, instrumental sound effects, and *Hamilton*-inspired rapping. By this point in the semester, students generally become hooked by—and empowered by—the autonomous freedoms of the creative process.

In the third and final group musical project, students collectively create an original song in any style. They write and select the text, form, instrumentation, and other musical elements, including improvisatory passages. They also navigate ways in which to incorporate primary and secondary instruments, as well as new instruments they know nothing about and must learn to play (e.g., drum set, electric guitar, electric bass). This is where plasticity and a lack of structure have burdened the students initially, until a musical concept materializes, which is consistent with research findings on the songwriting process; for example, Jaffurs' (2004) and Green's (2008) work with informal learning practices among school students, Kratus' (2016) and Giotta and Kruse's (2022) work with youth and adolescent songwriting creativity, and Draves' (2008), Riley's (2012), and Hill's (2019) work on songwriting interactions among college students.

One cohort wrote "Summer Vacation," a dark parody about a Hawaiian-vacation-turned-nightmare due to a zombie infestation. The students' thoroughly descriptive text of the horror was mitigated, however, by the sounds of 'ukuleles, a major key, more background doo-wops, and a Hawaiian melody that was soothing, happy, and—dare I say—infectious. The result was a tongue-in-cheek incongruence that was laughable, and listeners found themselves rooting for the zombies. In another example, the cohort from 2017 began constructing a protest song targeting the then White House administration, seeking to challenge its narrative against "fake news." However, the students increasingly became overwhelmed by the thought of living out concentrated negativity inside and outside of class. For them, wrestling daily with national discord while simultaneously writing a protest song about it became too daunting. There was also a looming deadline for the

musical assignment, and the students concluded that messages of social justice require time and space to develop and to get right. They believed they did not have that luxury given the circumstances, so they abandoned that particular topic. Instead, the students chose a light-hearted yet targeted attack on the assaulting, insidious nature of clickbait, titled, "The Second Verse Will Shock You: Four People Went Vegan After Hearing This Song. Listen To Find Out Why." The students' chosen mode of improvisation involved retrieving trending clickbait prior to performance, and then improvising melodic and rhythmic content on the spot. Every performance was fresh, as each student chose new clickbait titles each time they performed the song. Ultimately, this piece still served as a protest song, because it cleverly highlighted a form of fake news that is designed to distract and mislead the public.

Throughout the semester, each successive musical creation includes fewer boundaries so that students can build on previous experience and gain confidence in their abilities to create novel music autonomously. Overall, students acquire new vocal and instrumental skills, claim ownership and satisfaction through constructing a variety of songs, and begin to conceive of ways to fold similar concepts into school ensemble settings. This process was particularly crucial during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, when the students and I responded to extensive instructional modifications and learned alternate ways of incorporating vernacular approaches (e.g., GarageBand, Soundtrap[2]). Still, the applicability of these skills to students' future teaching lives is unclear.

Uncomfortable Questions

As mentioned earlier in this section, several of the musical activities in this course were inspired by teachers and scholars who have championed student-centered music learning (e.g., Hill 2019, Kratus 2016, Hartz 2015, Allsup 2011, Woody and Lehmann 2010, Folkestad 2006). Each year, each class provides me with an opportunity for personal reflection and evaluation as the course evolves. This class, among others, was implemented in an attempt to place contemporary notions of music-making among more established ones, and to better prepare preservice teachers for meeting the needs of music students in 21st-century schools. The intersections of formal and informal, structure and plasticity, and

teacher-led and student-led convene in this class. However, I still question, as I did back in 2015: Will we be able to achieve a balance in our new curriculum? Will curricular breadth and depth live in bipartisan harmony? Are we preparing teachers for the kinds of jobs that actually await them? Are these changes worthwhile?

On the one hand, it would be wonderful if students could simply jam more in class, but we need time to reinforce concepts related to assessment, state music standards, instructional differentiation, and mandated writing projects. Are we doing a disservice by not going deeper into immersive music-making practices? Are we providing a collection of pedagogical samplings that soon may be forgotten? Is our model too far removed from what Adams (2016), Folkestad (2006), Hill (2019), Isbell (2016, 2007), Kratus (2016, 2007), Vasil (2019), and others have envisioned and espoused? If we are going to be vernacular, should we not play more?

On the other hand, this model compels students to reconcile connections between musical and non-musical information as it relates to planning for instruction. It allows students to weave complementary ideas into formalized ensemble settings, to think critically, to ask questions, to explore social justice through music, and to have a keener, more appreciative ear for non-Western classical musics and the messages they can send. Perhaps the sewn-together, bric-a-brac nature of this course works to our advantage. Perhaps the answers rest in the *application* of these concepts to large ensembles: creative warm-ups, meaningful listening activities, approachable composition or improvisation activities, and the realization that people can be creative if you let them. Perhaps this course *is* well-suited for the kinds of public school music jobs that currently exist, at least in our state, where the large ensemble model is prevalent. Perhaps the teaching of vernacular music in school settings rests somewhere *between* structure and plasticity.

While I still question whether VMIE "sticks," there are encouraging signs that program alumni have been exploring with their own students many of the concepts we examine in VMIE (Kruse 2023). As each cohort graduates from our program, I will be able to monitor the degree to which VMIE helped to shape alumni's development as music teachers, and whether it made a difference in the ways they approach music-making in their

own PK–12 classrooms. I also will be able to learn more about the contextual realities of program alumni, which will allow me to alter VMIE course content so that it complements and supports the landscapes in which alumni find themselves. In effect, change precipitates change. A broader discussion of change—in students and in teachers—is presented in the final section below.

Part IV: Intersecting Paths

The purpose of this article was to examine the incorporation of vernacular music approaches in school settings and to consider how curricular change can occur. Given societal shifts and contemporary discussions of what constitutes music education in schools (Hess 2020, Woody and Adams 2019, Waldron et al. 2018, Froehlich and Smith 2017), music teachers may be faced with whether—or how much—to include vernacular, popular, and informal music-making in their classes (Sorenson 2021, Mercado 2019, Vasil 2019, Isbell 2016, Folkestad 2006). Vernacular music approaches (e.g., aural learning, beat making, composing, diverse musicking, improvising, student-led learning) have been shown to engage a wide variety of students and have served as relevant paths toward expanding musicianship, autonomy, and creativity (Kruse 2023, Gramm 2021, Mercado 2019, Green 2008, Isbell 2007). Still, determining how, when, and why music teachers choose to pursue vernacular practices is an ongoing consideration, especially for music teachers whose primary background might rest in large ensemble traditions, or for teachers who do not feel prepared to facilitate vernacular or popular music practices in their classrooms (Blackwell et al. 2022, Sorenson 2021, Woody and Adams 2019, Isbell 2016). What leads to shifts in these perceptions? How do music teachers weigh change and tradition in their programs? When do music teachers decide to commit to any kind of curricular or instructional reform? Theories of change could be one way to contextualize these processes and to determine possible paths forward.

As addressed earlier, the three change theories included in this article represent a small portion of available theories on institutional change; however, the underlying tenets of each theory could be applied to school and university music and, ultimately, to the wider

profession. Because of their focus on intentional modifications at the individual and group levels, the three theories featured here could provide guiding directions on the intersections of music learning, music teaching, and curricular reform. Such guidance might complement Green's (1993) musical concept of "naming bins and binding threads" (35). That is, perhaps change theories are one way to divide programmatic change into manageable segments (naming bins) while monitoring intermediary steps that reveal growth toward a new equilibrium (binding threads). While Green (1993) noted the limits of such analogies, they could be practical starting places for conceptualizing change. Figure 1 below depicts a composite view of the aforementioned change theories as they relate to music teaching. The discussion that follows contextualizes these intersecting attributes.
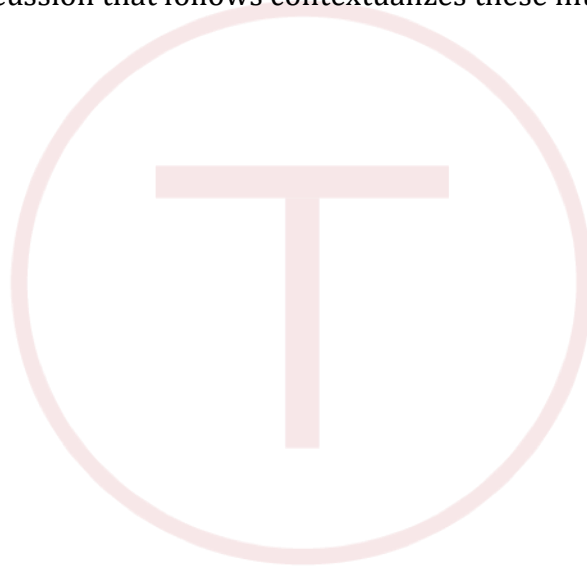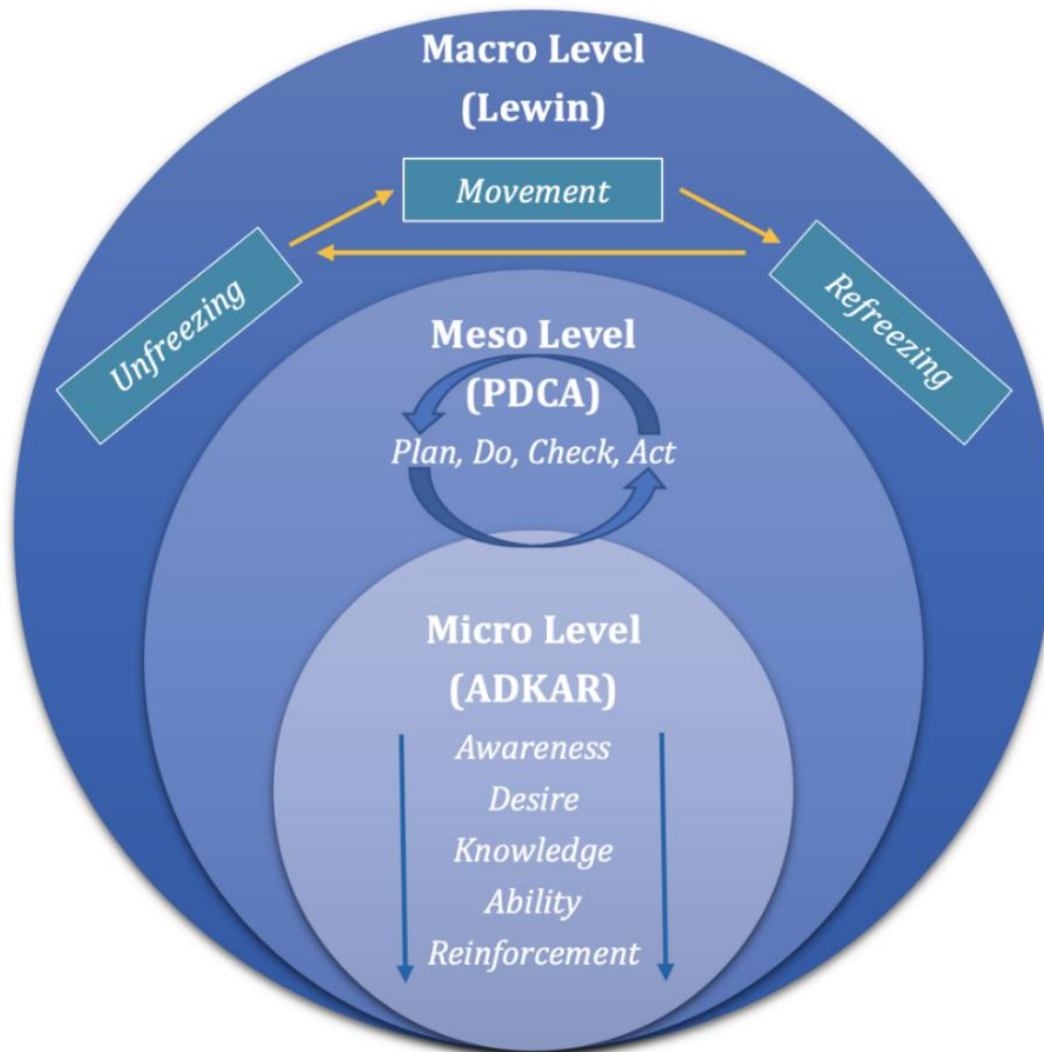
Figure 1: A Nested Change Model. Superimposed change theories based on (a) Lewin's change theory (Kladder 2020, Cummings et al. 2016, Hussain et al. 2016, Lewin, 1947), (b) Deming's PDCA cycle (Johnson 2016, Pietrzak and Paliszkiewicz 2015, Gupta 2006), and (c) Hiatt's ADKAR model (2006).

First, Lewin's (1947) change theory (unfreezing → movement → refreezing) could be helpful for visualizing large-scale transformation within music programs or teaching practices. While broad, Lewin's concept allows for individual tailoring within each stage so that teachers and students can recognize when musical change (e.g., experiences, learning activities, skills, understanding) is occurring and evolving to the next stage. In a concrete

example, I was unaware in the early stages of the new VMIE class that the opposing forces I called "structure and plasticity" were paralleling Lewin's concepts of unfreezing and moving toward a new equilibrium. When students are confronted with reconciling vernacular and Western classical concepts, changes in personal awareness and pedagogical applications can increase. It is perhaps through the thawing of a status quo and the loss of structure (e.g., a preconceived notion, belief, or practice) that problem-solving is awakened in both learners and instructors. School music teachers and their students could experience similar progressions as they explore diverse music-making in their own contexts, and how those progressions can accrue musical breadth, application, and autonomy over time. For instance, music teachers and students could discuss how music (of any genre) expresses overarching societal messages and meanings. Through age-appropriate and context-appropriate ways, teachers and students could explore music's role throughout time and place, taking the viewpoints of others and creating connections to their own lives. Broaching large-scale social issues (e.g., community, empathy, hope, justice) could pique students' interest in and curiosity for exploring deeper musical meanings and skills, thus reflecting Lewin's (1947) melting process that activates a change in understanding. Over time, continued discussions could become a natural extension of music programs that complement other curricular facets such as repertoire selection, performance skills, and student leadership.

Second, Shewhart and Deming's PDCA (plan-do-check-act) cycle (Johnson 2016, Pietrzak and Paliszkiewicz 2015) replicates many pedagogical steps that teachers practice daily in the classroom. Although the PDCA cycle was intended as a business model, its iterative approach complements traditional teaching cycles and could be an organic way for teachers and students to assess progress when learning new or unfamiliar material. Music teachers are highly skilled at diagnosing problems, prescribing solutions, and providing feedback for future learning goals. PDCA's principles could be applied to what music teachers already do in the classroom, could reinforce the tenets of good teaching, and could highlight how diverse music offerings can bolster music programs rather than undermine them. For example, just as music teachers might approach rehearsing repertoire by

emphasizing particular scales, arpeggios, chorales, or bowings/articulations, they could use similar approaches to highlight various connections between Western classical music and pop, rock, folk, and other musics. Drawing students' attention to similarities and differences across genres (e.g., balance, chord progressions, form, functional harmony, key signatures, meter, rhythm) could bolster the foundational elements of music for students, emphasize the application and transfer of such elements to novel settings, and prepare students for exploring other avenues of musical creativity (e.g., composition, improvisation, songwriting, informed listening). Given the cyclic nature of learning musical concepts and skills, the PDCA cycle (Johnson 2016, Pietrzak and Paliszkiewicz 2015) could provide teachers and students with numerous opportunities to deepen musical understandings with each passing repetition.

Third and finally, the person-focused emphasis in Hiatt's (2006) ADKAR (awareness-desire-knowledge-ability-reinforcement) model could be useful for examining change among individuals. While ADKAR's principles also mirror the notions of teaching and learning, its application to music settings could be particularly fruitful with regard to self-directed learning and the actualization of improved skills, which have been mainstay concepts in vernacular music learning (Mercado 2019, Woody and Adams 2019, Isbell 2016). Focusing on individuals' motivations for change applies to students and teachers alike. Just as students may be drawn to new ways of musicking, so too, could teachers. For instance, music teachers could monitor individual students' musical growth through independent or small-group activities that allow students to make autonomous musical decisions. Student-led chamber ensembles, playlist creations, community-based musical explorations, and songwriting or composition projects could provide windows into students' ownership of musical decision-making. Self-directed music activities also could serve as informal, competency-based assessment for music teachers who could use what they learn from their students to shape other areas of program instruction. ADKAR's person-focused foundations (Hiatt, 2006) could be particularly helpful in this regard.

Thus, a "nested model" of these theories (Figure 1 above) could be one way to envision change across multiple, dynamic layers. For imagery purposes only, this cross-

sectional approach incorporates the recognition of and motivation for change among individuals (ADKAR/micro level), nested within the iterative cycles of teaching and learning (PDCA/meso level), nested within the overarching stages of change itself (Lewin/macro level). In other words, changes in individual students and teachers (micro level) could enrich cyclic group instruction (meso level), which ultimately could provide direction for making large-scale transformations in music programs (macro level). Such imagery could be helpful in reminding teachers and students that change can occur simultaneously, at varying levels, and at different times. One could argue that this process already happens daily in music classrooms, as learning itself occurs as a consequence of change—that is, repeated thawing and freezing—which is not always a linear process but a haphazard one. Visualizing a three-tiered framework could be advantageous for engaging a variety of stakeholders, tempering perceived risks of change, and allowing exploration that best meets the needs of individual music students, classes, or programs. Furthermore, changes need not be drastic initially and can occur in modest steps to engender forward momentum (Randles 2022, Kladder 2020, Vasil 2019). Preservice and inservice music teachers who are curious about exploring or learning vernacular music practices—and how to incorporate them—could couch their journeys within a long-term progression of change, rather than with the purpose of acquiring immediate transformation or expertise.

Continued narratives from preservice music teachers, inservice music teachers, music education faculty, and music students could help to clarify how vernacular music practices are being incorporated into school music programs. Such accounts could reveal how music teachers have approached change in their own contexts and could serve as practical examples for the profession. As music teachers and their students continue to navigate diverse ways of music-making, additional intersections between theory and practice could become more visible—and more accessible.

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[1] The Hawaiian spelling of *'ukulele* includes the *'okina* ('), a diacritical marking within the Hawaiian alphabet that indicates a glottal stop.

[2] GarageBand (https://www.apple.com/mac/garageband/) and Soundtrap (https://www.soundtrap.com/musicmakers) are accessible, online digital audio workstations (DAWs) that allow users to create and share music files. Both platforms include banks of prerecorded instruments, beats, and loops as well as inputs for external instruments and voices. GarageBand and Soundtrap allow users to engage in collaborative music-making, storytelling, podcasting, and other educational projects.