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Cultivating Accessibility and Equity in the Elementary General Music Classroom Through Feminist Pedagogies

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ABSTRACT

Music curricula and pedagogies found in elementary general music classrooms in public schools in the United States can be sites of oppression for many students and teachers. Within this system of oppression, teachers and students often lack the agency needed to create and engage with empowering and innovative music curricula and pedagogies, thus sustaining the status quo. In this paper, I employ feminist pedagogical perspectives to discuss how teachers and students might subvert oppressive music teaching and learning practices through a reimagining of elementary general music curricula and pedagogies with accessibility and equity at the fore.

Keywords: accessibility, equity, empowerment, oppression, elementary general music education, feminist pedagogies

It is well documented that music curricula and pedagogies found in elementary general music classrooms in public schools in the United States are rarely accessible or equitable for many student populations (Benedict 2009; Goodrich 2020, 2022; Hess 2014, 2017). This lack of accessibility and equity can be attributed to a variety of factors within a broader historical context of education and music education in the United States (Gustafson 2009; Keene 2009; Mark and Gary 2007). Feminist scholars, who might label this lack of accessibility and equity as a form of oppression, have introduced liberatory practices which

can be used to create more empowering forms of music curricula and pedagogies (e.g., Ahmed 2017; Hess 2019). However, current systems of education and music education in the United States, often bound by bureaucratic mandates and historical precedence, provide few opportunities for students and teachers to create and engage with more empowering forms of music curricula and pedagogies, thus sustaining the status quo (Mullen 2019; Powell 2023; Ravitch 2010).

As the literature has indicated, if large-scale change is to occur within the field of music education, a basis of liberatory musical opportunities must be established early in the school music experience, expanding as children progress to adolescence and adulthood (Grissom-Broughton 2020; Kaufman 2020; Schoppe 2022). In this paper, I consider how we, as educators, scholars, learners, and music-makers, might challenge musical and educative norms in an effort to create a more empowering form of music education, beginning at the elementary level. Specifically, I ask: How can we work toward increased accessibility and equity in music curricula and pedagogies for all learners? In response to this question, I employ feminist perspectives to critique current oppressive music education norms in the United States before highlighting a series of reflective and concentrated efforts we might undertake when attempting to subvert those norms in the elementary general music classroom. Through these efforts, we can begin to create the conditions for student and teacher empowerment, which may lead to enriched, happy, and healthy musical lives.

Equity, Accessibility, Oppression, and Empowerment

Equity is a frequently-used term in education that is rarely defined clearly or concisely (Unterhalter 2009). Although an in-depth examination of equity is beyond the scope of this paper, a brief overview is needed to understand the discussion that follows. For the purposes of this paper, I view equity as a foundation of conditions needed for one or many to engage in processes that may ultimately lead to personal or community growth (e.g., emotional, social, musical, academic) and wellbeing. To cultivate a sense of equity in music education, one must simultaneously consider the idea of accessibility. According to the National Association for Music Education (NAfME), all students, regardless of race,

ethnicity, religious background, sexual orientation or identity, academic standing, socioeconomic status, disability, exceptionality, or musical ability can—and should—engage in an inclusive array of musical traditions and music-making opportunities in their schools (National Association for Music Education 2017). NAfME has also emphasized the importance of building a diverse coalition of music educators to help develop and support these practices (National Association for Music Education 2017). In addition to accessibility, further conditions needed to cultivate equity in the classroom might involve creating a culture of respect, sharing, empathy, support, and collaboration between people. Despite this vision, many current music curricula and pedagogies in the United States privilege certain musical styles, genres, cultures, traditions, and teaching and learning approaches, while excluding others, creating a form of oppression (Benedict 2009; Cavicchi 2009; Hess 2014, 2017).

Oppression has been examined across many fields including teaching and learning, educational philosophy, educational psychology, and music education (e.g., Ahmed 2017; Freire 2000; Hess 2014; hooks 2015a, 2015b). In this literature, two descriptions of oppression are notable. hooks (2015b) described oppression as an absence of choice. hooks (2015b), however, did acknowledge this description as problematic, noting that while choice is present in life's activities, those experiencing oppression—whether knowingly or unknowingly—may not see the choices offered to them as oppressive. Often, this view of oppression manifests as a façade of choice, where we are “‘free’ to choose from a set menu, but we do not have a choice about what is on the menu” (Powell 2023, 29). Ahmed's (2017) description of oppression was more literal and tangible: one may “press” or “mold” another into an ideal image of what they may want them to become. When faced with this “pressure,” one can resist the pressure (i.e., work toward liberation) or conform to the pressure. In conforming to the pressure, one might experience a sense of relief, lessening or removing the pressure. However, in this conformity, one can lose a sense of self or purpose, possibly being lured into a false sense of happiness. Synthesizing these interpretations and applying them to the context of music education, oppression may be understood as conformity or compliance to expectations or rules set by those in positions of power (e.g.,

school administrators; local, state, and/or national government agencies), with some teachers and students—in their conformity or compliance—unaware they are being oppressed.

Like oppression, empowerment has been widely examined in the literature (e.g., Hess 2019; Mladenović 2020; Regelski 2002; Silverman 2013). Although the importance of this literature cannot be understated, a detailed examination is beyond the scope of this paper. For the purposes of this paper, I briefly look to Mladenović (2020), who described empowerment as capability, where power is conceptualized as “creative energy, not domination” (70). In this interpretation, power can be distributed among many, rather than a select few. Capability and “creative energy” can result in the freely and willingly undertaken processes of reflection, action, and transformation by teachers and students, possibly leading to a fulfilled and enriched livelihood. This conception of empowerment is directly linked to ideas of accessibility and equity, as well as feminist pedagogies, which will be introduced later in this paper.

A Lack of Accessibility and Equity in Music Education in the United States

Many historic and current music education practices in the United States are grounded in what Noddings (2005) called “inferred needs,” rather than “expressed needs” of students and teachers. According to Noddings (2005), “an expressed need comes from the one expressing it and may be expressed in either words or behavior. An inferred need comes from someone other than the one said to have it” (148). Music education in the United States has been described as authoritarian (Allsup 2003); an outgrowth of military, industrial, and assembly line-like traditions (Allsup and Benedict 2008; Elliott 2009); and grounded in competition and capitalist economic structures (Elliott 2009; Mullen 2019; Powell 2021, 2023). Common to each of these descriptions is the absence of student and teacher agency: the ability to think and act freely in pursuit of one’s educational desires in the classroom (Eppard et al. 2020; Wiggins 2010, 2015). This lack of student and teacher agency is indicative of content and pedagogies being grounded in inferred needs and further illustrates oppression as an absence or façade of choice.

Compounding this lack of agency is “methodolatry,” the unquestioned faith and devotion to standardized teaching methods and/or teaching as one was taught (Benedict 2009; Regelski 2002). Benedict (2009) has explored the idea of methodolatry through examinations of two common teaching methods in elementary general music settings in the United States: those inspired by the work of composer/educators Zoltán Kodály and Carl Orff. Initially conceptualized as non-prescriptive philosophies grounded in folk music of the child’s culture, Orff and Kodály-based pedagogies have evolved into standardized and formulaic methods of music learning through their ritualization, systematization, and codification (Benedict 2009). These methods can disregard the wide range of musical interests and diverse cultures of children if not implemented with careful examination and reflection (Benedict 2009). In addition to these methods, innovative pedagogical practices (e.g., popular music pedagogies, peer mentoring, informal learning, creativity-based learning) have emerged as music education has evolved. Yet, even with good intent, oppression can persist and take on new forms within these innovative practices (Hess 2023; Powell 2021; Schoppe 2022). Understanding these challenges, how might we truly transform curricula and pedagogies? How can we ensure our practices become empowering experiences and genuinely move music education toward accessibility and equity for all?

Feminist Pedagogies

Feminist pedagogies are one of many possibilities which may lead to more accessible and equitable music curricula and practices. Feminist pedagogies are broadly founded in ideas of empowerment and liberation from oppression (e.g., Freire 2000; Hess 2019; hooks 2015a, 2015b; Mladenović 2020). Because of this broad conceptualization, a narrower view is needed for clarity in the present discussion. Coeyman (1996) identified four principles of feminist pedagogies, which can each function as a centerpiece for educators attempting to initiate positive change. These principles include diversity, opportunities for all voices, shared responsibility, and orientation to action. Each of these principles have been supported and expanded across content areas and with students of varying age and ability levels (e.g., Digiovanni and Liston 2005; Grissom-Broughton 2020; Kaufman 2020; Schoppe

2022). For these principles to manifest, a welcoming and safe learning community grounded in dialogue, collaboration, and diverse approaches to content and learning processes are crucial (Digiovanni and Liston 2005). Specific to the elementary general music classroom, a conceptualization of feminist pedagogies through these principles might involve expanding Mladenović's (2020) suggestions of deconstructing gender stereotypes through colors (e.g., rainbow scarves), occupations (e.g., orchestral conductor), or classroom materials (e.g., instruments); using standardized or required content as a catalyst for discussion or critique (Mladenović 2020; Schoppe 2022); and working with students to develop, implement, and reflect upon class norms, curricula, and pedagogical processes (Schoppe 2022). Within this view of feminist pedagogies, content, processes, and outcomes may produce personal, individuating, idiosyncratic, and self-actualizing musical experiences where there is no "right" way of transformation: what "works" for one teacher, student, or group of students may not for others. Likewise, "successful" practices may be impossible to replicate, even with the same processes and student population (Elliott 2009; Elliott and Silverman 2015; Regelski 1998).

Practical Possibilities for Feminist Pedagogies

Applying the above interpretation of feminist pedagogies, I now examine some practical possibilities for a more accessible and equitable vision of elementary general music education. Many of these possibilities are drawn from the literature and should serve as a starting point or inspiration for change, rather than a set formula. Finally, expanding the work of Recharte (2019), I offer a longer-term vision of elementary general music education as sound education.

Teacher Self-Examination and Reflection

Recognizing oppressive curricula and pedagogies. According to Elliott (2009), curricula are complex endeavors with many definitions, ideas, and views that can become more complex as teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders add personal knowledge and beliefs into the mix. Yet, as Elliott (2009) and Elliott and Silverman (2015) have noted, development and implementation of curricula are often reduced to the impersonal process

of stating learning objectives, selecting and organizing activities to achieve the objectives, and developing an evaluation to determine whether the objectives have been met. Akin to the “banking” model of education where an all-knowing teacher may deposit musical knowledge into passive student recipients (Freire 2000), this process is evident in numerous elementary general music curricular resources. For example, curricular series such as *Purposeful Pathways* (Sams and Hepburn 2012–2019) or *Gameplan* (Kriske and DeLelles 2005–2011), if implemented at a surface-level, can be premised on assumed student populations (e.g., White, middle class, able-bodied, neuronormative, suburban students) and quickly become teaching methods based on established pedagogical processes (e.g., Orff-Schulwerk, Kodály). This generalization of students and teaching processes can be problematic because it ignores the broad and diverse musical interests, lived experiences, and prior knowledge of students and their teachers (Benedict 2009). Still, teachers may accept and implement these resources as methods without question or with little consideration of the students’ expressed needs (Noddings 2005). This acceptance and implementation can be viewed as a reflection of an indoctrination within the current system of music education in the United States where teachers may teach as they were taught and methods are viewed as “salvation” (Benedict 2009; Regelski 2002, 2009). Considering this problem, how might we move beyond these types of stagnant, formulaic, and impersonal approaches to music curricula through self-examination and reflection?

Transforming curricula and pedagogies. Gates (2009) justified a need for teacher self-examination and reflection, explaining the current state of music education in the United States as ineffective due to changing times, practices being informed post-hoc, and ongoing conflict between preservation and progress. To begin addressing this ineffectiveness, we must “critically review our own practices, and accept current instruction as problematic” (Gates 2009, xx). Through this acceptance, we can begin to identify alternatives to our collectively accepted, yet unexamined habits (Gates 2009). Many examples of feminist self-examination and reflection exist in literature in and beyond the field of music education (e.g., Capobianco 2007; Digiovanni and Liston 2005; Kaufman 2020; Schoppe 2022). Central to this literature is a call for teachers to examine the inclusiveness

(or lack thereof) of their physical environment, as well as their privilege (or lack thereof) within current educational systems. In undertaking these examinations, our role as the all-knowing teacher may shift to that of a facilitator: one who becomes a contributing member of the group rather than the sole source of knowledge (Allsup 2003; Goodrich 2022; Schoppe 2022). In practice, a teacher functioning as a facilitator might summarize and provide points of clarity during class discussions, experience moments of vulnerability when working as a co-learner, and lead the way in turning group-suggested ideas into practical possibilities (Schoppe 2022). The culmination of these reflective processes can be a uniquely feminist music class environment where compassion is a key component, teaching and learning processes are varied and reflective of the class population, inclusive and collaborative dialogue is promoted, and each class member is a valued and contributing member of the group (Benedict 2021; Coeyman 1996; Hendricks 2018; Schoppe 2022).

Challenges in shifting to a feminist mindset. Though processes of self-examination and reflection can lead to the creation of more meaningful music curricula and pedagogies in the elementary general music classroom, the processes are not without challenge. These self-reflective processes involve a fundamental shift in one's thinking: one must shift their mindset from a "me" approach where the teacher leads all aspects of the classroom, to an "us/we" approach where questioning, listening, and experience-sharing become the norm (Hendricks 2018). When considering this shift in mindset, one may be hesitant to move from the familiar (e.g., teaching methods, scripted or predetermined curricula) to the unfamiliar (e.g., student-driven inquiry, regular and authentic inclusion of styles/genres outside the Western art canon). This hesitancy is likely a result of prolonged immersion in a system of music education where Western art and North American folk music, large performing ensembles, and competition are emphasized and acclaimed, while "difference" in repertoire, teaching and learning processes, or rationale for music-making can be disregarded or discouraged (Abramo and Austin 2014; Allsup and Benedict 2008; Benedict 2009; Powell 2021, 2023). Hendricks (2018) provided a sense of hope for those confronted by these challenges: in making space for multiple perspectives and ideas, teachers might learn from students, expand their musical vocabulary, experience new

musical styles/genres, and recognize nuances in musical styles/genres that may have once been viewed as “inferior.” Through this, music curricula and pedagogies can begin to meet the needs of diverse student populations and possibly result in more effective and meaningful teaching and learning (Hendricks 2018).

Small Acts of Subversion

In conjunction with self-examination and reflection, teachers may engage in small acts of subversion when challenging current music curricula and pedagogies. Small acts of subversion are “modest but meaningful changes moving in the direction of a perceived ideal” (Kratus 2015, 346). These small acts do not directly challenge power hierarchies and require patience and extended time frames to be effective (Kratus 2015). However, with time, patience, persistence, and power conceptualized as capability through “creative energy,” (Mladenović 2020), these small acts can undermine the status quo and lead to a destabilization of hegemonic music teaching and learning practices (Kratus 2015).

A foundation for small acts of subversion. Small acts of subversion can take many forms, and in the sections below, I highlight only a few of the possibilities. These suggestions take careful planning, and for some educators, may be difficult to implement within current systems of education and music education in the United States where teacher oversight is commonplace (Ravitch 2010). These strategies may also be difficult for those experiencing fear and apprehension as they attempt to break from established music education norms, in which music teachers are trained and have a high level of expertise. Considering these challenges, Bazy (2019) offered a series of strategies, each aligned with Coeyman’s (1996) feminist principles of diversity, opportunities for all voices, shared responsibility, and orientation to action. These strategies can be used as stepping stones to enact small acts of subversion. Among these strategies, Bazy (2019) suggested:

- Minimizing teacher talk and expanding opportunities for students to talk, respond, and justify their thinking;
- Modeling and providing structures and opportunities for collaboration; and
- Incorporating connections to the lives of students (e.g., popular music, digital tools), possibly through inviting students to provide input on learning goals.

Applying these strategies, Benedict (2021) proposed a dialogue-based framework for listening and responding, carefully crafted for use with even the youngest of students. In this framework, students can engage in dialogue with each other, work collaboratively to make individual and group decisions, and relate music to their own lived experiences through critical listening and music-making.

Digiovanni and Liston's (2005) recommendations can also be considered when attempting to establish a foundation for small acts of subversion. Among these suggestions, Digiovanni and Liston recommended the elimination of tokenization in the physical environment. In the music classroom, this could include the regular incorporation of a wide-range of visual depictions of composers (e.g., female composers, composers of color, LGBTQIA+ composers) and music practices beyond the Western art canon (e.g., visual displays of musical cultures and/or instruments from around the world), rather than perfunctory displays for Hanukkah, Black History Month, or other celebratory events/times.

Digiovanni and Liston (2005) also recommended the use of inclusive reading materials. In the music classroom, this could mean using repertoire reflective of the student population. In practice, students might serve as culture bearers through sharing music of their family or cultural heritage with other students, contributing to a class songbook, or creating an online music library. If standardized or set curricula make this an impossibility, one might consider how musical materials could be used as a catalyst for discussion and/or critique. For example, one may initiate brief but impactful discussions of standardized repertoire, leading students to realize instances of privilege or a lack of representation. Similarly, Digiovanni and Liston (2005) recommended teachers facilitate connections between students' lived experiences and class content through discussions, storytelling, and writing activities centered on race, gender, or other inclusive topics. In the elementary general music classroom, this may include discussion, listening, and composition activities. Benedict (2021), DeLorenzo and Silverman (2022), Lewis (2020), and Wiggins (1994, 2010) provided additional possibilities through examples grounded in dialogue, issues of social justice, critical listening, and collaborative music-making.

Finally, Digiovanni and Liston (2005) suggested using a variety of classroom practices and settings (e.g., comfortable and flexible classroom spaces, cooperative learning techniques) and encouraging each student to interact positively, often, and with everyone. In the elementary general music classroom, this may involve creating spaces and activities with flexible and differentiated learning in mind; providing opportunities for students to offer input on class expectations, norms, and musical hopes and dreams; and/or choosing where, how, and with whom they might work. Furthermore, the music classroom might become a flexible space, at times moving beyond the physical music classroom (e.g., a computer lab with digital audio workstations, observing and creating sounds in nature). Although each of these strategies may seem basic, they provide students and teachers the space to begin exercising agency (Eppard et al. 2020; Wiggins 2010, 2015) and can lead to the incorporation of carefully planned small acts of subversion, such as the ones I now discuss.

Peer mentoring. One possible small act of subversion is the use of peer mentoring. Peer mentoring can include more knowledgeable students supporting and scaffolding their less knowledgeable peers, or students with a similar knowledge base supporting and scaffolding each other (Goodrich 2022). During this process, students have opportunities to make meaningful contributions and engage in critical reflections of their learning (Goodrich 2022). Goodrich (2020, 2022) recently examined the use of peer mentoring using lenses of accessibility and equity. Directly linking to feminist pedagogical inquiry, Goodrich (2022) posed the question: “Will they [i.e., the students] merely *reproduce* the knowledge they have learned from their White teachers, or will they use their knowledge and experiences to help *transform* their classroom into forums about relevant topics such as race and racism?” (157). This question can be extended to a number of issues related to accessibility and equity in the elementary general music classroom, specifically those issues related to the unquestioned or unexamined use of teaching methods and the possible inauthentic representation, tokenization, diminished presence, or absence of a wide range of musical traditions, cultures, people, and processes. Thus, when considering peer mentoring as a small act of subversion, it is the job of the teacher to ensure the process provides

opportunities for students to examine and question *what* they are learning, *why* they are learning it, and *how* they are learning it. These examinations can occur through the establishment of a welcoming class environment where students can feel safe to share their thoughts and feelings (Goodrich 2020, 2022).

If music curricula and pedagogies are to become more accessible and equitable through the use of peer mentoring, especially in the elementary general music classroom, teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders must carefully consider how peer mentoring can be used as a tool for fostering empowerment rather than as a tool for the re-inscription of oppressive practices. One possibility might involve students serving as culture bearers to their peers through sharing musical traditions. Another possibility might involve improvising, arranging, or composing. In this, students might scaffold each other's ideas and work through the process, collaboratively creating pieces of music through a sharing of ideas and a refining of musicianship and performance skills. Other examples documented in the literature which can serve as a starting point or inspiration for future peer mentoring opportunities include scaffolded or collaborative songwriting (Wiggins 1994, 2010), navigating digital audio workstations (Schoppe 2022), and the sharing, critique, and refinement of student-generated musical compositions (Schoppe 2022). These suggestions offer students opportunities to engage in diverse concepts and processes while collaborating and sharing responsibility, potentially leading to more accessible and equitable music learning (Coeyman 1996).

Informal learning. Informal learning “does not refer to ‘an’ approach but to the blossoming of a range of approaches” (Narita and Green 2015, 314). At its core, informal learning incorporates and adapts music learning practices from outside the school into the school music classroom (Narita and Green 2015). Directly related to many of the key feminist pedagogical principles described above, informal learning is often grounded in the interactive social processes of working, playing, and composing; can deconstruct defined student and teacher roles; and can be loosely structured (Folkestad 2006; Green 2008; Narita and Green 2015; Rodriguez 2009). Equally important is the idea of power as capability through creative energy (Mladenović 2020). Unlike the structured teaching

methods present in many current elementary general music classrooms (Benedict 2009), informal learning largely relies on the prior musical knowledge and inventiveness of the students.

Like peer mentoring, informal learning has been examined by numerous scholars in a variety of music education contexts (e.g., Abramo and Austin 2014; Andrews 2013; Davis 2013; Green 2008; Narita and Green 2015). In this literature, the potential to move toward more accessible and equitable elementary general music practices using capability as creative energy is clear. Exploring informal learning in the elementary general music setting, Andrews (2013) and Davis (2013) found students to be active, engaged, and motivated participants during music-making processes. Davis (2013) also provided an example of informal learning as a small act of subversion, which may serve as inspiration for future moments of informal learning in a variety of elementary general music contexts. In Davis's (2013) study, students generated music playlists to guide their learning. Using this student-selected music, lessons cycled through whole class and small-group activities led by the students. Throughout the process, students engaged in a holistic approach to learning through aural and visual modeling, listening, observing, imitating, improvising, and composing a series of pop songs. Complementary to the peer mentoring process, engagement in informal learning can provide students with a voice in determining what and how they might learn. At the same time, students are provided with opportunities to engage in diverse learning practices. These tenets are key in the destabilization of oppressive music education practices and the creation of more accessible and equitable music curricula and pedagogies.

Creative music-making. Providing structured and unstructured opportunities for students to engage in creative music-making can also function as a small act of subversion with potential to grow over time. Though the possibilities of creative music-making with elementary-aged children are virtually limitless, John, Cameron, and Bartel (2016) and Wiggins (1994, 2010) provided two examples which may serve as inspiration for teachers seeking to incorporate opportunities for creative music-making in their own music classrooms. In these examples, students moved from structured to unstructured activities

with varying levels of teacher guidance. For John, Cameron, and Bartel (2016), this meant starting early childhood music lessons with rituals and guided musical play (e.g., a hello song, singing/moving to recorded music led by the teacher) before progressing into unstructured musical play (e.g., free exploration, improvisation, guided composition using graphic notation). Wiggins (1994, 2010) provided a template for collaborative songwriting which could be used across multiple age levels. One example provided by Wiggins (2010) involved first-grade students participating in a class songwriting activity. In the activity, the teacher mediated the discussion as students collaborated in the creation of rhythmic, melodic, and lyric ideas. Wiggins (1994) also provided a more open-ended example of the songwriting process as it might evolve over time, with fifth-grade students working through the process in small groups and with limited teacher intervention. These examples exemplify feminist pedagogical principles, as well as principles of accessibility and equity, through a constant emphasis on collaboration, experience sharing, open-ended processes, and the teacher as a facilitator of instruction.

Small Acts of Subversion: A Word of Caution

Engaging in small acts of subversion can be a realistic process leading to a destabilization of oppressive music education norms, however, one must take care to not recreate oppressive practices under a new guise. Fisher (2009), discussing capitalism and its impact on modern society, offered words of caution directly related to small acts of subversion and their potential long-term impacts. According to Fisher (2009), in dismantling established norms, a reinstallation of established principles on an “as needed” basis can result. There may be an illusion of change and progress, yet, nothing has actually changed. Powell (2021) and Hess (2018, 2023) offered similar words of caution: when attempting to create conditions for empowerment, one must take care to not reinscribe old practices through “new” or “forced” ways of music-making. Hess (2018, 2023) illustrated this argument using the lens of activist music teaching. As Hess (2018, 2023) explained, when liberatory practices become curricula, power hierarchies can be reinscribed. To avoid this, pedagogies must be “invented and reinvented for every context. In this reinvention, educators can aim to keep their pedagogy fluid and flexible, while acknowledging the

striation inherent in schooling” (Hess 2023, 29–30). Although Hess (2018) argued that this inventive approach to music curricula might be impossible within the current constraints of music education in the United States, small acts of subversion are certainly a step closer in reaching this vision.

A Possible Long-Term Goal

Over time, small acts of subversion can lead to the destabilization of oppressive music education norms in the United States (Kratus 2015). One possible transformative vision of music education is Recharte’s (2019) proposal of “sound education.” Although Recharte’s (2019) proposal is generalized to music education as a whole, the principles can be applied to the elementary general music classroom. Crucial to sound education is critical listening; Recharte (2019) noted: “By listening indiscriminately to sounds (whether *musical* or not), we may open up the classroom space to include, explore, analyze, and creatively manipulate those sounds that are most important to students’ lives” (79). Through engaging in critical listening, students might learn to analyze, describe, and organize different types of sounds (Recharte 2019). These critical listening experiences can lead to meaningful sound-making through performances, compositions, installations, or recordings created through exploration and experimentation with sound (Recharte 2019). Further, sound-making can include an array of activities (e.g., creating and performing unstructured or structured, “musical” or sound-based compositions, improvisations, or soundscapes) produced at varying of levels of perfection and containing different meanings for different people (Elliott and Silverman 2015; Recharte 2019). Considering sound education in practice, Benedict (2021) provided a template for dialogue, listening, and music-making, specifically designed for use in the elementary general music classroom. Similarly, DeLorenzo and Silverman (2022) designed many critical listening and sound-making activities for use in the secondary general music classroom, all grounded in themes of social justice (e.g., heroic figures, climate change, protest, war, love, peace). With careful thought and planning, DeLorenzo and Silverman’s (2022) activities can be adapted for use in the elementary general music classroom. Regardless of where the activity may originate, by deconstructing

and expanding the idea of “music” to include a range of listening and sound-making, a more open-ended, inclusive, and meaningful music education can result (Recharte 2019).

A sound education approach can only be implemented with success on a large scale and over a long term. Recharte (2019) discussed this challenge at length:

As long as music educators invoke the notion of music [i.e., a Eurocentric vision of music], we are conjuring up a hierarchical field in which Western Art music and its traditional ensembles are at the center and these ‘alternatives’ [e.g., compositions made with found objects, digital music-making, created/invented instruments] are marginalized. ... What happens when a student goes through one of these non-traditional music education systems and decides to become a professional musician? Which conservatory or university will admit a student who builds invented instruments, composes digital music and beatboxes, but doesn't play an orchestral instrument or read Western notation? (80)

If sound education is to become a reality in the United States, music education as a whole must be reconceptualized from early childhood through the university level and beyond. In addition, extensive training in curriculum development and implementation for practicing teachers is needed for those who may be experiencing an indoctrination within the current system (Benedict 2009; Regelski 2002, 2009).

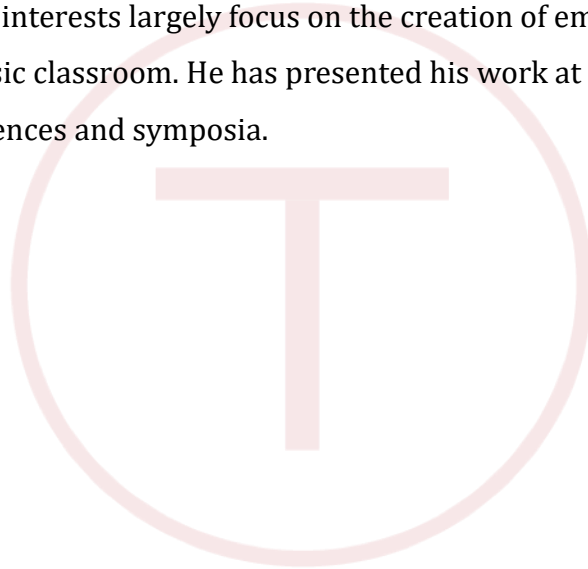
Conclusion

In this paper, I have examined oppressive music curricula and pedagogies, specifically those found in the public school elementary general music classroom in the United States. To respond to the question posed at the beginning of this paper (How can we work toward increased accessibility and equity in music curricula and pedagogies for all learners?), I employed feminist pedagogical perspectives to propose a series of short and long-term possibilities for overcoming current oppressive norms in order to create more accessible and equitable music curricula and pedagogies. To enact these ideas, I turn to Powell (2023), who suggested that to truly transform music education into a space of empowerment, we must be brave, take risks, and act in solidarity with one another. By engaging in processes of self-examination and reflection, implementing small acts of subversion, and re-imagining music education (e.g., as sound education), we can begin to

create the conditions for student and teacher empowerment, which may lead to enriched, happy, and healthy musical lives.

About the Author

Lucas Schoppe is a district fine arts facilitator and elementary music specialist at Will Davis Elementary in Austin, Texas. Prior to his time in Austin, he taught elementary general music as well as middle and high school band in Florence, Texas. He holds doctoral and master's degrees from Boston University and a bachelor's degree in music education from Texas State University. His research interests largely focus on the creation of empowering spaces in the elementary general music classroom. He has presented his work at local, state, and national music education conferences and symposia.



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