

Schooling the Future: Perceptions of Selected Experts on Jazz Education

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While jazz participation rates in public schooling¹ represent a relatively small percentage of the larger school population, this level of participation still far exceeds the percentage of the population who enroll in formal jazz studies at the post-secondary level or those who become vocational jazz musicians (although this is not to confuse the issue of participation with “impact” or “influence”). And yet, studies in jazz education tend to emphasize practices as they occur at the post-secondary level. Of sixty-four theses and dissertations in the ProQuest database returned for a search of “education” (subject) and “jazz” (keyword), for example, only ten relate in any way to jazz education issues at the public school level. Of these, one examines gender issues, one examines ethnicity, two deal with high school jazz choirs, and one looks at the effects of singing or playing a jazz melody on fourth- and fifth-grade students. One can only speculate, but it may be the case that post-secondary jazz education is considered of greater interest among jazz education researchers since it is viewed (in most cases) as vocational preparation and, thus, more directly linked to issues of music and society.

The paucity of research into jazz education practices in secondary schools is lamentable, given the importance sociology places on education as a form of social reproduction. Whether one chooses to view educational practices as a microcosm of democratic society (Dewey in Callan and White 104) or as *habitus* (Bourdieu and Passeron 54), compulsory education is inextricably linked to individual subjectivity and the perpetuation of specific forms of existence. Writers in music education such as Wayne Bowman, David Elliott, and Estelle Jorgensen have made much of the importance of music in constructing who and what we become. If this is true, then the specific forms of musical practices with which we engage hold the potential to shape students’ lives, either positively or adversely. Jazz education practices that emphasize product over process, tonal balance over groove, or notation over improvisation will necessarily result in very different people—and ultimately a different kind of society—than practices that emphasize the reverse. I suggest that improvisatory musical practices that encourage inter-active provisionality, and that suspend summative judgements in a perpetual quest that seeks potentialities, hold much greater promise for individuals and for society than the kind of Big Band music making that occurs in schools, where efforts are ultimately evaluated based on normative conformity and technical execution.

In this paper I draw on a larger study of jazz education at the secondary school level (Mantie 2004) that examines school jazz curriculum and instructional practices. Four “experts” in jazz education were interviewed—two were primarily jazz educator/musicians working at the post-secondary level; the other two were primarily jazz musicians who also did some post-secondary teaching. The results of the larger study suggest that current practices in jazz education at the secondary level largely ignore improvisation in favour of polishing the notes on the printed page. I conduct my analysis in this paper from the theoretical perspective of Lave and Wenger’s “situated learning” and “communities of practice.” While improvisation may be musically and educationally desirable, its inclusion in schools is complicated by poor teacher training practices and the codification requirements of the educational system.

Background to the Study

The impetus for this study derived from my belief that jazz education practices in secondary schools are not adequately reflective of the jazz tradition or current practices in jazz.² As an experienced secondary school music teacher and professional jazz musician situated in Manitoba, I noted that jazz education participation rates—provincially, nationally, and internationally—had risen substantially over an eight to ten year period. Manitoba, where I taught, was the first and, at the time, only educational jurisdiction to have formally adopted the IAJE/MENC³ (The International Association of Jazz Educators/The National Association for Music Education) jazz curriculum, “Teaching Jazz: A Course of Study” (TJ:CS hereafter). In my view, the kind of musicianship exhibited by school jazz musicians, locally and more broadly, did not appear to differ noticeably from the non-jazz—that is, “concert band”—musicians. I hypothesized that this was due to the standard employment of a “Big Band” model of instruction that favours ensemble skills over individual creative skills and is overly reliant on the director (teacher).

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Jazz participation rates were derived from data provided by the Manitoba Band Association, the Winnipeg Jazz Optimist Festival, the Brandon Jazz Festival, and the International Association of Jazz Educators (now the International Association for Jazz Education). While one might counter that school jazz participation in Manitoba, a province of one million people, can hardly be said to be representative of North American practices, there is little reason to consider this sparsely populated province as an anomaly.⁴ Regardless of the exact figures, there are a substantial number of people involved in school jazz ensembles. Consider that the Brandon Jazz Festival, an educational festival held in a rural town of approximately fifty thousand people, annually attracts close to three thousand student participants (grades seven to twelve). If one extrapolates this figure (which represents only a portion of school jazz students in Manitoba) to all of North America, one concludes that approximately one million public school students participate in jazz activities.⁵ Even as a rough estimate, this figure indicates a formidably high level of participation in school jazz.⁶

Manitoba's adoption of the provincial jazz curriculum, TJ:CS, is a somewhat more complicated topic and raises issues beyond the purposes of this paper. I include TJ:CS in this discussion only as an example of how educational discourses manifest teaching practices that may or may not be congruent with practices outside of education.⁷ TJ:CS is based, loosely, on a philosophy, prevalent from the late 1960s onwards, that promotes the concept of "music education as aesthetic education."⁸ TJ:CS lists five "rationales" for jazz education:

- Jazz can and should be taught as aesthetic education.
- Jazz is a valid art form worthy of study and performance at all grade levels.
- Music education students need an understanding of the art form to teach jazz—it should be included in teacher preparation.
- Music education students should be encouraged to take a broadly based jazz pedagogy course.
- Aesthetics texts such as those by Meyer, Langer, and Reimer should be examined with the intention of applying aesthetic concepts to jazz and jazz-related music. (Manitoba Education and Training 2)⁹

Unfortunately, TJ:CS does not explain what is meant by "aesthetic values," nor does it explain why jazz education should articulate a philosophy based on "aesthetic values" of jazz as opposed to other possible philosophical positions. TJ:CS, as a government curriculum, imposes an "official" version of what jazz education is to be and how it should be taught. By suggesting jazz can and should be taught as aesthetic education, TJ:CS emphasizes the product of the music over the process. According to Elliott, aesthetic education involves "disinterested perception" and the "education of feeling"—aspects which emphasize the importance of the intentional art object, that is, the musical product or "work." Musical processes, such as improvisation, receive little, if any, attention in the "music education as aesthetic education" model.¹⁰ It is worth noting that TJ:CS was a joint project of the International Association of Jazz Education and Music Educators National Conference. These two groups represent, by far, the largest and most influential organizations in the field of music education in schools. The weight of authority of IAJE/MENC sanctions a view of jazz much at odds with a processual-centered account of music.¹¹

The government adoption of TJ:CS may be considered as important on many levels, but as many educational practitioners will attest, the existence of formal curricula means little unless there is some form of will or accountability. Teachers may be legally obligated to teach a given curriculum, but in the absence of a mechanism for ensuring its implementation, teachers can, within reason, teach—particularly in subjects such as music that often evade close scrutiny—almost anything they like.¹² Therefore, in addition to examining the theoretical, philosophical, or political beliefs upon which jazz education is said to be based, we need to examine actual school jazz curriculum and instructional practices. These practices¹³ have previously received attention from several authors. Fraser, in a study of both high school and university jazz ensemble rehearsals, noted the role of the leader in these ensembles was more analogous to that of band and orchestra conductors than to leaders such as Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Jelly Roll Morton, and King Oliver. This is hardly surprising, given the origins of jazz education in public schools. As Sarath points out: "Constantly seeking credibility, jazz educators sought to emulate the conventional paradigm as closely as possible. Thus it was only natural that the big band, which was most like conventional school bands and orchestras, would emerge as the centerpiece" (126). Ake echoes some of Sarath's concerns, providing an historical account that helps to explain current practices:

Until well into the 1970s [. . .] school big bands (sometimes called "lab" or

“stage” bands) frequently defined the sole jazz outlet [. . .] Conservatory-trained directors led most institutional big bands of this period, even as their main responsibilities typically included the concert or marching band [. . .] Not surprisingly, these jazz-band directors generally stressed the same musical concepts valued in their other ensembles—centered and stable intonation, correct note reading, section balance—while improvisation often went overlooked. (114)

This situation remains largely unchanged. Commenting on the music schools of the midwestern United States in the 1990s, ethnomusicologist Bruno Nettl noted that, “the large jazz band, a miniature of the concert band, plays from scores a substantial amount of music that may lack improvisation. This kind of big-band has a very modest role in the outside world of jazz, but the school nevertheless selects it to be the exemplar of jazz within its walls” (qtd. in Ake 114).

The Big Band has unquestionably become the standard vehicle for jazz instruction in schools, a potential problem in at least three ways. One, it runs contrary to the history of the jazz tradition, which is primarily small-group based. Two, methods of instruction have become based on European models, which can be inappropriate and ineffective for the teaching of certain aspects of jazz that do not conform to notation, such as groove or “feel.” Three, improvisation plays a less prominent role in Big Band music than it does in small ensembles. While there is certainly much to be admired in the Big Band tradition, it can hardly be said to represent all jazz traditions or current practices. Additionally, it is significant that the professional musicians who played in Big Bands likely did not receive their primary musical training there. Therefore, despite legitimating jazz education in schools in terms of participation levels and its official sanctioning by government, doubts should persist about the appropriateness or efficacy of the Big Band model, as it is utilized in schools, to engender the kinds of musical skills and attitudes most valued by the “real world” of jazz.

Since an overwhelming number of school music programs are performance-based, I decided that the most appropriate way to examine school jazz practices was to consider the formal performances of these ensembles. In practice, the majority of instruction is oriented toward these performances. The individuals best able to provide an “objective perspective” on these formal performances are professional jazz education festival adjudicators, since these individuals: a) are, in most cases, professional jazz musicians and, therefore, understand jazz music to a greater degree than most school music teachers; b) typically have some academic knowledge of jazz instruction—that is, they are familiar with teaching and learning contexts; and c) usually have a broad perspective, having listened to many groups from many geographic areas, providing a normative frame of reference on what is happening in school jazz ensembles. In light of all of the aforementioned considerations, the following research question was advanced: What are the perceptions of selected Canadian experts on jazz education in Manitoba secondary schools?

The Study

The problem was addressed through the use of a semistructured email interview of selected Canadian jazz education experts. A sampling strategy was employed to identify individuals uniquely qualified and situated to provide information-rich responses to the issues in question. Criteria were established to ensure that individuals: a) had listened to Manitoba secondary school jazz ensembles at least twice in the past six years; b) were actively involved with jazz education at the post-secondary level; and c) had a vested interest in Canadian jazz education. Four of the five individuals meeting the established criteria agreed to participate in this study. Future studies may benefit from a wider representation of Canadian adjudicators as well as non-Canadian adjudicators in order to gather wider perspectives and greater cross-border (Canada-United States) comparisons.

The objective of the interview was to solicit experts’ perceptions of jazz ensemble performance practices in Manitoba secondary schools. An interview guide was used to ensure a degree of comparability among responses. The questions were emailed to experts one at a time, in the manner of a face-to-face interview. In order to allow for clarification and elaboration, the interview allowed for follow-up questions that arose from their initial responses. These did not take the form of new questions but were simple attempts to solicit further clarification of responses (e.g. “Could you please explain what you mean by...”) or provide clarification of a question if so asked by a respondent. The interviews were conducted between October, 2003, and January, 2004. For reasons of confidentiality, respondents are not given consistent labels in the reporting of results. Instead, the labeling changes for each question. That is, Respondent A in one question is not the same person as Respondent A in another.

Theoretical Framework for Interpretation

Although not part of the original study, I have, for the purposes of this paper, re-interpreted the findings using Lave and Wenger's theory of "situated learning"—an analytic tool aimed at explaining the sociocultural nature of learning. "Painting a picture of the person as a primarily "cognitive" entity," they insist, "tends to promote a nonpersonal view of knowledge, skills, tasks, activities, and learning. As a consequence, both theoretical analyses and instructional prescriptions tend to be driven by reference to reified "knowledge domains" (52)—such as, for example, jazz or jazz improvisation. Learning is, thus, conceptualized as internalization, "an unproblematic process of absorbing the given, as a matter of transmission and assimilation" (47). Often presented as the "empty vessel" model, the teacher (the owner of knowledge), simply fills the student's mind with information. As an alternative, Lave and Wenger propose the concept of "legitimate peripheral participation," (LPP) whereby "learners inevitably participate in communities of practitioners and that the mastery of knowledge and skill requires newcomers to move toward full participation in the sociocultural practices of a community." In the LPP model, learning is not centered on the knowledge itself but on becoming a participant in any given community of practice. This involves learning to engage in actual, in-the-world social practices, and subsumes, as a result, the learning of such things as "knowledgeable skills" (29). Lave and Wenger make clear that situated learning is not simply apprenticeship or "learning by doing" (29-31). Such a view of learning misses out on the importance of motivation and the changes in identity that are central to their concept. Learning as apprenticeship or "by doing" fails to account for the necessity of use-value. Students might learn to be a blacksmith quite effectively through apprenticeship, but since blacksmithing largely no longer exists, it is doubtful that students would feel any particular sense of membership in the "real world" of blacksmiths. Teaching jazz exclusively via the Big Band model might potentially qualify as effective apprenticeship but will not qualify as LPP unless students and their teachers make theoretical and practical connections between school music practices and musical practices outside of school.

Lave and Wenger write that in LPP there is no "central participation" and no designated periphery (35): "In our usage, peripherality is [. . .] a positive term, whose most salient conceptual antonyms are unrelatedness or irrelevance to ongoing activity [. . .] In this sense, peripherality, when it is enabled, suggests an opening, a way of gaining access to sources for understanding through growing involvement" (37). The metaphor of learning as LPP, then, might be considered as a doorway or window that allows the individual to experience and be a part of what exists beyond. To be clear, this does not suggest a teleological journey; the point is not to get somewhere—as might be the case with learning as "induction," for example. The goal of learning is to enlarge the doorway or window, allowing for greater and greater access to particular communities, leading to ongoing changes in identity and meaning making.

Examining learning as LPP, suggest Lave and Wenger, provides a better contextual lens for determining what students actually learn and what it means for them than do studies of curriculum or instruction (41), since it includes "the whole person acting in the world" (49). Learning, accordingly, entails the "historical production, transformation, and chang[ing] of persons" (Lave and Wagner 51). That is, it involves constructing identities, since it involves becoming a different person as the result of various forms of evolving memberships. "Thus identity, knowing, and social membership entail one another" (Lave and Wagner 53).

I have chosen to employ "situated learning" in this paper since it raises issues germane to culture and society. If, for example, identity, knowing, and social membership are interrelated, it follows that the kinds of practices with which we engage impact directly on the kinds of people we become and the kind of society that emerges. Schools are clearly not the only influence on young people, of course. In an age of unprecedented easy access to knowledge and culture via various media, the importance of schooling in the lives of youth may be, arguably, at its lowest level in recent memory. That said, very few people escape mandatory schooling, which means the forms of practice that occur in schools unavoidably shape who and what we become and the kind of society that is reproduced.

Findings and Discussion

As previously mentioned, this essay draws from a larger study on jazz curriculum and instructional practices. I have chosen to focus only on those aspects relating to improvisation, since improvisation is, as I have argued elsewhere, an area with rich educational possibilities,¹⁴ and improvisation was identified by the selected experts as a problematic area in school jazz teaching and learning. Furthermore, the findings, interpreted through the lenses of "situated learning" and "communities of practice," raise issues

that should be of interest to jazz musicians, scholars, and enthusiasts, owing to the significant and pervasive influence of schooling on individuals and society. I reiterate that although the research problem examines practices by school jazz ensembles in Manitoba, the selected experts in this study found almost no differences between the performance practices occurring in Manitoba and those in other Canadian provinces.¹⁵ If anything, Manitoba ensembles were noted as being slightly superior in performance ability to other provinces. The results, therefore, should be considered applicable nationally, as well as generalizable to a broader, North American context.

Question: What do you feel are the crucial elements in any jazz curriculum?¹⁶

Respondents A and B noted that there is an overlap in certain aspects of a curriculum specific to jazz education and one designed for music education in general. Respondent A suggested that the elements of sound quality, dynamics, balance, blend, intonation, range, time, articulations, and technique were common to all music education curricula. Respondent B said, "In terms of *fundamental* issues pertaining to music education, music is music." He continued, "teaching students about self-expression, the art of music, developing their creative problem solving skills, developing their critical thinking skills, developing their skills in working together in group environments, etc. should ideally cross all musical style boundaries. I see little difference in the various disciplines/styles/instrumentation in this regard." Respondent B stated that the jazz idiom was well-suited to teaching general musical goals, saying that "a jazz-based education is one of the best all around ways to achieve such aforementioned objectives." Respondent A indicated that jazz curricula differ in the areas of instrumentation (e.g. rhythm section—especially drums), characteristic stylistic elements (e.g. swing, Latin grooves), and improvisation. He suggested that improvisation is a great way to teach important curricular aspects such as history, theory, harmony, ear training, form, scales, time, and "feel."

The elements listed by the respondents as crucial in any jazz curriculum are as follows (with the number of respondents listing each element given in parentheses):

- (4) ear training and listening skills
- (4) improvising
- (4) theory
- (4) large ensemble playing
- (4) jazz history
- (3) listening to jazz
- (2) transcribing
- (2) keyboard skills
- (2) jazz composition/arranging
- (1) repertoire development

Based on their experiences in listening to festival performances, the respondents identified the following areas as "most emphasized" by Manitoba schools' jazz ensembles: working on a limited number of pieces; making students phrase correctly, use dynamics, cut off notes together, etc. (the details of playing a given chart); instrumental skills and the ability to play ensemble phrases; and basic large jazz ensemble playing, particularly phrasing.

The respondents identified the following areas as most neglected by Manitoba schools' jazz ensembles (number of respondents in parentheses):

- (4) repertoire selection
- (3) improvisation
- (3) lack of jazz concept
- (2) listening
- (1) rhythm sections
- (1) instrumentation
- (1) sight-reading skills
- (1) ear-training skills

Three of the four respondents listed improvisation as a neglected aspect in jazz education. Respondents A and C, however, cited improvisation as the number one neglected aspect of jazz by Manitoba schools' jazz ensembles. In their words:

Students do not have a clue when it comes to playing an improvised solo. When they play there is no demonstration that they know what key is happening, they have no ability to go through keys as they happen, and they have very limited (or no) jazz vocabulary. (Respondent A)

Often ensembles sound very good until the solo section where improvised solos are often only at the most introductory of levels and/or completely neglected (i.e. playing written down solos). (Respondent C)

A close reading of all respondents' answers demonstrates that current jazz performance practices emphasize aspects that are not distinct to jazz, such as ensemble phrasing, correct notes and rhythms, and good tone production. Jazz education practices seem to be less effective in addressing those aspects that are distinct to jazz, such as idiomatic style and repertoire, improvisation, and certain performance practices. This might suggest: a) ensemble directors are unable to teach these aspects competently as they do not have an adequate understanding of jazz; b) ensemble directors are ineffective at teaching these aspects; or c) there are other mitigating factors, such as scheduling, student motivation, student ability, instrumentation, etc., that prevent the distinctive aspects of jazz from being adequately addressed in jazz ensemble teaching and performance.

Question: In an interview, Bobby Shew summed up his general feelings on what he observes when he adjudicates at student festivals in the United States. In his words, he feels the bands "spend entirely too much time getting the thing polished. They go out and do a presentation of the band and they'll play some chart and have the ensemble pretty well polished and sound OK, and then when it comes time for a solo, everybody falls flat on their face . . . When I hear a band that plays a concert and I don't hear any solos, I want to 'take points away.' "Does Shew's criticism apply to what you hear at festivals in Manitoba?

All respondents agreed with Shew's observation, but only three agreed with his criticism. Respondent C suggested the situation of poor improvised solos is due to a lack of knowledge on the part of the music teacher:

Absolutely. No question about it. The reason is simple: directors know how to put horns and ensembles together. They can polish that very well. Articulation, phrasing, dynamics, sound, and style all sound very good. The problem is . . . they have no idea what is happening when it comes to an improvised solo. The directors don't know about keys, form, changes, functional analysis, chords/scales . . . the students don't have a chance. All of this is very simple and students could play decent solos if they had even the most basic information, but the teachers don't have the information so how can they pass on information to the students?

Respondent B indicated that, while the observation is accurate, it is unrealistic to expect improvised solos to be at the same level as the ensemble playing:

With young bands, the whole usually sounds stronger than any individual. If the bands had no arrangements and relied solely on improvised solos, they wouldn't sound very good. It is a little unfair to ask for solos to be as strong as ensemble playing, as most students are struggling with how to play their instruments, let alone how to improvise on chord changes. That said, I agree that too much emphasis is placed on the ensemble playing, and not enough on learning how to improvise. This certainly does apply to bands in Manitoba, and everywhere else for that matter.

Respondent A felt that large ensemble playing, regardless of the improvisation component, was a desirable "point of entry" for jazz education. He defended the use of the jazz ensemble as a vehicle for jazz instruction from a number of perspectives, citing its utility to jazz education as follows: "allowing a lot of people/students to participate in a non-threatening jazz environment; setting the stage for learning about basic jazz style; being easily teachable by music educators with limited jazz experience; getting kids 'hooked' on jazz." In his defense of the educational value of the jazz ensemble, this respondent cautioned

against equating Shew's comment with an indictment of the jazz ensemble as an instructional medium.

The email interview with selected experts revealed that school jazz education practices tend to emphasize large ensemble, Big Band-style music making skills, such as phrasing, balance, sound, note accuracy, etc. Of this style of jazz music making, Walser writes:

This kind of jazz survives today, in showbands and backing bands, its style changed remarkably little since the 1940s. It survives also, interestingly, in educational institutions, whose "Jazz Ensemble," "Jazz Band," or "Showband," usually under the baton of the Director of Music, can form a showpiece for the school's or college's progressive image. Such ensembles, however, are generally dependent on scores, usually commercial arrangements, which leave little room for either individual or group improvisation (they sometimes include fully notated "improvised" solos) and leave the conductor firmly in charge of everything that takes place. (383)

Walser's observations are largely consistent with the results of the email interview. Manitoba secondary school jazz ensembles typically play commercial arrangements—often ones specifically written for school bands, with the director (teacher) fully in charge. Improvisation, when it does occur, is most often done poorly, failing to exhibit any understanding of style or, even, tonality.

The overarching question raised by the findings of this study could be: "What does it matter?" What difference does it make if school jazz musicians exhibit good ensemble skills but poor improvisational skills? The short answer is: it makes no difference and all the difference, depending on one's ideological perspective. A better question is: "To whom does it matter?" While jazz practitioners who hold jazz improvisation in high regard may take offense to the neglect of improvisation in schools and the predominant use of the Big Band as an instructional medium, it is important to note that education is under no obligation to the jazz tradition. As Kevin Harris points out, "the aims of education, like both the concept and the process of education, are social, historical, ephemeral and changing [. . .] Aims, like all matters of policy, are contextual, political, normative, dynamic and *contested*" (3, emphasis in original). While I wholeheartedly agree that current school jazz practices are troubling in many respects, I wish to be clear that although my original motives for this study were guided by my belief that school jazz practices fail to adequately reflect the jazz tradition, my analyses and criticisms in this paper concern the inadequacy of current practices for both the individual learner and society.

The analytical power of Lave and Wenger's theory lies in its unpacking of the complex mechanisms by and through which we constitute ourselves as sociocultural beings. In part, this entails the construction of identities through shared membership in particular human practices, or, to use their term, "communities of practice." Their use of the word *community* is not intended to designate bounded, identifiable groups, however. It implies, rather, shared understandings about "what they [individuals] are doing and what that means in their lives and for their communities" (98). Central to this concept of community is the question of how knowledge is used "to renegotiate the meaning of the past and future in constructing the meaning of present circumstances" (34).

The kinds of jazz education practices that exist in schools raise many vexing questions. For example, with what kind of community of practice are students engaging? As Lave and Wenger point out, legitimate peripheral participation (LPP) requires the existence of a mature field for what is being learned (110). What kinds of meanings are students able to construct and negotiate, given the practice of performing commercial, Big Band arrangements, many (if not all!) of which are written specifically for school ensembles? It appears learning via current jazz education practices in schools is closer in nature to apprenticing as a blacksmith (e.g. "play the phrase this way") than as a form of LPP in which students feel they are opening a door or window onto the real world of music-making. When a mature field for what is being learned does not exist, a split invariably occurs between the "learning curriculum" and the "teaching curriculum." When students are not motivated by participating in real-world practices, but instead by "didactic caretakers," [. . .] the focus of attention shifts from co-participating in practice to acting upon the person-to-be-changed" (112). This all too often happens in schools, where "pedagogically structured content organizes learning activities" (112). In cases such as this, "exchange value replaces the use value" (112). Such an assessment seems an all too accurate appraisal of current jazz practices in schools, where, as Walser reminds us, the conductor (teacher) is firmly in charge of all that takes place. Students do not consider themselves as "co-participants," but rather as objects of a specific teaching

curriculum—a matter underscored by the Manitoba (IAJE/MENC) jazz curriculum that stipulates jazz “can and should be taught as aesthetic education” (Manitoba Education and Training 2). None of the respondents in this study showed any appreciable understanding of teaching/learning jazz as aesthetic education and I suspect very few jazz practitioners do either.

It must also be asked: What sort of identity or social membership is constructed when one’s learning involves participating in a practice that does not, for all intents and purposes, exist outside the confines of educational institutions?¹⁷ What meanings are students constructing about the present when their understanding of music has been influenced by a school Big Band model that devalues improvisation, both in curricular and instructional senses. What message is communicated when improvisation is largely or completely neglected in favour of “polishing” the sound of orchestrated passages? What sort of societal values arise from such a music education system? Viewed from the perspective of situated learning, it appears current practices in jazz education help to produce individuals who do not see themselves as part of an in-the-world community. In addition, those who are exposed to these practices experience a society that has no reason to value, or means to negotiate, improvisational practices.

Conclusion

“Jazz” has, for the most part, managed to become part of the educational discourse in many school instrumental music programs in the twenty-first century. For those who have advocated, and continue to argue, for the “legitimate” place of jazz within the school curriculum this is undoubtedly a good thing. To adopt a critical pedagogy stance for a moment, however, I would pose the following: Who benefits and who loses under the current paradigm? While the knowledge chosen for inclusion in public education is often seen as a reflection of societal values, Michael Apple points out that school curricula are more accurately a reflection of who has power in society. On this view, those with power are responsible for the current paradigm of jazz education—one that certainly validates the name of “jazz,” but one that manifests itself *in practice* in the dubious “swinging concert bands” that pass for jazz education. So whose interests are served? Certainly not the students, who fail to develop the kinds of musical skills and understandings that might allow them to better negotiate the musical landscape of the twenty-first century. One ponders the sorts of social memberships they feel a part of once they complete their secondary school years. The community of Big Band musicians? The community of instrumental musicians who read notation, perhaps? And it is certainly debatable whether society benefits from replicating individuals who come to view the point of all music making as the successful execution of notated ensemble passages.

There are at least two implications from this study of school music practices for society and culture, and the role or value of improvised musics. One is that students and teachers will default to circumscribed forms of participation in the absence of mature fields that motivate learners. This is not to suggest that improvisation is never practiced in schools, of course. It is, but it is not at all clear that there is sufficient awareness by students and teachers of improvisational practices and their central role within the jazz tradition and current practices. As a result, students and teachers are engaged in a form of LPP—if it can even be called that—that rarely exists outside the confines of educational institutions. The somewhat elusive point here is that school music is “delivered” by individual teachers, the overwhelming majority of whom, my research suggests, have little or no knowledge of improvised practices in jazz. It is hard to imagine how an awareness of a mature field of improvised musics is even possible unless music teachers have experience, or least exposure, in this area. Society, as a result, is reproduced with an ignorance of improvised music, its possibilities, and its potential values.

To put it bluntly, part of the problem lies with teacher training processes. This likely comes as no surprise, since schooling helps to replicate societal structures. Most music teachers in schools, I suggest, are products of the school system. That is, with rare exception, school music teachers were once students in a school music program. While it would not surprise me to learn of a few exceptions to this, the general rule still holds: members of school music programs audition for university music schools in order to become music teachers themselves. If—and this is a big if—music teacher training (or “teacher education”) programs are emphasizing the importance of improvisation and improvised musics through their own training/education practices, the results have yet to be felt in school music programs in any appreciable way.

The second implication is that codification distorts. This is a familiar argument in jazz education circles, and has been made elsewhere (see for example, Ake; Prouty). Even if improvised music practices were more prevalent in schools, it is open to question whether such practices could ever avoid the normative requirements of schooling in the form of such things as “objective” evaluation. Requiring the explicit

display of knowledge in standardized forms is a “parasitic practice” where exchange value supplants use value (Lave and Wenger 112). Creative musical practices in schools, even if and when they do occur, cannot hope to escape the need to measure and label, unavoidably changing the motivating factors for engagement. And it is not just motivation that is changed, but the very meaning of the activity itself. As Lave and Wenger point out:

there are vast differences between the ways high school physics students [or, in this case, musicians] participate in and give meaning to their activity and the way professional [musicians] do. The actual reproducing community of practice, within which schoolchildren learn about [music], is not the community of [musicians] but the community of schooled adults. Children are introduced into the latter community (and its humble relation with the former community) during their school years. (99-100)

Learning how to “do” school, they point out, may be what school really teaches (107). I am not suggesting, of course, that students should be learning music—in this case jazz—based entirely on a professional music-making model. What I am suggesting is that, based on their school experiences, the meanings students make of music are likely very different than the kinds of meanings that practicing musicians make.

I in no way doubt or question Attali’s argument that improvisation and improvised musics herald possibilities for “new relations among people” (cited in the “Call for Papers” for this special issue of *CSI/ECI*). Actualizing the powerful social potentials of improvised musics has likely yet to begin. And while I do not outright dismiss the value of people learning instrumental skills and the fostering of “the ability to play ensemble phrases,” as reported by the selected experts in this study, such ends seem more suited to the needs of the conservatory than the needs of society. In a global, interconnected world where issues of identity and power are becoming increasingly important, the possibilities of improvisation and improvised musics to negotiate these issues appear apposite. Whether this is desirable or even possible within education is currently a subject of debate. What seems clear from this study is that tapping the potentialities of improvisation and improvised music will require a strong show of will to counteract the majority of current practice, which helps to reproduce a society largely ignorant of or uninterested in such practices.

Notes

¹ “Public schooling” in this paper refers to compulsory, state schooling.

² For a more detailed account, see Mantie, “Re-conceptualization.”

³ The International Association of Jazz Educators (now: for Jazz Education) and the Music Educators National Conference (now MENC: The National Association for Music Education).

⁴ According to the research respondents, practices in Manitoba did not vary considerably from what was observed in other provinces. Consider also that school jazz ensembles throughout North America perform from largely the same repertoire of music published by such companies as Kendor Music, Hal Leonard, Warner Brothers, and so on.

⁵ Based on: Manitoba=@one million. North American=@330 million.

⁶ One should note this “total” figure represents the demographics of a five to seven year spread, and the total involvement of students typically ranges from one to six years, resulting in varying levels of “depth.”

⁷ In the larger study I compared the philosophical views of TJ:CS to those of the “selected experts.” There was, surprisingly (or not), almost no knowledge of “aesthetic education” on the part of those interviewed.

⁸ For more on this topic, see Reimer, and Elliott. TJ:CS cites heavily from David Elliott’s 1982 dissertation, in which he advances the idea that jazz can, and should be, taught as aesthetic education. Ironically, perhaps, Elliott not only renounced this position, but became deeply embroiled in a polemic with Reimer over this very issue.

⁹ One notes only two of the five are truly rationales, but this is an issue for another paper.

¹⁰ See Elliott (29-38) for a more detailed account.

¹¹ For more on product and process in music, see Ake or Charles Keil and Steven Feld, *Music Grooves* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1994).

¹² In theory, teachers are supposed to “deliver” the approved curricula of Ministries of Education. In practice, teacher autonomy is, I suggest, highly correlated to the degree of “inspection” (read provincial standardized tests). Since provincial testing in music is extremely rare, music teachers are relatively free to design their own curriculum. Not once in fourteen years in the classroom was my teaching scrutinized regarding my delivery of the provincial music curricula. For more on this topic, see Elliott, (241-267).

¹³ I refer, here, to the general practices of the North American context. Very little, in fact, distinguishes school jazz practices in Canada and the United States. For more on this topic, see Mantie.

¹⁴ In Mantie, I argue improvisation is both musically and educationally important. Improvisation helps to engender a more flexible form of musicianship that transfers across genres better than basic notational fluency since the majority of the world’s musics are non-notational. Improvisational skills, therefore, increase the likelihood of a student making music recreationally later in life—something consistent with the aims of education as praxis (and of LPP as argued in this paper). Moreover, the “talk-like,” conversational nature of improvisation holds greater potential for negotiating the complexity of daily life than the rehearsed script of a typical notated chart. See Mantie, chapter three, for a more detailed discussion.

¹⁵ One should note that all of the selected experts were very familiar with American school jazz ensemble practices as well.

¹⁶ Unfortunately, this question did not distinguish between secondary and post-secondary curricula. It is, therefore, unclear to which level the responses refer—or if, in fact, the respondents believe that curricula should be differentiated according to level. None indicated such, at any rate.

¹⁷ Lest all the existing professional big band leaders out there excoriate me, let me add that I mean no disrespect. My point is not just that there are relatively few big bands operating, but that those existing certainly do not play the kind of school-jazz arrangements upon which students form their understanding of “jazz.” I am actually quite opposed to basing instruction on the professional music-making model. The point I am making is not about professionalization, but about the in-the-world nature of the activity.

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