

Teaching in Pandemic Times

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Abstract

In this presentation, I share insights about what I have learned while teaching in pandemic times –specifically, what I have learned about myself, and what I have learned about my teaching. The muddle of remote, hybrid, and in-person teaching meant that music teachers were constantly experimenting with their work. Forgotten pedagogies like portfolio-based learning suddenly made new sense. Creative teaching strategies and open-ended assignments permitted students to speak radically. Improvisation became more about invention than just building skills. With health and well-being are on my mind, my students and I created new relationships to art, repetition, and practice. The prevalence of trauma and loss made spiral-minded growth feel disingenuous. I wonder about the impossibility of what we call teacher training or teacher preparation. And processes once held sacrosanct, like dialogue, shifted –what does it mean to witness more than talk? In virtuality, the idea of curriculum-as-assemblage is newly realized outside the strictures of linear time.

As pandemic leads to endemic, and endemic leads to . . . what? Will we abandon these insights, and return to normal? Can we?

Keywords: portfolio learning; assemblage; witnessing; open-ended learning

“Dr. Rieux resolved to compile this chronicle, so that he should not be one of those who hold their peace but should bear witness in favor of those plague-stricken people; so that some memorial of the injustice and outrage done to them might endure; and to state quite simply what we learn in a time of pestilence: that there are more things to admire in men than to despise.”

Albert Camus (1913-1960), The Plague¹

Thrown into emergency remote teaching by the global pandemic of 2020 –in the middle of a semester, no less– music teachers around the world were faced with unprecedented challenges. We were told to be resilient and flexible. We were told to adapt. But unless we were already teaching on-line, music tuition through Zoom made no sense. Worse, the rupture took place *literally* overnight. Those of us who were university music teacher educators began building-the plane-while-flying-it, all the while trying to model what ‘good’ building-the-plane-while-flying it looked like.

Like you, I won’t forget the avalanche events of the spring of 2020. Maybe you were working with a fiddling group outside Athens, or directing a choir in Thessaloniki. I was teaching a graduate music education course through which collaborative composing

¹ Albert Camus, *The Plague* (New York: Vintage International Random House), 308.

was facilitated in small working groups. I was trying to model a student-centered ‘democratic’ classroom, already hard enough. You, me –all of us– we muddled through the confusions and breaks that ensued. As teachers, we had no choice but to lean on our students, and learn from the nearest source. Resilience came later, I suppose, though I still feel that I barely ‘met the moment’.

Next came the summer of 2020, bringing an even greater confluence of events: a world movement to fight police brutality, racism, and sexism; the reelection chances of Donald Trump; personal isolation and loneliness; and portents of grief emerging from my family and the news. Out of crisis teaching came surprises -in particular, new teaching strategies and pedagogical insights. My curricula changed quickly and dramatically (as if out of my hands), virtual classes became spaces of intense one-anotherness (even community), and my students’ creative work took on new flights of intimacy and revelation. I began to take notes, like a beginning teacher.

There were lessons to be learned. The great rupture of 2020, I see better now, augured new visions and new possibilities for music education.

We can’t know what music teaching will look like in five years, or even six months. We can ask ourselves what we learned from this experience. As with all of teaching, research, and music-making since the start of 2020, our aspirations for the future of music education have been inescapably reshaped by Covid-19. The insights I wish to talk about are informed by the university music teacher preparation courses I taught, the notes I took, and what my music education graduate students revealed to me in their creative work during this time. From a context of shared vulnerability, I have re-immersed myself in an emotional form of writing, one that is hopefully more evocative, political and bio/graphical.² By extension, in writing and in teaching, I feel more emotionally connected to my students than ever before.

I organize this presentation into four broad themes, put together by the surprises and pedagogical adjustments I made during this time. The themes deal with (1) portfolio-based learning; (2) curriculum-making as assemblage; (3) student health and well-being; and (4) forms of dialogue. I end each of the four sections with self-edited excerpts from the notes I took during 2020. These aspirations may be pointed or possibly obvious, but I believe they are worth discussing as our field moves into its unpredictable future.

(1) The forced rescue of portfolio-based learning

“From now on, it can be said that plague was the concern of all of us. Hitherto, surprised as he may have been by the strange things happening around him, each individual citizen had gone about his business as usual, so far as this was possible. And no doubt he would have continued doing so. But once the town gates were shut, every one of us realized that all, the narrator included, were, so to speak, in the same boat, and each would have to adapt himself to the new conditions of life.”
Camus, *The Plague*³

Overnight -again, no exaggeration- music teachers went from directing ensembles and teaching lessons to a kind of project-based learning that took place A Brief Introduction to A Philosophy of Music and Music Education as Social Praxisonline,

² See Arthur P. Bochner and Carol Ellis, *Evocative Autoethnography: Writing Lives and Telling Stories* (New York and London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016); Patti Lather, *Getting Lost: Feminist Efforts toward a Double(d) Science* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007); Elizabeth Mackinlay, *Critical Writing for Embodied Approaches: Autoethnography, Feminism, and Decoloniality* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

³ Camus, *Ibid.*, 67.

alone, in caregiver homes and apartments. Maybe there were early adaptations of Eric Whitacre-style virtual choirs, but most music teachers I know were forced to construct individualized e-portfolios in which students would submit work for evaluation and monitoring. With (say) hundreds of portfolios to review and direct, the traditional teacher-centered instructional model became impossible to sustain. Based simply on the economics of time, students were allowed more say about what they wanted to do. To greater and lesser degrees, creative student-centered portfolio-based music education reemerged in North America, though mostly without strategy, professional development, or teacher facilitation. Anecdotally, it was reported to me that much of this teaching was a mess. An opportunity presented itself, however. Competitions, sit-down exams, and adjudicated contests were now impossible, thus auguring new ways to explore music outside the master/apprentice dogma that I had long fought to dismantle in my own theory and practice.⁴

So here we are, with the return of portfolios. I never thought it would happen! . . . I remember being a graduate student in the 1990s, and project-based learning was all the rage. Howard Gardner and Nelson Goodman's work at Harvard University's Project Zero was one source of inspiration.⁵ Emphasizing creativity and problem-solving, their research helped music teachers enlarge a disciplinary field that was mostly product-driven and behavior-based. Creativity and problem-solving, moreover, were process goals that looked different across disciplines, and experienced differently by each learner. From this vantage point, portfolios were a natural location for diverse learners to showcase their multiple interests and findings, but more importantly to showcase how and why they came to their multiple interests and findings.

My vision of portfolio learning is shaped by that moment in history, but I revel in greater potentials for beauty, protest and messiness. Music portfolios, I explain to my students, can be analogous to those giant leather satchels that art majors carry with them across campus. If you ask to look inside, you will find scraps of marked-up napkins, unfinished nudes, completed cityscapes in ink or pastel, and notes from class critique. Inspired, I was drawn to Leonardo da Vinci's notebooks wherein physics, sexual desire and formal beauty weave together page after page, with strange cursive notes, both ridiculous and brilliant. Missing from Da Vinci's notes, and Project Zero's conception of portfolio learning, however, is an outlet for anger. Whether dealing with racial injustice or forthright assertions of identity, my students' portfolios this year contained music that was highly critical, located often in pain, but still filled with hope and healing. The portfolios were easily digitalized and we ended the semester sharing excerpts, laughing and sometimes crying.

Before this national reemergence of project-based learning, it is worth recalling that portfolio learning came to a crashing halt in the early 2000s with the advent of Big Tech and a global standards movement that could absorb countless derivations of student and teacher data. Whether trustworthy or not, learning benchmarks created stabilizable variables that could be compared and assessed, with concomitant punishments and rewards for learners, teachers, schools, and even nation states.⁶ Yes, portfolios were nice, the story went. But they lacked value. They couldn't prove anything because. . . well,

⁴ Randall Everett Allsup, *Remixing the Classroom: Toward an Open Philosophy of Music Education* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016).

⁵ <http://www.pz.harvard.edu/>

⁶ See Cara Faith Bernard and Joseph Michael Abramo, *Teacher Evaluation in Music: A Guide for Music Teachers in the U.S.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019); Pasi Sahlberg, *Finnish Lessons 2.0: What Can the World Learn from Educational Change in Finland?* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2015).

difference (vis-à-vis effort, intention, culture, interest, style, etc.) was just too hard to compare, and thus logically, portfolios were fundamentally non-objective.

Today, an important lesson emerges from the momentary collapse of standardized testing, as sit-down group-surveilled memory-based examinations are impossible to conduct on account of airborne contagion. American universities and colleges are reporting record numbers of diverse applicants, and are accepting record numbers of Black, brown, and indigenous students. Alternative criteria for what counts as ‘good’ or ‘worthy’ were necessarily turned to. The lessons for music education’s future are obvious: learning standards devalue diversity; the rubrics attached to learning standards silence students’ voices and narrow creativity; and, there are always alternative and multiple criteria for what counts as good.

1. *On portfolios and teaching:* We need to acknowledge that the standards and assessment movement in music education has not only failed dramatically, but has actually harmed our students by devaluing diverse efforts and interests, and has stunted student creativity.
2. *On portfolios and research:* We need to better understand and operationalize research based portfolio systems that allow students greater voice in what, how, and why outcomes. Such scholarship would replace and ultimately eliminate the need for rubrics and standards.
3. *On portfolios and organizing:* Teachers need to organize against current evaluation and assessment schema in music education, and showcase successful visions of student centered work, both process and product.

(2) Curriculum-as-assemblage

*“But public welfare is merely the sum total
of the private welfares of each of us.”*
Camus, *The Plague*⁷

Learning remotely has reemphasized to me that our students are fully formed, fully encultured, complex persons who are endowed with private histories, public politics, identities and multiple ways of seeing and knowing. Watching learning take place from an individual’s home, hotel, or apartment exposed a subtle truth: too often students leave part of who they are, and who they are becoming, when they enter a school or take a seat in our classrooms. Although my teaching philosophy is strongly influenced by John Dewey’s educational and moral concepts of growth, and Maxine Greene’s notions of becoming, I see more clearly that students, no matter what age, are antinomically both complete and unfinished.⁸ Yes, it is our job to foster expansions of life and living, but I am newly interested in growth without prescription, deficit-thinking, or heavy handed design. If this vision of teaching sounds like a contradiction, it is one I have come to enjoy immensely. And as contradiction, it is a process and an aim that we can strive to prolong within our curricula.

Curriculum can be designed to capture the contradictions of ‘growth without prescription’, even operating according to a para/logic of ‘structured openness’. I like to think of curriculum as a rhizomatic assemblage of texts that interact without an anchor, a

⁷ Camus, *ibid.*, 88.

⁸ John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: Macmillan, Inc., 1916). Maxine Greene, *Releasing the Imagination: Essays on Education, the Arts, and Social Change* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1995).

tapestry that seeks an unattributing posture, a plural that refuses filiation. The concept is Deleuzian, and borrows from Roland Barthes's notion of the 'text'.⁹ However, one can draw curricular inspiration from contemporary music production as well, especially the ways in which hip hop musicians make and communicate their art. Like the sources I draw from, a decentered curriculum is piecemeal -a mound, an open plain/plane . . . an anthill or rabbit's burrow, without beginning or end, some kind of middle place.

I noticed that curriculum-as-assemblage became more pronounced when students were learning from home, using the unique resources around them as they explored and put to use our group discussions. One principle of assemblage is that a class never explores one piece of music alone, or one topic from a singular source. Long before remote teaching in 2020, I enjoyed mixing styles and genres by theme (how male composers 'write' women, say) or concept (prioritizing texture and timbre as first-order compositional devices). Designing for openness, I structure a concept for wide discussion and subsequent laboratory exploration. We might begin with Toro y Moi and Henry Cowell's use of texture and timbre. Students working remotely are encouraged to use the resources around them to improvise and compose, thereby emphasizing and extending homelife, yet also inserting and celebrating the unique cultures and languages that students bring to the mix. Using the technological platform that facilitates our virtual space, we grow our 'mound' of stuff, adding link after link to an initial assemblage. Naturally, students return from their explorations and share aspects of who they are, where they are, and who they are becoming. Revelations ensue.

Now, if you know me, then you know I am terrible at technology, even a bit phobic . . . A music teacher better-versed in technology would almost certainly create far greater vistas of synchronous, asynchronous, cooperative, and real/virtual circuitry than me: learning webs that sidestep the natural linear shape of teacher-directed learning. Teaching through Zoom was a matrix I reluctantly stepped a foot into, but one from which I now take unexpected inspiration. The designs of assemblage cohere nicely with two important aspirations for music education: technology can unleash and facilitate curricular re/mixing, and help to re-orbit the student as the primary locus of learning. A decentred curriculum is (or should be) a decolonizing space, resulting in a greater diversity of voices across time, culture and interest.

Some notes and aspirations:

1. *On curriculum and teaching*: If classrooms, rehearsal spaces, and applied studios were to re-orbit the locus of study away from the Master-teacher or the great Objects of learning, larger landscapes of life (especially those that are silenced, hidden, and unlooked for) will enrich all participants in the curricular space (the text, teacher, school, society, and above all, the student).
2. *On curriculum and research*: Teacher action research might look at how music educators design, implement, reflect upon, and redesign spaces that emphasize and profit from the antinomic fact of multicultural schooling – e.g., students are simultaneously finished and unfinished in their pursuit of a richer life.
3. *On curriculum and organizing*: Educators need authentic and on-going professional support to customize technology according to their talents, interests and levels of reluctance. Technology is a conduit, not the point of education, of course.

⁹ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987). Roland Barthes, 'From Work to Text', in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 155-164.

(3) *Loss, trauma, therapy, well-being*

“So you haven’t understood yet?” Rambert shrugged his shoulders almost scornfully.

“Understood what?”

“The plague.”

“Ah!” Rieux exclaims.

“No, you haven’t understood that it means exactly that
–the same thing over and over and over again.”

Camus, *The Plague*¹⁰

I have been an educator a long time, and I know (like you) that we all carry within us private histories of loss and suffering. Our students do, too. Yet I have never seen so many public intersections of pain and trauma as I witnessed over the course of this pandemic. In profound ways, my students and I needed each other this year. I don’t know how else to put it. We embraced trust and mutuality in spite of a flattened digital space that seemed antithetical to these conditions. As artists do, we made the best of our resources, and told stories of fragile courage. Out of these stories came some degree of hope, but so too a heaviness I just couldn’t shake.

I went in search of healing and calm. I found myself purposefully designing instruction that addressed personal well-being and mental health. I became interested in the ways in which the ancients in China used music as a healing practice, what Leonard Tan and Mengchen Lu call *mingxin jianxing* (明心见性), the clearing of the ‘heart-mind’ and the exploration of the inner life.¹¹ As a class, we tried to approach our instruments differently than how we were trained -more like meditative tools, more like the scholars in China who perform the guqin as a way of self-knowing and wonder. Could we refuse musical thinking (so prized and privileged in Western music education), refuse metacognition even, for a what? . . . a para/cognitive experience of nothingness, a passage to elsewhere? We looked at Pauline Oliveros’s musical meditations and designed warmups that used her twin concepts of breath and deep listening.¹² Koji Matsunobu, in his article, ‘Performing, Creating, and Listening to Nature through Music: The Art of Self-Integration’ took us outside, playing music with birds and the wind, like Koji did with his students in Tokyo, like the ancients did in Japan long ago.¹³ I spoke with my doctoral student, Lindsey Blackhurst, who designed a research study around singing, contemplation, and mindfulness.¹⁴ Inspired by Lindsey, I tried meditating for the first time in my life. Were the results successful? Did I know enough to act? Was I appropriately grounded in these practices? How far was I permitted to explore outside my culture, life experience, and expertise? The answers to all these questions were . . . probably not . . . sometimes . . . under certain conditions . . . who knows? . . . *what else could I do?* At the same time that I was looking for personal healing, I was also dealing with anger and self-doubt. Protests against police brutality were rocking my Harlem neighborhood, and my heart ached for those who died. For the month of June, and during

¹⁰ Camus, *ibid.*, 161.

¹¹ Leonard Tan and Mengchen Lu, ‘I Wish to be Wordless: Philosophizing through the Chinese Guqin’, *Philosophy of Music Education Review*, vol. 26: 2, 2018, pp. 139-154.

¹² Pauline Oliveros, *Deep Listening Pieces* (Kingston, New York: Deep Listening Publications, 1990).

¹³ Koji Matsunobu, ‘Performing, Creating, and Listening to Nature through Music: The Art of Self-Integration’, *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, vol. 47: 4, 2013, pp. 64-79.

¹⁴ Lindsey Blackhurst, *Exploring the Whole Singing Self with Technique, Mindfulness, and Contemplative Education*. Unpublished Ed.D. dissertation (New York: Teachers College Columbia University, 2021).

every night, fireworks lit up the sky, preventing sleep. I tried to sharpen my practice as an anti-racist teacher, looking closely at my curriculum for evidence of settler coloniality. Was I qualified to facilitate the kind of intense abolitionist teaching that was needed in this moment, and when would I know that I'm ready? Was I qualified to be a therapist? What if I did harm to my students?

I have come to appreciate that there are phases in a teacher's life when time affords us the luxury to fine-tune a practice. There are many more moments -running perhaps through all of life- when we are outside of the required expertise to feel comfortable and safe. I assert, nonetheless, that although we may be without expertise in an area that requires attention and haste, we are never without tools. We can draw upon dialogue, or employ alternative pedagogies, such that students lead or share when we cannot. For example, I was not the only facilitator in conversations about racial justice. So too, we can draw upon an explicitly ethical posture when approaching an unfamiliar culture. My Chinese students helped my class think differently about why we might play an instrument as if it were the *guqin*. They led conversations about Chinese aesthetics and its relationship to nature and well-being.

Here I present another case for diversity. In homogenous communities, or in spaces of standardization and external evaluation, we are effectively prevented from drawing upon expertise that we don't possess. Overly-homogenized communities or rubric-driven curricula may prevent us from exploring alternative pathways; we might rush into cultural spaces where humbleness and caution are better approaches. And here we are presented with another antinomy, another aphorism. We can pivot quickly, but must do so with caution. We cannot let undue caution prevent us from meeting a moment that demands speed.

1. *On well-being and teaching*: How are music teachers strategically addressing issues of trauma and mental health in their coursework? Are there spaces in curricula where students feel protected and comforted, and also afforded opportunities to reveal anger and resilience?
2. *On well-being and research*: The familiar dualisms that drive scholarship in music education (formal vs informal; classical vs popular; presentational vs participatory, etc.) have inadequately addressed the physical and mental health needs of students and teachers. Well-being and health should be present in all practices and theories, conservative or progressive. Any teaching practice is redeemable if it is purposefully designed to promote student health and well-being.
3. *On well-being and organizing*: To sustain a life of emotional attachment and care, educators need support structures and time to process their own feelings regarding expertise, self-doubt, and the stress of rapid change. Therapeutic care must be offered to teachers as well as students.

(4) *Dialogue, witnessing, and quiet pedagogy*

“Whereas in the early days of the plague they had been struck by the host of small details that, while meaning absolutely nothing to others, meant so much to them personally, and thus had realized, perhaps for the first time, the uniqueness of each man's life.”
Camus, *The Plague*¹⁵

¹⁵ Camus, *ibid.*, 183.

As a university music teacher educator, it is my job to model a teaching practice that is informed by theory. I won't present a theory in class that I can't point to in practice. This imperative is aspirational, and not always successful, but it is an ethical posture I hold myself to. Thus, it is hard to overstate the surprise I felt this year when a praxis I held dear changed in front of me. A closely held theory transformed, but without conscious strategy on my part. Remote learning, creative portfolio-based teaching, and student well-being has reconfigured how dialogue plays out in my classroom.

I have always used classroom dialogue as a principal method for flattening the hierarchies that have historically worked against the creation of more open music-learning environments and performance practices. My problem with master-apprentice teaching and its praxis of student docility permeates much of my research.¹⁶ In search of more emancipatory literacies, I came to a theory of 'the text' whereby each reader brings the fullness of their lives and the uniqueness of their vantage point to a classroom encounter. There is an expectation that not only will each student see, feel and hear differently, but that a classroom profits when reports from multiple vantage points are considered and debated. I like to talk about dialogue as producing surplus meaning. If an object of attention has only singular meaning or comes from a closed standard of practice, it is probably not worth studying, at least not in my classes. Curriculum in the humanities is the art of bringing together rich mounds of provocation to produce the kinds of multi-directional spill-over that enlarge and enrich life.

It can be said that the gravitational pull of authority forever disallows the student a place at the center of interest. Whether we are talking about a code of practice, a dead composer's score, or a teacher's earned expertise, the music learner is always the last to speak. What if the reader speaks before the author has His say? What if we performed without explication? What if a composer's intentions were just one part of a mound that included an audience's interpretations, a de-centered tradition, amendable codes of practice, and unlimited links and passageways to the unconsidered or previously silenced? Dialogue helps re-orbit the student as the center of pull. When a group of diverse learners comes in close contact, the topics, conversations and activities push and pull apart, moving erratically from location to location. The effect can be destabilizing, exhausting, and exhilarating.

This year, to my surprise, a different energy and affect emerged. The change had something to do with a digital video platform that doesn't allow for simultaneous discussion, or the rhythms of excited interruption. Our flattened space created quieter conversations. But the primary change, I think, had to do with the ways in which my students were using their creative assignments to address issues of race, gender, isolation and general anxiety. When students shared their creative work, a manner of silent respect often followed. We listened and watched, and suspended any kind of dialogical contest. There was no rush to opine: no point for point and counterpoint. Quite the opposite. Forceful dialogue became unnecessary because we were acting as witnesses to hurt, beauty and struggle. Disclosure was a student-led praxis from which I, too, learned to be more quiet.

What does it mean to practice quiet dialogue, or quiet assessment? Is this a new praxis? Or, just new for me? Last summer, as my students' creative work evinced increasing emotion and pain, our class began to refer to quietness as 'witnessing', a word whose Christian overtones

I was initially uncomfortable advancing. As the practice of quietness took shape, I recognized its potential for enlarging empathy and togetherness. Witnessing, our class

¹⁶ Randall E. Allsup, 'The Eclipse of a Higher Education or Problems Preparing Artists in a Mercantile World', *Music Education Review*, vol. 17; 3, 2015, pp. 251-261

decided, had something to do with informed action, as used when James Baldwin calls our attention to the atrocities of racial injustice, writing as a form or force of testifying.¹⁷ David Hansen uses the term to evoke a receptive orientation to the commonly-profound, appealing to the dignity of human work, specifically the act of teaching.¹⁸ In class, we were not merely beholding revelation, though certainly we were. Nor were we merely practicing empathy, though again, certainly we were. We were growing, becoming otherwise, and our choices were purposeful. Witnessing, thus, had everything to do with the very meaning and purpose of education. Since our witnessing occurred after we shared work from our portfolios, its practice re-orbited the place of explication back to where it has greatest value: in a learner's hands, sharing creator intensions, feelings and discoveries. As a classroom of diverse learner-witnesses, we noticed generally the value of the new dialogical method, and noticed differently the value of each person's offerings.

There is nothing inherently wrong with explication, even in a theory of the text. Explication is oppressive when dialogue is disallowed, as when a conductor decides the range of choices his orchestra is afforded to make, or when notation and style are treated without strata, as autochthonous rock. Explication in the hands of the vulnerable -in the hands of the subaltern- is a different story. For one thing, it means that the rights of the reader are deferred, though never foreclosed. When a student shares vulnerable work, our job is to attend, be alert, and wait. We notice. We contemplate.

This kind of evaluation -hearing where value or emphasis is placed, observing value's affect on oneself and others, considering why certain choices are made and where these choices come from- is at last worthy of the richness of our students' lives. When a student feels the need to share anger or pain, there is no justifiable place for rubrics or backwards-designed assessments. Yes, a quiet evaluation occurs, but the observation and location of value is a sideways event -becoming para/analytical, embodying the projection and reception of feelings, leaving judgment much more in the hands of the maker, and less in the critic (usually the teacher). Assessment and evaluation, as educative concepts, are recovered by a contemplative praxis of valuing and noticing. 'I heard you say this . . . What do you mean?' Or, 'I noticed this choice . . . Say more about it'.

In my notes from 2020, I began to wonder about what I was calling 'loud pedagogy'. Was my previous concept of dialogue too loud, or did it lack dimension or nuance? What would it mean to better appreciate the envelope within which the sounds of learning occur -to really attune to wider dialogic frequencies, durations, volumes, and all the echoes of their reception and decay? In my notes, I recall that Socrates was a loud pedagogue, and I've come to disavow his pedagogy of confrontation. Here was a teacher who gave himself the task of educating the unwilling, mostly through unsolicited argument with them. We know the story: in Socrates's mind, Athens was a slumbering horse and he was a gadfly, ready to sting a lazy polity to his vision of wide-awakeness. Couldn't quiet conversations, I ask, even between naps, have worked just as well? Why do we confuse volume with knowing, and loudness with insight? Talk to a beginner who is learning a new language. Greater volume will not help you understand a word that you have not learned, or cannot recognize. Greater volume will not help you understand a cultural phenomenon that you have not experienced, or cannot recognize. Loudness might

¹⁷ See James Baldwin, *The Cross of Redemption: Uncollected Writings* (New York: Vintage International, 2011); James Baldwin, *The Price of the Ticket: Collected Nonfiction 1948-1985* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985).

¹⁸ See David T. Hansen, 'Bearing Witness to Teachers and Teaching', *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, vol. 49; 1, 2017, pp. 7-23. David T. Hansen, 'Among School Teachers: Bearing Witness as an Orientation in Educational Inquiry', *Educational Theory*, vol. 67: 1, 2017, pp. 9-30.

agitate, but it is the quiet comment that brings me closer to you and what you wish to share with me.

Here are some notes on dialogue.

1. *On dialogue and teaching*: Is dialogue the antidote to failed evaluation practices that emphasize standards and teacher power? Can contemplative assessment practices reform outdated notions of evaluation, gesturing toward ‘in/valuation’? How do we enlarge both the range of what dialogue makes possible in classrooms as well as what counts as dialogic practice?
2. *On dialogue and research*: Dialogue is a skill, pedagogy and orientation, but university music teacher educators know too little about how it is taught, learned, practiced, and refined. Can research advance a notion of best practice, one that honors the multiple cultures and unique dispositions of our students?
3. *On dialogue and organizing*: Dialogue is a natural fit for bottom-up policy-making in schools. Can we put policy back in the hands of the persons closest to whom it affects? Would study groups and teacher action research projects re-orbit who is allowed to make policy and for what purpose?¹⁹

Conclusion: the new 21st century musician

*“In normal times all of us know, whether consciously or not,
that there is no love which can’t be bettered.”
Camus, The Plague²⁰*

The least controversial prognostication I can offer for the future of music education is that remote learning has enlarged our teaching toolkit, as well as our empathy. As the year progressed, I was forced to admit that Zoom teaching was not the educational ‘malpractice’ I thought it would be. Emergency conditions wore off, and as recounted in this chapter, new things happened. My personal prejudice against online education melted away, to my very surprise. My all-remote doctoral seminar, for example, is a space of comfortable equality, with the exception of a few time zone differences. And although I don’t like cats, it is fun to see them pop up on my students’ screens, and even nicer to know that these normally stressed-out dissertation researchers are working from the comfort of their most comfortable chair, with their favorite companion nearby (human or otherwise). In a seminar setting, the flattened space allows for the easy sharing of written work, and I can more confidently manage conversations and time. Going forward, I haven’t figured out what role remote learning will play in my two-part creativity course (when all goes back to ‘normal’), but I am sure I will not try to replicate what occurred in the semesters Before Time 2020. I feel confident predicting that most music teachers will do the same. We will reflect on what worked, and think about what didn’t, and we will inevitably change how we teach. It is exciting to contemplate.

I would like to offer another prediction for the future, also without controversy. Covid-19 has reshaped what it means to be a performing artist, and it has forced our music majors to enlarge their skills, even their understanding of what it means to be an artist.

¹⁹ See Patrick Schmidt, *Policy as Practice: A Guide for Music Educators* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020); Eric Y. Shieh, *Learning Policymaking in Schools: Decolonization, Reinhabitation, and Inquiry*, Unpublished Ed.D. dissertation (New York: Teachers College Columbia University, 2019).

²⁰ Camus, *ibid.*, 75.

Theater, dance, and music have awkwardly moved to remote production stages, and through this painful process, new techniques and skills are being achieved. Today, the octogenarian visual artist David Hockney ‘paints’ exclusively on his phone and I-Pad. GPS tracking allows anyone with a cell phone to explore parks and cityscapes, accompanied by sound-art of all manner. Last week, near me, a pop-up jazz quartet played live on a Harlem stoop, with a tap dancer in tow.

In traditional study of aesthetics we ask, what is art? I think it’s more interesting to ask, where is art, when is art? Remote teaching has revealed that music-making and music-sharing are eminently uncontainable, never limited to production studios, concert stages, or practice rooms.

Nor does composing depend upon an upright piano in the aforementioned cramped practice room. In 2020, we made music from household objects, the calls of geese and traditional sources, as well as from squishy loops and stems found online and made up new. By composing alone, or collaborating with others from home, stunning music videos emerged throughout the year, though I never specified an aesthetic form that a student or group should adopt. I saw reflections on nationality from a spoken word video that took inspiration from Langston Hughes’s poem, I Too [Sing America] – Hughes’s remix of Walt Whitman’s Song of Myself. I heard ruminations on race from a white student, as he walked through a starry night sky in Little Rock, Arkansas. There is politics in music, an obvious point finally internalized by my many classically trained student musicians. I joke with them that they jumped from the 19th century to the 21st in one year’s time, skipping the 20th century completely. I watched as these classical musicians, many of whom had never used recording and composing software before, wrote moving stories about society and self. It wasn’t long ago that music education researchers thought that drum sets and guitars would revolutionize music education by instantly bringing popular culture and society into the traditional classroom. Then we recognized a collective prejudice: that it takes just as long to learn the guitar as it does the violin. Perhaps this insight brings me to a final observation. While I generally agree that there are no ‘easy’ instruments to learn to play, it does appear from 2020 that we can learn production skills rather quickly, especially in diverse peer groups. We have succeeded, I think, at the arrival of genre agnosticism, and a concomitant reordering of power. The field of music education has become more open. Our students are showing us what they can do. I aspire to learn more from them.