# Critically Assessing Forms of Resistance in Music Education

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## Abstract and Keywords

In their classrooms, music educators draw upon critical pedagogy (as described by Freire, Giroux, and hooks) for the express purpose of cultivating a climate for *conscientização*. *Conscientização*, according to Paulo Freire (2006), "refers to learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (p. 35). This consciousness raising is a journey teachers pursue with students, together interrogating injustices in communities and the world in order to transform the conditions that inform them. Learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions often leads to multiple forms of resistance in and out of music classrooms. This chapter explores the following question: What do critical forms of assessment look like in music classrooms that use critical pedagogy and embrace resistance to foster conscientization?

Keywords: critical assessment, critical pedagogy, praxis, resistance, conscientization

> (p. 83) Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other.
>
> —Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

IN this chapter we[1] explore the question: What do critical forms of assessment look like in music classrooms that use critical pedagogy and embrace resistance to foster conscientization? We begin with an overview of critical pedagogy—in which we explain phrases key to our argumentation, such as "teacher-student," "problem-posing education," and "learning and teaching as praxis"—followed by a fleshing out of the term *conscientization* (consciousness raising), which we characterize as one of the main goals of our teaching and of assessment. We follow this with a conceptualization of resistance as having voice and agency and a theorization of indexicality as a powerful tool for assessing resistance as transformation. All of these discussions provide the necessary scaffolding for our ex-



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plorations of the synergies among assessment, critical pedagogy, and music education. We then interrogate traditional assessment before pivoting to a bulleted list of examples of co-constructed and co-enacted formative assessments that can be used in classrooms to evaluate notions of resistance. Assessment of a critical pedagogy in music education—one centered on the dialectical, co-constructive, student-centered, problem-posing, praxial approach to learning music—is therefore presented as an integral part of an ongoing inquiry in and about the world.

We write of critical assessment not necessarily as a negation of traditional forms of assessment but to widen the parameters of what is currently deemed intellectually (p. 84) acceptable and scientifically robust. Indeed, whereas David Kahl (2013) notes that "many critical educators tend to view assessment as inherently negative" (p. 2617), we are not of that orientation. We believe assessment is pivotal in and for music teaching and learning. However, we are avowedly of the belief that the logics of traditional assessment are insufficient in the face of fast-changing educational landscapes, whose topographies are being deeply restructured by fascinating social, political, economic, and cultural influences. We echo Patricia Broadfoot's (2009) sentiments:

> For many, the certainties of modernism have been replaced by post-modern doubts about the possibility of progress. Recognition of the fallibilities of science has brought with it an increased recognition of the importance of diversity and subjectivity. Changes in the nature of work, globalisation, the information revolution and the increasingly social nature of contemporary challenges also suggest different priorities for education systems. (p. vii)

Impelled by Freirean thought, one such priority that we posit is that many of the processes and ends of education should equip both teachers and students to see the inequities and oppressions of our world and to craft and implement radically differentiated ways of being. Assessment can and must play a major role in these processes, but not to the extent that it becomes the proverbial tail wagging the dog. That is, the core of education must not be assessment as a teleological end, but rather assessment as an open-ended process of inquiry. Whatsoever we, as educators, deem to be ends—in whatever spheres we work—we should strive to see "ends" not as discrete entities per se but as parts of a continuum: "Ends become a part of a process, one stage in a continuum. Dewey actually preferred to use the term 'ends-in-view' to capture this sense of process. This term keeps our attention on the ends of the particular task at hand and reminds us that ends are always provisional and changing throughout the course of educational experiences. Thus, ends-in-view are deliberately open ended" (Hildreth, 2011, p. 34). When assessment is conceived as a compartmentalized, self-constituted entity, it can reify the trope of assessment-and-learning as objectively knowable and apolitical. In contrast, assessment within a critical pedagogical framework provides a different perspective—one that is agential, co-constructive, and political.



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# Critical Pedagogy: An Overview

Critical pedagogy developed as an educational response to injustices, inequalities, and oppressive power relations found in the world. In his seminal work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, the radical educational theorist and practitioner Paulo Freire (1970) presents a *liberating*[2] and *humanizing* perspective of learning, a process of overcoming oppression that is rooted in a *love for the world*. He outlines key concepts of learning that have shaped the discourses and practices of education over the past forty years. These include

(p. 85)

- a *dialogical* approach to inquiry that is rooted in the situations of the learner and teacher who, together, *in the world, with the world, and with each other*, co-construct and co-produce knowledge;
- the hyphenated term *teacher-student*, which is meant to capture a more interdependent and equitable learning relationship;
- *problem-posing* and narrative-based learning that is connected to the lived experiences of students, as opposed to the *banking method* of learning, in which knowledge is *deposited* in the student;
- learning as a form of *praxis*, a process of *conscientização*, in which the human subject experiences and *reflects* upon the *limit-situations* that challenge understanding and then works with others to develop plans of *action* that address issues emerging from the social, political, and economic disparities impacting our communities; and
- a *political* perspective on learning, in which learners and teachers become conscious of how power operates and then engage in various forms of *resistance* to *transform* the conditions in which power is used to oppress.

Freire's work is based on his own educational practices for improving literacy in Brazil in the 1960s and 1970s. These practices involve *naming* situations to be critiqued in order to reveal the systems of oppression. This *decoding* is a point of departure that contributes to the development of a set of *generative themes* by which learners collaboratively determine their own pedagogical needs and the manner in which they will meet those needs. Working as an *investigating team*, learners identify the *nuclei of contradictions* that influence and shape their lives. Through their *restless*, *impatient*, *continuing*, and *hopeful inquiry in the world*, learners take steps to become more critically aware of their situations and how to change their conditions, a process Freire termed *conscientização*, or *conscientization*—a key term/notion for the argument of this chapter with direct relevance to assessment in music classrooms.

# Conscientization

Conscientization, as postulated by Freire (2005), refers to critical consciousness. Freire theorized conscientization as a self-reinforcing feedback loop of reflection and action in



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which neither is useful without the other (Freire, 1970). To Freire, *activism* is action without constant and deliberate reflection, and *verbalism* is reflection without action. Activism and verbalism are both untethered from a critical historicity and, in that respect, are apolitically constituted and not aimed at radical social transformation, a cornerstone of conscientization. Such critical consciousness calls for *perceiving the social, economic and political contradictions in the world*, as well as a purposeful, constant striving to upend the inequities emergent therefrom. This synergy—between reflection and action—is how Freire defines *praxis* (Freire, 1970).

(p. 86) Conscientization has been operationalized into the varied theories and practices of critical pedagogy that followed Freire's seminal work.[3] These theories[4] examine and promote practices in education and music education[5] that have the potential to transform oppressive institutions or social relations. Linked to the aforementioned political nature of education, Ira Shor (1992) contends that "a curriculum that avoids questioning school and society is not, as is commonly supposed, politically neutral … *not* encouraging students to question knowledge, society, and experience tacitly endorses and supports the status quo" (p. 12). Shor adds that beyond the in-class texts, "politics reside not only in subject matter but in the discourse of the classroom, in the way teachers and students speak to each other. The rules for talking are a key mechanism for empowering or disempowering students. How much open discussion is there in class? How much one way 'teacher talk'? Is there mutual dialogue between teacher and students or one-way transfers of information from teacher to students?" (p. 14). This highlights yet another tenet of Freirean critical pedagogy: the dialogic nature of co-constructed knowledge, wherein power is continually inverted and renegotiated, producing teacher-qua-student and student-qua-teacher (Freire, 1970). This dialectical nature of education aims to dismantle the banking concept/model of education (which sees students as mere repositories of knowledge from the teacher to be regurgitated later) and replace it with a problem-posing model of education (which is generative and reflexive) (Freire, 1970).

The yin and yang of problem-posing pedagogy—as evinced by the seemingly antagonistic dyads of reflection and action and of teacher and student—beckon a certain reflexivity, one that is essential for navigating the tensions that surely emerge in these dialectical relationships. Regarding reflexivity, Victoria May Door (2014) states that "one aspect of Freire's concept of conscientization is that individuals develop a deepening awareness of both the socio-cultural world and their own potential for transforming that world … about deepening awareness of self in the world, in the context of consistency of thought and action … [so that] our own actions [do not] perpetuate the very cycle from which we hope to escape" (p. 89). She adds that "[b]eing critically reflexive therefore does not imply self-interested introspection, but involves looking to our own judgement and behaviour as well as to the nature of the systems in our particular institution" (p. 97). Therefore, when conscientization is the modus operandi of the learning environment, music learners see knowledge as a process of inquiry, not mere facts to be memorized. Learners see knowledge as power—a tool for transforming our world and the conditions in which we live. Conscientization, or critical consciousness as Thomas Regelski (2005) points out, "leads people to take ownership of their own history, empowering them to realize their own indi-



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vidual and collective interest through the freedom and wherewithal to change their social and individual selves" (pp. 14–15). Through conscientization, learners understand that to overcome the social, political, and economic contradictions of our world we must (1) *name* and *decode* how power and knowledge operate within systems of oppression, (2) *reflect* how we participate in and contribute to these systems and how these systems operate upon us, and (3) *act* and *resist* in both small and large ways in order to transform our world.

## (p. 87) Resistance

Critical pedagogues strive to co-construct the aforementioned learning environment with students. In challenging students to apprehend the social, economic, and political contradictions of our world, cognitive dissonances necessarily abound. We welcome these because the ontological perturbations that are the result of our varied praxes must perhaps first emanate from within intellectual and epistemological ruptures. Maria Martinez Serrano, Mark O'Brien, Krystal Roberts, and David Whyte (2015) note that "Critical Pedagogy approaches to learning are not an 'easy option' and do require an attitudinal shift by the students and tutors, as well as a resource commitment. For students from educational backgrounds where didactic teaching has been the norm, notions of autonomous learning and co-learning with the teacher can be difficult" (p. 16). As teacher educators, we believe in challenging the status quo in and out of our university classrooms. We wish to both resist (and work against oppressions in our worlds) and model this resistance. At the heart of this resistance is the notion of voice. Voice being integral to our conceptualization of resistance is not divorced from action; in fact, we deem voice *as* action and actions-qua-resistances as expressions and extensions of voice.

**Theorizing voice**. Voice has been theorized by many sociolinguists to reveal processes of being systemically muted, marginalized, or silenced and to show how voice is both limited and empowered through the form and function of our language use. As Jan Blommaert (2005) indicates, "[t]he issue of voice is an eminently social issue … it is about function, and function is affected by the social 'values'—in a politico-economic sense—attributed to particular linguistic resources" employed (pp. 68–69). Blommaert draws upon John Gumperz (1982) and writes: "Language differences play an important positive role in signalling information as well as in creating and maintaining the subtle boundaries of power, status, role, and occupational specialization that make up the fabric of our social life. Assumptions about value differences associated with these boundaries in fact form the very basis for the indirect communicative strategies employed in key gatekeeping encounters" (pp. 6–7).

As critical pedagogues interested in opening up more inclusive spaces for learning, we examine with students how these boundaries and codes shape our abilities to speak and music. We consider what value, meaning, and function of our language and music are prevented or accepted as we move from one social, cultural, political, and economic space to another. As Blommaert (2005) points out: "Whenever discourses travel across the globe,



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what is carried with them is their shape, but their value, meaning, or function do not often travel along. Value, meaning, and function are a matter of uptake, they have to be *granted* by others on the basis of their real or potential 'market value' as a cultural commodity" (p. 72). The same can be said as we travel from home communities to school communities within the same geographic region. As students and teachers often come from differing backgrounds, the "market value" of our language is often muted, marginalized, or dismissed as it travels from our home lives to our school settings. (p. 88) Another way to look at this is that while performing language (Hymes, 1996), speakers display "orientations towards *orders of indexicality*—systemically reproduced, stratified meanings often called 'norms' or 'rules' of language" (Blommaert, 2005, p. 73). These norms or rules index certain identity markers, such as class, race/ethnicity, gender, and sexuality, and have also been theorized by educational sociologist Basil Bernstein (1990) as *codes*. Language and code switching is common for almost every person in some capacity and is a matter of indexicality (Talbot, 2013). Alessandro Duranti (2007) sums up: "Indexicality ties language usage firmly to social and cultural practices. To say that words are indexically related to some 'object' or aspect of the world out there means to recognize that words carry with them a power that goes beyond the description and identification of people, objects, properties, and events. It means to work at identifying how language becomes a tool through which our social and cultural world is constantly described, evaluated, and reproduced" (p. 19).

John J. Gumperz (2001) indicates that our conversations are filled with indexes—signs that have some kind of existential relation with what they reference. For example, Duranti (2007) explains "that an expression like *this table* includes an imaginary arrow to something recognizable, most likely something perceptually available to both the speaker and the addressee" (p. 18). Indexes rely on context and become complicated when we consider linguistic resources in conversations that employ more than one type of language or identity. As Duranti indicates, "in bilingual communities, where language switching is a daily affair, the choice of a particular language over another may index one's ethnicity or a particular political stance toward the relation between language and ethnicity" (p. 18). The same can be said about music. To choose a particular music over another may index a cultural or political stance. To say that language or music is indexical (Talbot, 2013), then, is to say that what a word or piece means is context dependent. As Betsy Rymes (2003) points out: "How words are used can create new relevant contexts, and whether any of this meaning-making potential is realized at all, is dependent on the kinds of interactions people have around those words. Furthermore … indexical meaning accrues through multiple interactions (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984)." The way meanings are indexed over the course of a single interaction and in repeated, patterned interactions influences how people understand (and create new understandings for) both words and events" (p. 126).

**Voice and agency**. In any music classroom setting, the indexes of power, knowledge, status, and control continually develop meaning as participants interact more and more throughout the year. Many of these indexes come preprogrammed from the socialization process of early schooling years. The rules and norms of schooling carry indexes toward a history and culture of schooling that values a hierarchical and authoritative structure



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modeled on factory production and efficiency that serves the economic and political interests of the upper class. Thus, argues Bernstein, when we think of having *voice* in the classroom, we must make a distinction between "the voice" and "the message." Drawing from the work of Madeleine Arnot and Diane Reay (2007) on "pedagogic voice," Gary Spruce (2015) describes their differences, noting that what is often "'heard' is not 'the voice' but 'the message'—a message that reflects (p. 89) and sustains the power relationships of the pedagogical context within which the voice is formed" (p. 292). This theorization positions voices in most classrooms as lacking agency; that is, they are not "independently constructed 'voices,' but are rather 'the messages' created by particular pedagogical contexts" (Arnot & Reay, 2007, p. 317). Spruce (2015) explains further:

> Consequently, for some children, their experience of school is one in which they are aware of the power relationships and frameworks within which they find themselves, though they are unable to articulate the expected or required messages that enable them to be heard—they are in effect muted, marginalized, and potentially alienated. But this muting, marginalization, and alienation are masked by the illusion that consultation and the elicitation of the student voice inevitably realize and release principles and frameworks of equity, democratic engagement, and social justice … the messages that are heard in schools (particularly within strongly framed and classified pedagogical contexts) are from those voices that have been successfully enculturated into the dominant discourses. Thus the potential for the student voice to disrupt hierarchies and power relationships through democratic engagement with the processes of music education is negated, as the messages that are heard are only those that project the school's legitimated text. (pp. 292–293)

The theorizations of Bernstein, Arnot and Reay, and Spruce specifically focus on the notion of student voice, but as critical pedagogues we suggest that their concepts also apply to teacher voice, because teachers are also bound by the codes, norms, and rules of language as they too travel between spaces in and out of schools. Critical pedagogy thrives on this multiplicity of voice: the individual, the co-constructed, the questioning, the afraid, the uncertain, the inspired. As Henry Giroux (2011) states, critical pedagogy asserts that we can engage our own "learning from a position of agency and in so doing can actively participate in narrating [our] identities through a culture of questioning that opens up a space of translation between the private and the public while changing the forms of self- and social recognition" (p. 14). Thus, in classrooms that employ critical pedagogy, teachers and students work together to liberate voices from the codes, rules, and norms of oppression that are embedded in our language. We use indexicality as a tool to *name* and consider how these codes operate, then we reappropriate and use them as a means for navigating spaces, resisting oppression, and changing the conditions in which we operate. This resistance is the foundation for our work and our transformation in the world.



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**Resistance**. Resistance takes many forms in our classrooms.[6] Different kinds of resistances often emerge: the conservative student who admonishes the supposed liberalism and academic overreach of critical pedagogy, the apathetic student for whom our political interest in liberation is a bore, and the self-professed radically progressive student who thinks that critical pedagogy has already been co-opted by larger institutional forces. But we do not necessarily perceive all of these as *resistance* per se; some may just actually be oppositional behaviors. We desire a classroom for all types of behavior, but there is a distinction between resistance (as we wish to operationalize it in this chapter) (p. 90) and mere oppositional behavior. Our notion of resistance is scaffolded on a Girouxian understanding:

> Resistance must be viewed from a theoretical starting point that links the display of behavior to the interest it embodies, going beyond the immediacy of behavior to the interest that underlies its often hidden logic, a logic that also must be interpreted through the historical and cultural mediations that shape it. … [T]he ultimate value of the notion of resistance must be measured not only by the degree to which it promotes critical thinking and reflective action but, more importantly, by the degree to which it contains the possibility of galvanizing collective political struggle.
>
> (Giroux, 1983, p. 291)

We concur that, in contextualizing resistance, there ought to be a type of metacognitive grasp (by both students and teachers) of the historical and cultural mediations that shape it. This is not to say that students must at all times be comprehensively aware of the historical and cultural mediations that feed their oppositional behaviors to our practices, pedagogies, and praxes (we are aware of the automaticity with which our subconscious guides us in the world). But this is why reflexivity is of such import; reflexivity and metacognition go hand in hand in this mightily political project of teaching and learning for liberation. Resistance, then, is operationalized here as a spectrum, one in which oppositional behaviors to our goals of conscientization are acknowledged and not sidelined (no matter how uncomfortable they make us at times), but also as the epistemological and ontological resistances that we, with our students, dialectically co-construct and co-enact against the status quo and the inequities that it reinforces.

These constitutive elements of conscientization—praxis (reflection + action), co-construction of knowledge, inversions of power, problem-posing education, and reflexivity—coupled with resistance and the tool of indexicality, all have direct bearing on assessment. If we are to answer Door's (2014) ethical call for consistency in our practice, then we must tend to the not-too-easy challenge of postulating assessments congruent with the ethos of critical pedagogy. This leads us to consider the following question: What do critical forms of assessment look like in music classrooms that use critical pedagogy and embrace resistance to foster conscientization? Before we get at this question, however, we must first look at what we mean by assessment and how it connects to a critical pedagogy in music education.



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# Assessment, Critical Pedagogy, and Music Education

Assessment has many purposes in education and comes in many forms. While the rhetoric and practices around educational accountability have intensified, we agree with Randy Elliot Bennett and Drew H. Gitomer (2009) that “there is a fundamental problem (p. 91) with the system as currently implemented” (p. 45). We are most certainly not opposed to rigor, accountability, and reflection in our practices, all marshaled toward constant interrogations, articulations, and tweakings of the linkages between aims and inputs on the one hand and outcomes and impact on the other. But in an era in which teachers, students, and educational managerialists are increasingly stressed by the politically charged top-down approach to high-stakes testing, it is imperative to impugn the prevailing testing culture and the significant consequences it has on our lives.

Freire averred that education is not neutral. In that same vein, we believe that “there is no cultural neutrality in assessment or in the selection of what is to be assessed” (Gipps & Stobart, 2009, p. 111). Since “theories are historical, social and, hence ideological products of the manifold social and political forces of the time of their making and use” (Kress, 2009, p. 27), we view assessment as “a socially embedded activity that can only be fully understood by taking account of the social and cultural contexts within which it operates” (Gipps & Stobart, 2009, p. 106). This critical take on assessment impels us to consider what Gunther Kress (2009, p. 27) asks:

1. Whose interests count in terms of curriculum and learning: those of the authority or those of the learner?
2. How can we assess learning expressed in modes other than those that are dominant in formal educational settings?
3. Whose interests rule?

These questions demonstrate our explicit aim of conjoining assessment and critical pedagogy to unmask the oft-unacknowledged role that power and political interests play.

While we acknowledge the difficulty in crafting creative and critical assessments to match creative and critical pedagogies, we agree with Patrick Griffin (2009) that “nothing is too hard to measure” (p. 184). In the pursuit of better comprehending and rendering its evaluability and assessability, we note the perils of hyper-instrumentalizing something as seemingly amorphous as critical pedagogy itself and thereby puncturing its avowedly revolutionary zeal.

However, Serrano et al. (2015, p. 18) present three succinct ways in which assessment and critical pedagogy can be merged:

1. Forms of assessment that allow the structure of learning to be defined by student learners’ lived reality, rather than a predetermined or designed structure.



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**2.** Forms of assessment that encourage students to be "free learners," able to challenge the physical and ideological structure of their pedagogical environment and relationships.
**3.** Forms of assessment that move students to action and involvement in the world in ways that promote and further the causes of social justice and democracy.

This is not meant to be an exhaustive list of possibilities, because a flexible array of pedagogies begets a flexible array of assessments. As Mary Breunig (2005) states, "if (p. 92) multiple 'ways of knowing' and multiple sources of knowledge are valued, then multiple methods of assessment and evaluation must also be considered" (p. 115). But within Serrano et al.'s (2015) suggestions are several core notions of critical pedagogy: student centeredness, agency, social justice, and action in the world. Regarding the relevance of this to music education, Frank Abrahams (2005) writes:

> Unlike the popular approaches of Orff or Kodaly, Critical Pedagogy does not advocate a particular body of repertoire, or specific teaching procedure. Instead, it is a view that provides teacher and student with a flexible pedagogy. For music education, this pedagogy questions, challenges, and empowers students to experience *our* (i.e. the teacher's) music, and their teachers to understand *their* (i.e. the student's) music as integral parts of a collective reality. Critical pedagogy suggests that music, as part of our cultural past, present and future, has the power to liberate students and their teachers from present stereotypes about music and musicians, and encourages critical thinking, critical action, and critical feeling. It places music into a social, political and cultural context that results in a connection of what Freire calls "word," which in our case is the music, to "world." (p. 8)

This co-constructedness of the classroom—and the dialecticism that informs it—is indeed pivotal to our praxis, and it too must help shape assessment both discursively and technically. This dialecticism between music teachers and students can be fostered and evaluated in terms of formative assessment. Martin Fautley (2015) states: "True formative assessment, that which involves teacher and student in a dialogue about the music produced, and has as its primary aim to develop the music that the student has produced, is very different from the formative use of summative assessment, where the student is told what grade they have scored in a test, and this is then used to provide a target for the student to aim at next time a test is given" (pp. 514–515).

We wholeheartedly agree with Fautley's injunction that the application of assessment needs to shift the primary focus from summative assessment to one on "developing learning and achievement through formative assessment … in order to truly develop music education for all pupils" (p. 519). This, therefore, is "assessment for social justice as it involves learners in becoming agentive in the processes of their own learning, and although interventionist to some extent, it is personalized purposefully so that the learning journey is negotiated, not imposed" (p. 523). So what does a critical pedagogy model look like in music education, and how does assessment work in such a space?



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# Critical Pedagogy for Music Education

Abrahams (2005) proposed a model of critical pedagogy for music education oriented around four questions borrowed from Jurgen Habermas (1982): (1) Who am I? (2) Who are my students? (3) What might they become? (4) What might we become together? He connects these questions to four domains of music: *experiencing*, *connecting*, *creating*, (p. 93) and *performing*. These are then sequenced through eight lesson steps that are flexible in nature: (1) honoring the students' world, (2) sharing the experience, (3) connecting their world to the concept, (4) dialoguing together, (5) practicing the concept, (6) connecting word to world, (7) assessing transformation, and (8) acknowledging transformation. This sequence model is unlike traditional lesson plans, in that it is flexible and relies on the teacher's expertise as "music education connoisseur": one "who knows from instinct and experience when it is appropriate to go with the flow, or when it is time to move on" (p. 10).

Like Abrahams, we perceive a potent synergy between music education and critical pedagogy. We mobilize the synergy toward engendering conscientization, ergo assessments must be, so to speak, conscientizational: participatory, problem posing, reflexive, and not overly prescriptive. They must be developed in conjunction with students and must connect to the overall goals of a critical music pedagogy: using and creating music as a means to perceive contradictions in the social, economic, and political conditions of the world and taking reflective action to change the conditions in which we live. Social justice is the foundation of any critical pedagogue's work, and for music educators who use critical pedagogy, music is the medium in which we act. Together, through music, we resist—as transformative action—the injustices of the world. And if resistance is at the heart of what we do as critical pedagogues, how then do we assess it? We return to our guiding question: What do critical forms of assessment look like in music classrooms that use critical pedagogy and embrace resistance to foster conscientization?

# Critical Forms of Assessment

Premised on the theoretical work around multiple intelligences (Gardner, 2011), we feel compelled to use a wide array of critical assessments in our classrooms because varied assessments are necessitated by the very presence of student diversity and by the fact that there is no singular assessment that will capture all that we (teachers and students) wish to capture. Kahl (2013), in conceptualizing "preassessment," suggests that "the process of conscientization should begin before [we engage with] course material" (p. 2618). Though we have professional and ethical responsibilities as teachers to set the intentions and goals of the courses in which students enroll, we regularly provide space and invite students throughout the semester to propose alterations to our syllabi, including the types of creative projects we design and assess together. Students and teacher vote on proposed changes through a democratic process. This is intended to immediately



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set the tone that our classroom—and the documents that regulate the expectations—are spaces that belong to each person and are aimed at co-creating a learning community.

Students are expected to revise and resubmit all work throughout the semester, turning the focus of assessment on a formative process rather than a summative product. As Fautley (2015) states: "Central to the notion of good formative assessment is that (p. 94) quality is developed by personal human interaction between teacher and student. At the heart of this is the notion of *feedback*, or, as some would put it, *feed-forward*. This takes place in the moment, as music making is proceeding, and while the process is still unfolding. Doing this renders the *process* of musicking significant" (p. 514).

So what does this actually look like? In this section we offer a bulleted list of examples of critical assessments we use in a number of our courses,[7] with an attendant explanation of how each indexes resistance and the greater notion of *conscientization*—that is, reflexivity, problem- posing/promoting critical thinking, praxis [reflection + action], co-construction, inverting power relations/hierarchies, perceiving contradictions in the world, and so forth.

• *Responsive suite*. This is presented as a set of options (reflective journaling, blogging, and recorded chats) from which students may choose. In our classes, students do readings and listen to musical selections suggested by both teacher and students around questions that emerge from class interactions. Participants offer their own substantive interrogations of these readings and musical selections by writing in reflective journals, posting on the class blog, or engaging in further discussions outside of class that are recorded and uploaded to the course content management site. Participants respond to each other's posts and pose questions that problematize or offer possible plans of action to address various topics or issues. These questions, additional materials, and action plans are then revisited during subsequent class sessions. Embedded in these activities are opportunities to express disagreements one may not have felt comfortable articulating in the larger group setting or opportunities to further extend and contribute to the perspectives and plans of actions presented in class. These assessments are antithetical to banking education and encourage students to bring their own voice to bear on the material. They are also encouraged to merge this with their own educational histories and experiences. [reflexivity, problem posing/promoting critical thinking, perceiving contradictions]

• *Found object ensemble*. Working in teams can be an asset and is a much-needed skill. Students bring outside materials and have opportunities to facilitate part of the class teaching, learning, and composition sessions. These include musical recordings of pieces they wish to perform using instruments they make out of objects found from home. Throughout the project, students consider the following questions: What is music? What is culture? What is our relationship to music as humans? How does music contribute to our humanization? This project connects to life outside of school and honors our individual identities while co-constructing a reflective classroom identity. By promoting collaboration as the dialogic modus operandi of the class, this project promotes student agency



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and challenges the competitiveness and rugged individualism so prevalent in American educational systems. As they create, reflect, and perform, students learn skills in negotiating interpersonal dynamics in group settings.

[inverting power relations/hierarchies, co-construction, perceiving contradictions]

(p. 95) • *Musicals for social change*. Working as a class, students write, compose, and produce a thirty-minute musical focused on creating awareness of an issue they wish to change in our community. They have wide latitude in selecting the topic and implementing a plan to achieve their goal. Students assign each other various roles for writing, composing, performing, filming, and editing the musical. They are asked to create an original plot that includes an antagonist and protagonist and must compose original music, including: solos, chorus, and small group numbers. As a group, students can either put on a live production of the musical or film and edit it in "real-life" settings. Students organize and promote either a live performance or a screening of their film in the local community. Throughout, and at the end of, the semester, students are asked to submit evaluations of their project, which reflect a charting of their project's successes and challenges, all linked to key notions of social justice. This iterative process represents the feedback loop of reflection and action.

[reflexivity, problem posing/promoting critical thinking, praxis, co-construction, perceiving contradictions in the world]

• *Constructive controversy*. This is used in conflict resolution/mediation training in which the teacher presents a controversial issue to be discussed, and students are asked to choose which side they vehemently support. They are then asked to convincingly argue for the opposite side by composing a new or arranging an established protest song; this encourages students to step into the "other" perspective that is so often easily/readily demonized. Through this project, participants examine the historical roots of particular songs, such as "La Cucaracha," "This Land Is Your Land," and "Mississippi Goddam," and explore their origins, ways in which these songs have been appropriated to articulate agendas, and how their meanings have changed over time. As students engage with this material and think about opposing views, they develop awareness of how individuals and groups use music as a tool to promote political, economic, and cultural interests. This kind of role-playing is often a challenge for students because they recognize how deeply wedded we sometimes are to our own perspectives/opinions/beliefs, and it can lead to a discussion about notions of resistance and voice. This process of stepping into the "other's shoes" is not meant to dissuade students of their perspective, but to deepen tolerance and augment nuance. Constructive controversy requires active listening because we ask students to paraphrase the arguments of the opposing side. We ask the opposing side if the other side paraphrased them well, and this presents an opportunity for students to see how adept (or not) they are at active listening. At the end of the activity we give feedback on the process to each side.

[reflexivity, problem posing/promoting critical thinking, co-construction, perceiving contradictions in the world]



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• *A class session without the teacher*. We ask students to choose and lead a warm-up, lead a rehearsal, or teach a music activity at which the teacher is not present. We then ask all students to use the tool of indexicality—learned throughout the semester—to assess the experience, identifying and reflecting on power dynamics, (p. 96) hierarchy, autonomy, and teacher-student relationships. They are asked to reflect upon whether new hierarchies emerged and whether students' engagement and linguistic markers shift without the teacher present. They consider the following questions: What are the roles and responsibilities of the various participants in ensemble settings? How is repertoire chosen, what types of repertoire are chosen, and who decides? What are the components of the rehearsal, and why? How is the music learned, and what are the media and structures of delivering content? How does one convey musical meanings? How does a group convey musical meanings? How do we provide space to create, embrace, and express our identities?

[reflexivity, problem posing/promoting critical thinking, co-construction, inverting power relations/hierarchies]

# Conclusion

We view assessment of critical music pedagogy as *conscientizational*; that is, assessment is developed in conjunction with students to be participatory, problem posing, reflexive, and not overly prescriptive. To assess from a critical music pedagogical perspective means to consider and evaluate specific ways in which our knowledge has been transformed. As Giroux (2011) reminds us: "Critical pedagogy becomes a project that stresses the need for teachers and students to actively transform knowledge rather than simply consume it … to connect classroom knowledge to the experiences, histories, and resources that students bring to the classroom … to link such knowledge to the goal of furthering their capacities to be critical agents who are responsive to moral and political problems of their time and recognize the importance of organized collective struggles" (p. 7). In short, students and teachers use music together to *resist* the injustices of the world. Resistance is at the heart of our praxis as critical music pedagogues. Resistance is to have voice, to have agency to "call people in," to dialogue, to reflect and act in order to transform the conditions in which we live. Resistance is the manifestation of Freire's notion of *conscientização*.

A critical music pedagogy uses formative assessments (Fautley, 2015) to evaluate resistance by examining the shifts in indexical meanings. As Giroux (2011) reminds us, "resistance must be viewed from a theoretical starting point that links the display of behavior to the interest it embodies, going beyond the immediacy of behavior to the interest that underlies its often hidden logic, a logic that also must be interpreted through the historical and cultural mediations that shape it" (p. 291). Drawing upon tools presented by Blommaert (2005), Hymes (1996), and Rymes (2003), we see indexicality as a theoretical and methodological tool that promotes pedagogic voice (Bernstein, 1990) among students (Arnot & Reay, 2007; Spruce, 2015) and teachers. As teachers and students co-construct



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knowledge through projects that challenge and shift our positionalities and perspectives, we use formative assessment throughout, placing the (p. 97) focus on the process of our development. We create spaces within each project to reflect upon our growth as individuals and as a group, identifying and examining the indexes that point to our beliefs and the shifts of indexical meanings that display this growth and the transformation of knowledge.

Critical forms of assessment in music classrooms—those that embrace resistance and foster conscientization—are embedded in the very types of critically minded, creative projects we have described here. In other words, the project as process *is* the assessment itself. These projects are not the traditional forms that assess the "objectively knowable material" presented in textbooks to be "transferred" to students through memorization teaching. Instead, they are dynamically responsive and dialectically constituted, problem-posing projects that engage students and teacher from a position of agency tied to the lived experiences and conditions of our communities. Through these musical projects we perceive the contradictions in the world, reflect on our participation in these contradictions, and co-create ways to address these contradictions. In reference to the epigraph, critical assessment becomes our inquiry in the world, with the world, and with each other.

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## Notes:

(1.) Brent teaches courses in music and education, and Hakim teaches courses in education and Africana studies, at Gettysburg College.

(2.) All italicized words are key terms used by Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

(3.) We are also aware that Freire's practice was enacted in a very particular space, and we remain cognizant of this challenge of its cross-pollinative employment: "The places of learning to which latter day Critical Pedagogy has sought to enter are established [educational] institutions, with established ways of doing things (cultural norms, rules, protocols and hierarchies) that have been established over centuries. Critical Pedagogy by definition seeks to establish an alternative set of norms that are not necessarily compatible with the established culture of [our own institutions]. The danger that follows from this dilemma (of a sub-dominant culture entering an established culture) is that the latter will always be able to co-opt the former" (Serrano, O'Brien, Roberts, & Whyte, 2015, p. 4).

(4.) Ira Shor's (1992) conceptualization of *radical educational practice* positions the teacher as the mediating figure between outside authority and the student. Henry Giroux's concept of *emancipatory authority* (Giroux, 1994, 162–63) legitimates teachers' and students' own critiques of oppression and hierarchy in the schooling system and links it to democratic struggles. He saw students and teachers as *border crossers* who work at the interfaces of different cultural landscapes, revealing and negotiating the tensions of identity and representation that these create in the classroom (Giroux, 1994, 141–52). Joe Kincheloe's concept of *bricolage* advocates that educational material should be drawn from many sources, perspectives, and methodologies, with the aim of transforming the classroom into a place where previously suppressed voices are heard. bell hooks's (1994) *engaged pedagogy* transgresses gender, race, and class segregation, building teaching as part of the community rather than as an isolated act. For hooks, to choose not to break down oppressive structures of hierarchical education is not to be neutral, but to offer political support to existing inequalities. Peter McLaren's (1995, 1997) *revolutionary pedagogy* is a Marxist approach influenced by the guerrilla insurrectionist philosophy of Che Guevara, which explicitly links educational practice to social activism for change.

(5.) As Juliet Hess (2017) documents, "A significant body of literature in music education in the 1990s centered on tenets of Freirian pedagogy. … With this focus … Music educators thus acknowledge students' histories and experiences and make room in the institu-



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tion for students not only to speak, but name the world, and dissent from dominant discourse” (pp. 173–74).

(6.) We incorporate critical pedagogy in all of our classrooms, but explicitly teach and model it in three classes: Social Foundations of Music Education, Education for Social Change, and Secondary Music Education Methods.

(7.) These assessments are a combination of the various forms we use in our respective contexts.

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