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Martin Scaiff | Democracy and Music Education – Playing with Power and Identity

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Martin Scaiff

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Contraditório Think Tank

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ABSTRACT

A Democratic Music Education must recognise that;

- Participatory Democracy is a form of music
- Young people should be allowed to explore their musical selves free from intervention, direction or artificial imposition of any cultural, societal or political agenda
- Each person understands their musical world individually, and this understanding is created by both their society and their individual nature.
- Attempts to prescribe a pre-eminent musical form are attempts to control the individual for social or political purposes
- Freedom of individual musical expression is a socially negotiated process
- Free political expression and free musical expression are inseparable

This paper explores the development of these statements of policy and principle through discussion drawn from an Ethnographic Case Study/Action Research project conducted by the author, their professional experience as a music educator and musician, as well as their personal experiences.

Keywords: Democracy; Music; Education; Identity; Power

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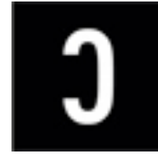
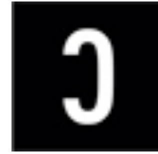


1. Origins

The origins of the statements of policy and principle outline above are many and varied. They draw primarily from my personal and professional experiences as a beginner musician, music student, professional musician and music teacher. Brought up in the English public school system as a member of a musical family, trained at a government supported specialist music school and labelled as a *talented* musician, once into adulthood I began to wonder where my enthusiasm for music had gone? Where was the career that was promised to me as a *gifted young musician* and why did the experiences this status brought access to make me feel so removed from my everyday experiences? Why were some of my peers forging successful careers in the professional music world while others were suffering from depression, struggling with their day to day lives, or switching careers?

These questions were then built on by my experiences as a professional teacher. Why was I forcing my kids to learn the diatonic system when the majority couldn't care less? What part did luck, culture, social status or natural talent play in the lives, both musical and non-musical, of my students? Why was I bothering to teach them at all?

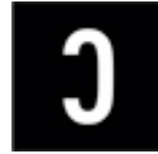
Whilst the sorts of feelings and questioning described above could not be considered uncommon they belong to me, and as my professional training in both music and education had failed, and was continuing to fail, to answer or even address these and many other deeper questions, my responsibilities and practical experiences as a teacher were forcing the issue. I found once again disconnect, this time between professional theory and professional practice. I was being expected to grade a student's musical and artistic output in a state of total separation from that person. If a student's musical output suggested unhappiness it was not considered part of my job to care about this unhappiness, only to decide whether or not it had any subjective artistic merit, or fulfilled criteria in some assessment rubric. Categorising educational practices were separating me from reality. If a student couldn't come to college because they had no money, or they came from an unstable family, this was not to be considered when evaluating success. The primary source of programme funding was dependent on



assessment results, and the pressure to achieve these results led to the fabrication of a plethora of personal, social, institutional and professional lies. Most sickening of all it led to the prospect of students leaving my educational programmes believing untruths about themselves and their future; thinking, as I did, there is such a thing as a *music business* and that this *music business* has some sort of preordained nature to it; that if you can't understand this *music business* then you shouldn't be making music. More fundamentally my students were unprepared for the world as I thought and felt they might find it.

In the initial stages of attempting to answer these questions through my own education I became aware of alternative viewpoints, and in particular the work of A.S.Neill and Summerhill School. In 2000 I wrote to Summerhill to see if there were opportunities at the school and subsequently became a member of the school community. At Summerhill whilst I found many answers to some of my questions, more were being presented to me by an environment that inherently valued many of the things that I had been taught to devalue in music, and in life; the importance of fun; the value of the individual beyond any notion of academic, or in my case musical, achievement; the connections between work and play; the power and importance of a considerate and caring community. Whilst my experiences at Summerhill were of course not universally positive (one for the eternal critics!), once I had left I was able to make comparisons that presented me with practical professional, and sometimes personal, difficulty. Once I had seen young people who had been given space to play not becoming the inane delinquents some public opinion would suggest, but being balanced, mature young people as well as for some exciting and imaginative creative musicians and artists, it began to be believable that this state was possible both for myself and for the students I was teaching.

Several years later, and after more time spent working professionally in education in a wide variety of roles I tried to synthesize theoretical and practical considerations of my work using Summerhill theory and practice as a cornerstone. This research involved an Ethnographic Case Study and Action Research Project conducted at Summerhill. The material below represents these considerations on both original questions as well as those that arose through the research process.

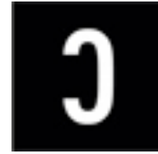


2. Democratic Education – a contemporary context

A key conundrum that the debate surrounding democratic education appears to try to answer is to what extent should and can young people have a say over their lives? Some questions that frame this discussion include;

- Who/what is a young person?
- What are the implications of defining an age bracket?
- What do we mean by 'say'?
- Who decides on what power young people have?
- Who takes responsibility for these decisions?

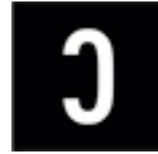
The answers to these questions ask much of those involved in education, and often too much when considering the practical realities of financial restraints, educational resources and where education fits into other social demands and ideology, with the current debate around the expansion of the UK Academies programme and its relation to the financial crisis being just one example (Downes, 2013), (Paton, 2013). The questions outlined above are those that are most often asked, and in part answered, by the Democratic Education movement. It seems that the current state of the movement is one of continual re-negotiation of boundaries and definitions. One school that considers itself democratic may well be considered profoundly undemocratic by others within the same movement; 'Whereas some understand it simply to refer to the work of student representative bodies…others define it more widely to encompass all aspects of school life and decision-making.' (Huddlestone, 2007). There is a clearer understanding of the aims of the movement in its desire to represent the position of children as needing guidance not direction in self-governance and social engagement through attempting to remove harmful restrictions placed on them by the previous intellectual and emotional experiences of adults. There is also the desire to create a sense of equality among a whole school community; 'the democratic view, therefore, is less concerned with deciding where (or in whom) power resides and more interested in creating a climate in which all those involved can genuinely participate.' (Trafford, 2012, p. 2).



The American Education Resource Organisation lists in its member directory schools describing themselves as democratic in Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Costa Rica, Denmark, Egypt, Finland, France Germany, Guatemala, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Israel, Japan, Nepal, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Palestine, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Puerto Rico, Russia, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, Ukraine, United Kingdom and the USA (American Education Resource Organisation, 2013), with the last of these countries taking up a third of the number within its borders. This last piece of information implies much about the intellectual and political narratives with which the democratic education movement could be suggested to associate itself.

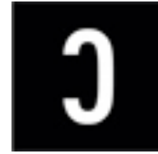
Despite the worldwide reach of some agreed understandings in democratic education Rowe suggests that 'the idea of school democracy does not as yet have universal acceptance within the teaching profession.' (Rowe, 2003). A key reason for this is suggested to be that 'opportunities for student participation are often perceived to be constrained by the requirements of nationally or regionally prescribed curricula and testing regimes and by the need that teachers and school leaders feel to moderate their principles in the light of parental and other external expectations.' (Trafford, 2012, p. 2). Essentially educational ideology is conflicting with practical and political reality. Trafford also suggests that there appears to be a further conflict within the structure of the democratic education movement in the separation between authentically democratic schools where there is powerful democratic engagement in 'both foundation and practice' (Trafford, 2012, p. 3) operating within ranging remits of independence from state influence, and those that operate more formally within a state/governmental system.

Some of these dichotomies associated with the Democratic Education movement had been examined and discussed before its current manifestations by one of its oft quoted theorists, John Dewey. Intrinsic in the notion of Democratic Education is the aim of social cohesion. For Dewey the notion of society is ambiguous; 'when we look at the facts which the term *denotes* instead of confining our attention to its intrinsic *connotation*, we find not unity, but a plurality of societies, good and bad.' (Dewey, 1944, p. 82). For Dewey then, as soon as the concept of Democracy is implied as a



reality it becomes a meaningless ideal as opposed to a tangible, actionable aim. The reality of active democratic engagement is such a mess of intention, emotion and action as to be incomprehensible for one individual to conceive and perhaps therefore can only be understood within a combined collective/individual sense. This dualistic concept of a fight between the interests of the individual and the interest of groups could be said to highlight a difficulty within the democratic education movement and may indicate why its reach into wider acceptance has been limited so far. In essence, each individual has an infinite number of historical, present and future societies and groups to which they belong and to which interest must be paid and energy spent in varying degrees, all of which are not able to consistently address all the needs of the individuals within them.

Within the context of this negotiation between the individual and the social self it is worth noting that there would appear to be a further difference between the democratic lives of adults and the democratic lives of young people. Fundamentally adults have traditionally been considered to have a wider range of worldly experience, concern, responsibility and power that conflict to want to dictate the circumstances of the young, whereas the young have been seen as having only the prospect of future experience, inherent desire and limited practical responsibility and power. The democratic education movement refutes this position placing young people and adults on a politically equal platform. It might be logical to imply from this argument that if the democratic ideal is considered to be a worthwhile aim for adult societies any limitation to the democratic engagement of the young people in those societies can only be seen as a limitation in the democratic engagement of its adults. This problem presents a second major theme within the democratic education movement, that of responsibility. Who is responsible for creating these democratic environments? For Dewey 'a [democratic] society must have a type of education which gives individuals a personal interest in social relationships and control, and the habits of mind which secure social changes without introducing disorder.' (Dewey, 1944, p. 99). What is notably missing from this quotation is any suggestion of how this is to be implemented and by whom? A theoretical problem which for many outside the democratic education movement represents a fundamental lack of realism and responsibility.

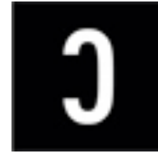


There seem to be a wide variety of approaches to solving this problem from the current democratic education community. For some it is the application of democratic principles within a traditional classroom environment, ‘Each school year students have clearly demonstrated that they are able and willing to actively participate in planning and designing their own education.’ (Brodhagen, 1999). For Brodhagen the application of democratic action is described through a range of activity such as drawing up classroom constitutions, discussing questions of identity, asking the bigger questions in class, encouraging self-evaluation in students and considering social issues. It is the application of democracy through adult direction within a compulsory curriculum.

For others it is through the notion of life itself being the teacher. ‘I thought you lived in the world and everyday you got smarter because everyday you were learning.’ (Sudbury Valley School, 2013). For Sudbury Valley learning is seen as an unavoidable reality of life that needs nurturing as opposed to direction. The narrative of democracy at Sudbury Valley is expressed through recognisable adult democratic processes such as meetings, committees, judicial processes and collective management, all rooted strongly in historical American cultural and political narratives and concepts of equality and democracy.

For others, with A.S. Neill among them, democracy is a natural state born out of the individual’s need and imperative to interact socially and in many ways is a representation of the lives of those individuals as opposed to a fixed unchanging system of political engagement. The democracy of Summerhill today is different to the democracy of Summerhill 50 years ago and the democracy of Summerhill yesterday. In theory it appears to be more a continuous questioning in the debate between freedom and licence for all those involved; ‘freedom is a give and take – freedom for the parents as well as freedom for the child.’ (Neill, 1966, p. 4). Democratic engagement itself is even up for discussion. ‘The [general school] meeting is not compulsory, but is usually well attended.’ (Summerhill School, 2013).

There are of course many other schools that draw on elements of each of the above descriptions and then integrate them into their particular circumstances. The Centre for Self-Managed Learning, based in Brighton, UK, employs the self-regulation and independence encouraged by democratic environments to enhance learning through



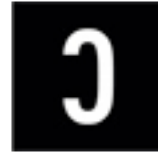
management of the process. Closer in model to a University than to a school, and linked more directly with the home-schooling movement, 'The essence of self-managed learning is that we provide a structure within which young people can plan, organise and carry out learning activities.' (Centre for Self-Managed Learning, 2013)

The range of interrelated models very briefly described above in reality reflects only the circumstances of the individual schools and the individual people invested in their success (or failure) themselves, and these descriptions are lacking profoundly in nuance and detail. There may well be equally significant moments of individual empowerment through democratic engagement in each of these models but as social constructs they represent specific narratives about what is 'best' for educating children. The continuous conversation presented by the ranging arguments within these models, and the arguments and debates yet to emerge, in many ways crystallise the intentions of the democratic education movement. Nobody has all the answers, but should young people not be included in the debate?

3. *Non-compulsory lessons, identity formation and educational 'gigging'.*

For many the question of whether children should have to 'go to lessons', or 'go to school' (the lines between these two positions is often blurred out of existence) is completely polarizing. It is not the aim of this paper to examine the social, legal or moral arguments of this debate but to consider what influence a position of non-compulsory attendance may have on musical understanding and development. A review of the literature on this topic has revealed little direct engagement with the arguments surrounding it and therefore much of the information gathered has been through relating secondary arguments or discussions to the topic, particularly in relation to Summerhill School and democratic education.

For A.S. Neill the question of attendance at lessons is a non-issue; 'lessons are optional...children can go to them or stay away from them – for years if they want to. There is a timetable, but only for the teachers' (Neill, 1992, p. 9). It is also in many ways for Neill the most important issue, as forcing a young person to attend a class is

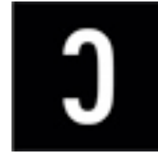


part of wider attempts to indoctrinate, ‘We set out to make a school in which we should allow children to be themselves. In order to do this we had to remove all discipline, all direction, all suggestion, all moral training, all religious instruction.’ (Neill, 1992, p. 9). So for Neill it is a question of individual identity, an identity that is in some way already in place in the young person and that already has fundamental roots within their character and is capable of understanding and taking charge of its own future direction. Concepts of how identity is formed or understood are multitudinous and have become increasingly popular with academics and theorists more recently. Some adopt a social cognitive approach, others phenomenological, others discursive, but it seems certain that music plays a pivotal role in many aspects of an individual’s identity. ‘We contend that music plays an important role in the negotiation, construction and maintenance of identities’ (MacDonald, R., Hargreaves, D.J. & Miell, D., 2009, p. 463). MacDonald et al. are suggesting that individual identities are partly understood through the multi-modal communication offered by music, and more specifically that these identities are constantly being rebuilt and maintained through engagement, and importantly, re-engagement with music. They also reference research that suggests ‘music is the most important recreational activity in which young people engage.’ (MacDonald, R., Hargreaves, D.J. & Miell, D., 2009, p. 462). Current research and theory has demonstrated the complexity of musical skill acquisition and psychological development. For Volgsten (2012) the role music plays in the development of identity is extremely subtle and often goes unnoticed by those involved in its generation.

‘What I suggest is that music ‘makes special’ nothing less than the development of human identity, the dialectical articulation of an ‘I’, ‘You’, ‘We’ and ‘Them’….what makes the enhancement of self-development a less ‘obvious function than, say, the establishment and maintenance of social identity (through rites of passage for example), is that the former goes unnoticed and that it is hardly ever intentional.’

(Volgsten, 2012, p. 16)

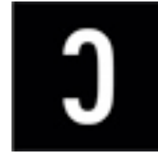
So for Volgsten music is a method of co-operated activity between individuals in the creation and development of both individual and social identities. It is also fundamental to the practical business of how individuals understand these concepts.



Colwyn Trevarthen has developed a number of theories around the formation of identity through music including the notions of *Communicative Musicality* and the *Intrinsic Motive Pulse (IMP)*. MacDonald et al. describe *Communicative Musicality* as 'the dynamic state of an individual that allows co-ordinated companionship to arise.' (MacDonald, R.A., Hargreaves, D.J. and Miell, D, 2002, p. 6), suggesting that music is fundamental to our ability to successfully interact with others. They describe IMP as a 'rhythmic time sense which is able to detect regularities in musical elements, a sensitivity towards the acoustic elements of the qualities of the human voice and the ability to perceive 'narrative' structures in vocal or musical performances.' (MacDonald, R.A., Hargreaves, D.J. and Miell, D, 2002, p. 6). It is possible to draw the implication from this, as others have done (Perlovsky, 2012) that language is a by-product of an initial musical sense, based on pre-language acoustical experiences, and further that this sense is the foundation for the ability to collaborate socially.

To try to summarise the above arguments, it is suggested that the acquisition of musical understanding is profoundly important in the development of both the social and individual self, whilst at the same time the process of this development is almost impossibly intangible. If this is to be considered the case, it could further be argued that formally structured musical engagement, through obligatory schooling for example, brings with it understandings that relate not specifically to the musical sounds created themselves but to the context of those sounds and that there is the potential for both gaps and connections in the understandings of this context for those enforcing the obligation and those receiving it. Simply put, it is not possible for all individuals (and inherently therefore adults and young people) to have exactly similar understandings of the context (including the social and political ones) of the music they make. This in turn asks the question to what extent should those encouraging enforced musical engagement express clearly their understanding of these contexts? To what extent is it possible to do this? And is it even worth doing?

It is possible to draw a picture of a relationship between this understanding, of the nature of musical communication and identity formation, and educational politics, particularly the politics of obligatory schooling. Imagine that in any school there are ranges of continuously evolving individual identities, at different stages of development



and definition (categorised for example by age, emotional experience, cognitive development, social awareness, sex, physiology etc.). The complexity in the variety of this identity development, and an understanding that those identities are continuously being formed, maintained and negotiated in the present, could suggest the potential for an almost infinite range of identity hierarchies partly formed by musical engagement. In this context, the notion of a hierarchy decided entirely by age (a hierarchy essentially all legally enforced schooling in an environment where those under 18 cannot vote is defined by) seems out-dated at best, particularly when considered as an approach for educating in music.

It is perhaps the recognition of this variable hierarchical structure in identities that has given the Summerhill School Meeting its influence. A defining element of the school in both the writings of A.S.Neill and in its continued practice today, the Meeting is considered the ultimate governing power within the school; 'School Meetings, at which the school laws are made or changed, are held on Monday, Wednesday and Friday…These laws are the rules of the school, made by majority vote; pupils and staff alike having equal votes.' (Summerhill School, 2013). An outward expression of equality in the recognition of variable states of identity formation, the meeting is a platform for the exploration of the boundaries of these identities. The politics of these meetings and the subsequent platform for political rhetoric and performance might, within the context of *Communicative Musicality* very briefly examined above, be described as an educational, political and musical 'gig'.

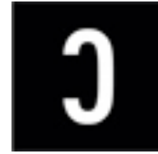
4. *Is participatory democracy a form of music?*

In Music and Democracy (2006) Nancy Love explores the relationship between politics and music, particularly the messy politics of Democracy. She argues that there is opposition in current thinking between three key understandings of democracy. The first is that of *aggregative democracy*, which according to Love describes a politics of 'instrumental reason, private interests, competitive elections, representative officials, and institutionalized power.' (Love, 2006, p. 5). This is an indirect democracy primarily operated through representation and its concurrent systems and procedures. The second

view is that of *deliberative democracy* which 'directly involves citizens in public discourse about political issues, a process that ideally enlarges their perspectives and produces consensual decisions.' (Love, 2006, p. 5). This is primarily a discursive democracy where decisions are reached through consideration of the issues and subsequent mutually agreed implementation. The third view is that of *agnostic democracy*, which for Love is best represented by William Connolly, among others. For Connolly, *agnostic democracy* is 'that conflictual process by which new identities are propelled into being by moving the pre-existing shape of diversity, justice and legitimacy' (Connolly, 1999, p. 10).

It is perhaps with the three areas that form the political identity cited by Connolly, diversity, justice and legitimacy, that the school meeting at Summerhill is most often concerned. There are two meetings at the school, one that forms, repeals and updates laws (the general meeting) and one that deals with matters of personal and school justice (tribunal). Both meetings offer the chance for *deliberative democracy*, through open discussion and rational debate, and *aggregative democracy,* through the management of school committees for example (Summerhill School, *Intelligent Choice*, 2013). These processes add up to form part of a wider development of an individual's political identity through the application of *agnostic democracy* as described by Connolly. For Neill the democracy at Summerhill was also one that had a further aim other than the implementation of a political system for its own merit, that being the development of individual identity through self-government, 'Summerhill is a self-governing community, democratic in form.' (Neill, 1992, p. 16). So for Neill the implementation of democratic processes at Summerhill was something that appeared naturally through giving children the freedom to play for as long as they wanted. Children automatically understand its benefits and want it, even without artificial (adult) instigation.

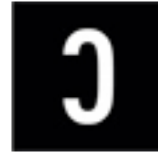
For Nancy Love, fundamentally, political debate through discourse and rational argument cannot express the complexities of human politics and a current preference for this type of political engagement dis-enfranchises sections of society whose identities are not understood primarily through this medium of communication. I argue here that children fall into that category. Love references the concept of *communicative*



democracy, developed by Iris Young and other deliberative democrats. This recognises 'the embodiment and particularity of interlocutors' and provides 'ways of speaking across difference in the absence of shared understandings' (Young, 1997, p. 6). In other words mediums of communication that reach beyond language should be legitimized in political understanding and representation. Musical expression clearly falls into this category.

The question of whether participatory democracy is a form of music has perhaps been fine-tuned by the above arguments. It would appear that to understand participatory democracy as a form of music, the concept of what music is has to change from its current westernised position as a tool 'to sway emotions for entertainment and distraction and to condition and persuade people to buy things.' (Dissanayake, 2006, p. 50). This question is no more relevant than when dealing with children and young people. The line between where music ends and other forms of communication begin in the development of young people is blurred, and much research has been done into a proposed pre-disposition for a musical understanding of the world in humans. Trehub (2006) and fellow researchers (Trehub, S., Schellenburg, E., & Hill, D., 1997) have found 'that infants are sensitive to melodic contour, to octaves, to simple frequency ratios, to rhythmic patterns, and to some aspects of harmony,' and that these biologically based preferences are culture-general. (North, A. & Hargreaves, D., 2008, p. 327). The question of how musical development happens after this point is also debated, with some suggesting that there is no linear pattern to musical skill development and that 'various developing skills are constantly interacting with one another as children encounter different situations and have different experiences, such that development proceeds in several different directions all at once.' (North, A. & Hargreaves, D., 2008, p. 328). This theory chimes with the ideas discussed earlier of seeing identity development not as a process of linear formation over time but as something that is constantly adapting, changing, updating and requiring of maintenance.

The nature of musical identity development in young people is further explored through the concept of *affect attunement*. Developed by Daniel Stern (1985), the concept posits the notion of linear stages of development of an individual identity. These are *self versus other* through *self with other* and *subjective self* into *verbal self*

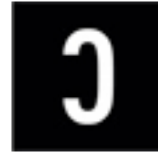


(Stern, 1985). The foundation for this form of developmental communication being the early sonic environment that an infant finds itself in and the employing by the infant of learnt expression based on that sonic environment and matched physiological experiences and emotion that then adapt to enable it to communicate with its mother. Volgsten uses this theory of origin to support his claim that music engagement is a non-imitative or symbolic way of 'making special' the process of identity formation (Volgsten, 2012). For Volgsten music-making is not a skill that humans begin life without and then have to develop over time, it is a fundamental part of the human communicative toolbox and further that it performs a particular function, through *affect attunement*, of enabling a non-semantic communication and the formation of notions of a *subjective self* as well as a *verbal self*, in this case with subjectivity being 'intersubjectivity created by the dialogically-related agents as they develop a sense of self in relation to another self.' (Volgsten, 2012, p. 212). So for Volgsten although music's individual and social functions may change over time it is fundamental in understanding inter-personal relationships regardless of considerations of age or culture.

A logical conclusion of these briefly explored arguments in relation to the policy statements outlined at the start of this paper must be the recognition that music and language are fundamentally interlinked in the development of identity beyond traditional notions of age and experience employed by the majority of schools. Therefore any process that involves language, such as a democratic meeting, must also recognise a redefined concept of music as being inherent in that process.

5. *Dissensus and Disharmony*

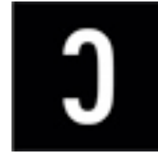
According to the quotation by Dewey given at the start of this article, once democracy as an ideal is held as a central tenet for action it becomes meaningless. The reality of democratic engagement is complex, messy and uncertain and has the potential for both positive and negative outcomes. In a similar way that reaching musical harmony requires dis-harmony first, political consensus can only arise out of dissensus. If a fundamental question within democratic education is to what degree is dissensus accepted it follows that the question for a democratic music education is to what degree



is disharmony accepted? For Patrick Schmidt the theorizing and idealistic narratives of educationalists, musical or not, can create a stifling atmosphere of unwillingness to challenge convention that limits potential. He also however warns against 'necessarily heeding to the siren call of the applicable.' (Schmidt, 2008, p. 12). For Schmidt, disorder, disharmony and conflict within a music education context are not only a protection against stultification but also 'constitutive…in fact elemental in and for agency'. (Schmidt, 2008, p. 12). He warns against democracy as an ideal and predetermining force with a religious sentiment, and calls instead for a never-ending effort to turn away from divisive concepts of 'we' and 'they', which might also be translated to 'good' and 'bad' music. While this argument may be equally idealistic in its tone, Schmidt goes on to place this laudable aim within a reality. He encourages the acceptance of states of being seen as having little worth, or worse, a negative impact. States of absurdity, irrationality, abstraction and aimlessness are, for Schmidt 'as much constitutive elements of who we are as their opposites.' (Schmidt, 2008, p. 16). Through his further developed arguments Schmidt is following a democratic tradition in standing up for the rights of those outside the tradition.

The difficulty with Schmidt's argument is the one that must permeate all academic discussion of musical politics, that of audience. He is writing for exactly the reasoned, literate and political element of society that John Nelson suggests need to learn from their rational pursuits 'how their rationality and inquiry are thoroughly rhetorical, truly tropal, intensely political.' (Nelson, 1998, p. 33) The central thrust of Schmidt's argument is destined to be lost on those whose musical rights he is claiming to defend. His suggestion that democracy in music education must 'go beyond consensus and abnormal discourses that seek to coerce it....(and) accept conflict and confrontation as inevitable and as potentially constructive' (Schmidt, 2008, p. 21) might be viewed as further effort on the part of literate, rational *aggregative democrats* to restrict those rights, particularly if Love's view that contemporary democracy is beset by 'formal, deductive, logical, systematic....argument.' (Love, 2006, p. 2) is held to be correct.

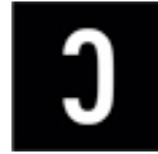
Where his argument may be seen to be more useful is as a contributor to the maintenance of an identity that asks musicians, and music educators, to pause before passing judgement on the merits of any particular musical engagement, conscious of



looking continually for the wider context whether that be musical, political, emotional, rhetorical, abstract, cultural, stylistic or philosophical. Particularly if as Volgsten suggests, identity formation most often 'goes unnoticed and…is hardly ever intentional.' (Volgsten, 2012, p. 16).

6. Summary

The arguments outlined above point to elements of the relationship between music and democratic engagement, particularly in relation to forms of democratic education. They put into question the merit of linear forms of educational practice in relation to music, and highlight the inseparable characters of music and its social context. Within the context of these arguments efforts to place music education on a sliding scale of ability relating to age seem limited at best and manipulative at worst. It points perhaps to the susceptibility of music in educational settings to being side-lined or informalised not because it has a perceived lesser worth but because it is representational of the state of individual identities, for good or ill, and as education is most often concerned with the manufacture of identities, music's power of representation can reveal much that is want to be kept hidden, particularly in relation to the voice of students. These arguments might also support a claim that the state of music in an educational environment is a profound mirror to the state of its environment as a whole.



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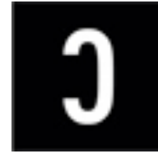

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