

## **The Ethics of Music Teaching as Profession and Praxis**

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### **Introduction**

Teachers typically like to think of themselves as professionals. If we consider the teaching function of parenting, and the role of teaching in the advancement of humankind, teaching is without doubt one of the most important undertakings in the history of civilization. But is it a profession and, if so, what criteria and conditions guide (or should guide) its professional practice? More to the present concern, given the uniqueness of music and the noble contributions claimed for it by apologists and advocates of music education, how well do music teachers meet the criteria and conditions of a profession?

These and related questions are explored here with particular emphasis given to the ethical dimensions of teaching and thus to the need to distinguish teaching as *praxis* from just any instructional practice. Music teachers, whether engaged in ‘school music’ or in various forms of ‘voluntary’ music education,<sup>1</sup> share their professional status with teachers of other subjects. Following a general consideration of this shared status, issues of specific relevance to the teaching of music are analyzed—not in the usual sense of the musical ‘standards’ or ‘standardized’ teaching methods (etc.) that form the preponderance of a music teacher’s own education and training, but in terms of

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professional *standards of care* understood in terms of the pragmatic benefits of music teaching for the ‘clients’ served—the students who become the musical public.

### Professions

The general concept of a “profession” or a “professional” is so loose and variable that the idea can often be more confusing than helpful.

To begin with, it is often associated in several ways with certain *occupations*. In many cases it simply distinguishes someone who undertakes a certain activity for money—particularly earned as a living—from amateurs who pursue that same activity for other reasons. As is stressed later, this distinction can become relevant when musicians who cannot otherwise earn a living by performing or composing music (etc.) become teachers in order to earn their livelihood. Such a motivation usually fails to meet one of the ‘classic’ traits of a profession (discussed below) of being ‘called’ or attracted to a practice for altruistic motivations and not for money, prestige, or the like. In fact, in the history of schooling,<sup>2</sup> regarding teaching as a ‘calling’ too often served as justification for paying teachers low salaries.<sup>3</sup>

Occupations that are typically called “professions” are also usually characterized by specialized skills. However, the nature and acquisition of such skills tend to vary greatly. Musicians trained in the Eurocentric canon, for example, typically have years of formal study behind them, including the study needed to gain admission to a university or conservatory. This is, of course, altogether different than the expertise of other professional musicians—perhaps the preponderance in the music world today—that is acquired mostly or entirely from informal teachers and models and is otherwise learned ‘on the road’, so-to-speak. In either case, however, the distinction seems to be that the occupation of “professional musician” is characterized by considerable musical expertise and skill. Even then, however, many amateur musicians are highly accomplished; many, in fact, have comparable expertise, or the same formal, professional or conservatory studies behind them, but—for a variety of reasons—chose other occupations.

Most music teachers think of themselves as professional musicians and, indeed, most have put in countless hours of study and practice in gaining their musical expertise.

In this, they are often unique among most of the other teachers in schools who do not typically ‘do’ the subjects they teach (art teachers sometimes are an exception). Unlike music teachers who, independently of their teaching, are trained musicians, most teachers are not trained physicists, chemists, historians, or the like, but have mastered their subject to the degree needed to teach it. However, even though most music teachers are neither willing nor able to give up teaching in order to pursue a career performing, composing, conducting or the like, their self-regard as music professionals usually has a bearing on what and how they teach.

So, in this regard, “professional” seems to apply mainly to the provision that they make their living via music—albeit by teaching music, and ‘doing’ it with students in schools instead of musician peers in the ‘real’ world.<sup>4</sup> However, “teaching” in this regard remains to be further clarified: simply offering lessons or conducting an ensemble does not necessarily produce the positive *educational* benefits for the student ‘audience’ that other music professionals more predictably provide *musically* for their paying audiences. This consideration leads, then, to a question of the qualifications a music teacher needs in addition to musical expertise.

‘School music’, as is the case with teachers of all school subjects, requires teachers to complete studies that lead to teaching *certification*; for example, studies of teaching and assessment techniques, curriculum design, and teaching methods and materials. The relevance of these studies, however, is widely disputed—even by many music teachers themselves. Nonetheless, modern societies typically require certification or licensing of some kind in occupations where a practitioner’s incompetence can result in personal harm for clients. In many occupations, such training is very narrow because the competence required is limited; it focuses on skills and knowledge that, at a minimum, are highly standardized and routinized, and thus are directly and easily evaluated; for example, the knowledge and skills required of a licensed electrician or plumber.<sup>5</sup>

As far as music teaching is concerned, one point of view argues that the only requirement for being a good music teacher is being a good musician. Thus many musicians take on the title of “teacher” with little or no specific qualifications concerning pedagogy, curriculum, evaluation techniques, and the like. They open private studios or

accept positions in community music schools, universities, and conservatories and either “teach the way they were taught” or are left to their own designs as far as the methods, materials, and evaluation techniques they employ.<sup>6</sup>

Where teaching certification is required, the “teacher education” courses mentioned earlier are typically a very small percentage of a music teacher’s preparation, are the least rigorous part of their training, and are often decried as “merely theoretical” or otherwise impractical, ineffective, or a waste of time better spent in the practice room. Some promote the recipe-based or prescriptive teaching that I have called “methodolatry” (Regelski 2002), the one-size-fits-all, ‘it works’ paradigm of pedagogy and curriculum that seeks to be ‘teacher-proof’.<sup>7</sup> So-called “evidence-based teaching” (viz., where teaching competence and professionalism are tied to a teacher’s ability to apply ‘findings’ developed by researchers—usually university-based—to their local teaching circumstances) is sometimes touted these days, but already has attracted a core of critics.<sup>8</sup> In any case, music education certification has, in the main, largely ignored such trends in teacher education, and music teachers tend instead to follow the well-worn paths of those who proceeded them,<sup>9</sup> sometimes all the way back hundreds of years.<sup>10</sup>

Typically, teacher certification requires an apprenticeship or internship of some kind where the “student teacher” works under the supervision of an experienced “master teacher.”<sup>11</sup> However, nothing approaching the rigor of, say, a medical internship is typically required, and it is fair to say that too often the student teacher learns a certain range of ‘how-to’ teaching approaches that, at best, are conducive to short-term success—namely, ‘survival’—mainly in that particular teaching circumstance. When the first teaching position is very different in its particulars from the internship, beginning teachers are often left mainly to their own designs.<sup>12</sup> This result might be less problematic where teaching circumstances are quite uniform, for example as a result of a highly centralized education ministry or monocultural student population. However, such uniformity or standardized practice is hardly a criterion usually associated with the “helping professions”—professions that serve the needs of people, such as law, medicine, ministry, therapy, et cetera.

### **Social Theory and the Professions**

As the previous discussion notes, a profession is commonly understood to be a specialized occupation that requires a certain degree or type of technical expertise. However, sociologists have attempted to distinguish professions from just any skilled occupations (such as athletics) or professionals from individuals whose expertise is recognized by some non-technical standard (for example, parents, sports commentators, tourist guides). Max Weber (1947), for example, took the helping professions mentioned above as models. With these in mind he analyzed certain shared characteristics:

They were self-employed providers of services, they entered their profession because they ‘called’ to it out of some deep personal commitment, and their qualifications were based on their possession of ‘expert’ and esoteric knowledge. In addition, their knowledge base could be acquired by only a select few who underwent long and rigorous study. Their service dealt with serious, often life-or-death matters, and they were remunerated by fees from clients. Communication between professionals and their clients was legally privileged so that courts of law could not require its disclosure. Most important, entrance to these professions was controlled by professional peers, who set requirements for entry, training, and certification. Boards of peers also developed review processes to maintain standards and competence. (deMarrais & LeCompte 1999, 150).

Other sociologists stressed the non-manual character of professional work—a criterion that still haunts the idea of professional programs of study in the arts that, at least as understood by some professors<sup>13</sup> in the humanities and liberal arts, are alleged to be forms of manual training that are more mechanical than scholarly or intellectual.<sup>14</sup> And, as mentioned earlier, professions are seen as altruistic, where the ‘calling’ favors intrinsic rewards over personal profit.<sup>15</sup>

Still others, following functionalist sociology,<sup>16</sup> stressed the “public service” function of the various specialized professions. An extension (or consequence) of this functionalism was the reducing of the layperson to a relative status of incompetence. Given the organization and growth of the professions that resulted from the systematizing logic bequeathed to modernity by the Enlightenment, the function of a profession was to provide a *unique and specialized competence of practical value*. Consequently, the profession becomes the authoritative source for judgments in its particular realm. Thus, only professional peers—or regulatory professional bodies that represent the

profession—can evaluate competence, not laypersons. It is (1) this *expertise*, (2) the resulting *authority*,<sup>17</sup> and (3) the *practical value* of a profession<sup>18</sup> that are responsible for the status and socioeconomic benefits it enjoys. Unlike the need for ever-more apologetics and advocacy marshaled by musicians and music educators for music education, then, the helping professions<sup>19</sup> are readily accepted and valued on the basis of their clearly pragmatic contributions to society. Indeed, society takes cautionary note of the lack of such professionals (e.g., doctors in sparsely populated regions, priests in Catholic countries), and new professions arise to serve new socio-personal functions (e.g., therapists of various kinds, industrial psychologists, financial advisors, accountants, etc.).

In contrast to functionalist sociology, recent critical social theorists have focused on professions and their professional organizations as representing a type of *special-interest group*. In this perspective, professions not only (1) exert power (authority) over members, they (2) exert it on behalf of members over society, and (3) even against other professions in the same field. Such power is used, then, not necessarily in simply serving the functional needs of society or of clients; it serves professionals themselves, and professional altruism is thus called into question.

In the first instance, professions “discipline” members who stray from standards of care and codes of conduct, lest the profession as a whole earn a negative reputation. This, of course, protects the public at the same time that it protects the status of the profession, but it is an aspect of *accountability* to the profession and public almost totally missing from teaching! On the other hand, such power can also be used to silence or subdue emerging or conflicting perspectives within a profession, or can impose a particular ideological stance that single-mindedly is advanced at the expense of all others.

Secondly, the expertise and resulting authority of a profession can be used (or abused) socially, as when such experts are the primary sources of laws and customs that promote their professional self-interests.<sup>20</sup> A related problem can be the use of professional authority to influence or endorse certain ‘needs’ clients might otherwise do without. Certain kinds of so-called “aesthetic” surgery and dentistry have been cited in this regard. However, music teachers regularly make similar claims (in their advocacy, but more directly in their curricular and literature choices) as to what the musical needs

are (or should be) of students. Along the same lines, the social power of a profession can be brought to bear in defending its members against clients who have complained about professional services. Advocacy of music education can amount to a similar defense against declining support for music in schools (including financial jeopardy of state or local government-supported community music schools).

Finally, power is used when professions in the same field vie with each other. As Bourdieu has shown (1990), this competition for resources and recognition within a field of endeavor is quite natural. A case at point, for example, is the competition between music theorists, music historians, music performers, sociomusicologists, ethnomusicologists, and cultural theorists (just to name some major contenders) as to what “music” *is* and what personal, social, and cultural values it serves (or should serve). What is not natural, however, are attempts to in effect create *monopolies*—for example, whether these are over rival medical paradigms<sup>21</sup> or over rival teaching methods.<sup>22</sup>

Viewed from the perspective of critical social theory, then, professions can resemble special-interest groups that pursue a variety of self-interested strategies that attempt to establish and maintain a monopoly of claimed expertise of a certain kind. Considered in such terms, professional groups attempt to promote or guarantee certain advantages for all members, *often quite irrespective of the actual competence typical of individual practitioners*—assuming that such competence does not attract attention by being either conspicuously meritorious (thus establishing models of excellence against which typical practitioners will be unfavorably compared) or flagrantly incompetent (thus damaging the reputation of the profession).<sup>23</sup>

Considered in light of functionalist theory, teaching in any field fails to meet many key criteria of a profession when compared with the helping professions or even with most key specialized occupations that are commonly called professions. Deviations of teaching from the Weberian model of professions cited earlier include “the nature of the knowledge base and the training required to attain it, the degree of control over entry to the profession, maintenance of standards, and the depth of commitment teachers, as a group, have to their calling” (deMarris & LeCompte 1998, 152).<sup>24</sup> Given their musical expertise, however, music teachers might seem to meet the criteria of expert and esoteric

knowledge better than most other teaching areas; and private studio teachers, at least, are free to set their own fees.

On the other hand, considered in light of critical social theory, music teachers can fall prey to taking the value and importance of music for granted—usually “their” music, as opposed to what the students prefer—and thus teach it in ways that *protects music from students*: for example, by either creating (or consenting to) competitive conditions that are intended to sort out the ‘talented’ few from the middling many, or by gladly letting students fall by the wayside (e.g., by not exerting special efforts to rescue a student’s original affection and enthusiasm for musical study). In fact, as we shall see, the risk exists that music teachers can serve their own musical (and financial) needs through and at the expense of their students’ musical and educational needs and thus can fall short of the ethical dimensions that apply when teaching is understood as praxis, rather than simply as a collection of habitual, taken-for-granted, or hand-me-down pedagogies and routine practices.

### **Music Teaching and Professional Status**

As has been concluded so far, music teaching deviates from the Weberian model of a profession for reasons that are mainly shared by teachers of all subjects,<sup>25</sup> but in certain other regards it has its own profile.

To begin with, as mentioned earlier, music teachers often claim to be professional musicians, and this professional status may be recognized by parents and students who are unlikely to confer a similar professional status on the knowledge base or expertise of teachers of most other subjects.<sup>26</sup> Regardless of this status, the standing of the musician-teacher as *teacher* is more ambiguous—including in the minds of many music teachers who variously identify more as “teacher” and sometimes more as “musician” and who thus have difficulty striking an effective balance between or harmony of the two somewhat competing identities.<sup>27</sup> Even among those who have entered music teaching as a ‘calling’,<sup>28</sup> musicianship, musicality, virtuosity, artistry, and all the other necessary criteria of being a competent musician are not sufficient criteria for being successful music teachers.



Furthermore, when models of music teaching are exported from the tertiary training of professional musicians to the educational needs of secondary and primary school students who seek (and deserve) music education for reasons other than for becoming professional musicians, results can be problematic. On one hand, student soloists and ensembles can be *trained* to perform at commendably high musical levels.<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, this training may not add up to a music *education*—at least not a well-rounded, holistic one where students have developed the independent musicianship, habits, and dispositions needed to promote lifelong learning and involvement after the school years. Such training may also be accomplished at the expense of the majority of other students whose musical needs, abilities, interests, and goals may be ignored or denied. Thus, serving the musical needs of a select few often results in the problem (or allegation) of elitism; and the social consequences of such negative perceptions can work against the status of music education in the minds of people in all walks of life who see education—of all kinds—in more egalitarian and pragmatic terms.<sup>30</sup>

Public perception that music education is insufficiently *pragmatic* and *egalitarian*—that is, that it too regularly fails to make a *notable* and lasting difference in the musical choices and lives of *all* its students—may well outweigh any benefits claimed for identifying or serving mainly the elite few, since music education is increasingly in the position of having to defend its existence. In this regard, then, music education seems to have fallen short of the *functionalist* criterion of a profession: aside from discovering and nurturing an elite cadre of musicians,<sup>31</sup> it is apparently unclear to society (at least as evidenced by school officials, public tax support, etc.) what distinct, specialized and useful function music education serves—what ‘good’ it provides for students (especially the many students not interested in musical careers) and, thus, what ‘goods’ it contributes to society.

To the degree it has failed to clearly demonstrate such a valued function to the public, music education experiences challenges to its existence that have elicited more and more advocacy, apologetics, and politics<sup>32</sup> while otherwise steadfastly ‘conserving’ the traditional methods, pedagogies and curricular practices that are in fact responsible for its increasingly challenged professional status. This situation is also in large part an ethical issue (discussed in more detail below) since, from the functionalist point of view

described earlier, the reason a profession comes into existence to begin with is to provide a specialized practical function, a public service valued by society. Thus, failure to provide such public service, in terms that can be clearly recognized by the public as functional and thus valuable, can be seen as an ethical failure.

Considered from the perspective of critical social theories, music education also suffers some liability not typically visited on most other teaching specialties. While most teachers like, even love, the subjects they teach, teaching music can be (or at least can seem to the public to be) simply more enjoyable and personally rewarding for the music teacher. Given the widely acknowledged affective delights of music-making, ‘doing’ it with students can be rewarding and enjoyable to music teachers in ways that seem lacking in comparison with, say, ‘doing’ mathematics, history, or chemistry in class. In fact, typically, even music-making with younger students is musically rewarding for the music teacher as well; and all the more so with older students and their advanced musical abilities. In this regard, and given the undeniable existence of some music teachers who entertain their own musical needs and pleasures via the rewards of music-making with students, music teaching is unfortunately open to the critique of critical social theorists concerning professions as special- or self-interest groups. Public advocacy for music education can contribute to the impression of music teachers as belonging to a special-interest group; no other teachers so unremittingly engage in such promotion of their subjects to the public.

Moreover, and oddly, while no one seriously doubts how special and important music actually is in one’s life and to society, the compulsion (or need) to advocate music education can also give rise to the notion that the *music* of music education is what is special—or is more special than the music in the ‘real’ music world outside of the classroom, studio, or rehearsal hall. This raises the further issue of whether music education involves an attempt to either *convert students* to music seen by their musician-teachers as somehow superior or more valuable than what is readily available outside of music education, or to create an *insular music world* that exists mainly for music teachers and their students, called ‘school music’—or both!

In this latter case, music education in effect creates an artificial and thus narrow (and limiting) music world of its own—namely, the school’s music ‘program’—that

serves mainly a certain minority of teacher-selected (or self-selecting) students and, at that, only during the school years. Any musical need tied to the ‘real’ world of music most typically goes undiagnosed or ignored and thus unmet. As a result, once students graduate from or leave the ‘program’ their likelihood of lifelong musical involvement is limited by the misleading simulacrum of ‘school music’; and, despite any ‘conversion’ attempts, their musical choices in latter life are rarely much different from those of other adults. The same scenario unfolds for most students who study privately while of school age and then cease to study, practice, or perform as adults, and whose musical tastes and choices typically mirror those of peers who have never studied.

Being that such issues involve questions of value, they again engage ethical considerations: for example, of whose or which musical values are at stake. That music teachers rightfully (not self-righteously) seek to *expand* or *extend* the musical values and choices students bring with them to their music studies (not necessarily to replace those values) is a subtlety that unfortunately can be lost on many students (for example, those who quit lessons or ensembles) and the public (which, despite the efforts of music educators to promote ‘good taste’, seems to continue to prefer what it prefers). If this subtle difference is not successfully conveyed to students and the public, it will not be surprising if music educators come to be seen more as a self-interest group than as serving the diverse musical interests and needs of students and of society.<sup>33</sup> And, once again, the more the political advocacy for public support of music education, the more the suspicion can arise that it is not a society’s ‘musical health’ that is in question but the self-interest of music teachers.

Such advocacy can sometimes seem like preaching to the unconverted, with music a kind of religion. Given their training, and the dedication to music that inspires it, music teachers can assume that since music is indisputably good (at least the “good music” they teach), teaching it is automatically good—whether or not they can point to any lasting benefits for their students or society. This attitude can be responsible, too, for music teachers who expect their students to share their fervor for and commitment to music and who are, then, quite willing to be rid of the ‘unworthy’ who do not. Like the excessive fervor of religionists,<sup>34</sup> what we might call “musicianists” can adopt a musically ‘holier than thou’ frame of reference, or engage in pushy musical evangelizing,

with results that invite rejecting the message because of the single-minded zealotry of the messenger. Every “failure” to succeed in competition,<sup>35</sup> every drop-out, and every student who is relieved to have compulsory music study behind them (including lessons enforced by parental fiat) represents not just a lack of ‘conversion’ to musical ‘virtue’ but gives such future members of the public compelling reason to doubt whether their music education has served any lasting purpose or value.

The question arises, then, concerning the degree to which music teachers seek simply to make a living doing the art they love, in comparison to being committed to sharing that love with students in ways and to a degree that more often than not benefits students musically for the rest of their lives. The earlier mentioned allegations of elitism also come into play in this regard, as well. All teachers certainly enjoy working with advanced and highly motivated students; however, they do not usually have the freedom to either ignore or rid their classrooms of the rest.

### **Professions and Action Ideals**

Despite attempts, defining a profession or distinguishing a profession from a non-profession via a checklist of criteria leads to more confusion than clarity. As a social institution and practice, any profession is no more a single ‘thing’ than is, say, marriage or parenting. Furthermore, even where the professional status of a practice is not publicly doubted, practitioners are notably diverse in their practices. No two doctors approach their profession in a standard way, and clergy differ not only according to their respective religions, but their practice varies even in comparison to peers in the same religion. In fact, one trait professions can be said to share—at least the helping professions—seems to be precisely important differences in practice that stem from (1) differences between practitioners themselves and, more importantly, (2) differences among those they serve and (3) in the situatedness of practice—the unique contingencies, conditions, and criteria that determine the particulars of any practice.

In this, a profession such as teaching can be understood as an *action ideal*. An action ideal is not a utopian or ‘idealistic’ undertaking; rather, it is a *valued direction* that guides choices and actions. Like a “good marriage,” “good parenting” or even “good

health,” an action (or guiding) ideal has *no single instance that defines it* (though we may look to various models and profit from studying their similarities and differences) and *no single or final state of realization or excellence*. Marriages evolve according to the changing world in which the relationship unfolds or develops, including changes in the partners; and parenting evolves as the child grows and eventually leaves home. Good health, of course, is altogether different for an eight year-old than for an 80 year-old, but is also different in important respects for different people in the same age group.

Teaching as a profession can be understood, then, in similar terms. It exists on the functional premise (described earlier) of providing a service that benefits students and, ultimately, society. As regards music teaching as a profession, then, a teacher should have in mind certain clear and clearly desirable benefits for students—*musical and educational action ideals*—that give direction to teaching choices and actions. Furthermore, just as there are symptoms of poor health and markers of good health that guide the diagnoses and recommendations of doctors, so too should music teachers have in mind the kinds of *empirical indicators* that can be used as tangible evidence of the ‘musical health’ of students and, thus, of the success of teaching and learning. In sum, then, curricular action ideals<sup>36</sup> should be premised in terms that facilitate *clear evidence* both of student achievement and teaching effectiveness—that is, clear evidence that the benefits claimed for the professional service have been advanced.

Secondly, as professionals, music teachers will evolve in response to the changing conditions of students, society, the music world, and the practices and resources that become available with, for example, advances in technology. Just as the doctors of today have evolved in comparison to doctors of several decades ago, music teachers as professionals should always be improving in the degree to which (or expanded range of ways in which) the action ideals that guide their teaching choices are realized for students.

This involves, first, a functional level of *reflexivity*—of self-reflective openness and self-critique—that admits the possibility of weakness, error, even failure and, thus, that highlights the constant need for improvement. As a professional, then, a teacher can never rest self-satisfied that “the” best efforts or results have been achieved.

Furthermore, such progress involves being alert to both new curricular possibilities and to new or improved means of addressing such curricular premises. For example, just as GarageBand® and Guitar Hero® offer new possibilities for classroom music, so do MIDI technology, computer software, and recording technology offer new possibilities for other types of music education.<sup>37</sup>

Finally,<sup>38</sup> “good is as good does” becomes the guiding criterion of success and points to the ethical conditions associated with the helping professions. When considered in terms of the models from those professions, “good results” in teaching are judged in terms of the benefits experienced by those served—the students. “Good teaching,” thus understood, leads to—or leads significantly in the direction of—the desired tangible benefits or ‘goods’ that are the valued indicators of ‘musical good health’ towards which curricular action ideals are committed. It cannot be determined in advance, for example, by claims that “good methods” were used. “Good methods” (materials, pedagogies, etc.) can only be seen in terms of good results, judged in terms of the tangible benefits typically realized for students.

In sum, considered in terms of the model of the helping professions, teaching music would be guided by action ideals that represent a *clear public service*—one noted and valued by the public—and would be conducted according to an *ethical dimension*. The kind of statutory malpractice that arises with the other helping professions is not at issue, given the conditions of most teaching. Nonetheless, the central role of *ethical standards of care* in the helping professions needs to be highlighted in regard to any music teaching that aspires to similar professional status.

### **Teaching as Praxis**

So far, reference herein has been to teaching *practice*. However, when reference is made to, for example, a doctor’s medical “practice,” the kind of practice that musicians undertake to acquire their musical skills is most assuredly not what is at stake. Nor are the “practices” of professionals a matter of a set collection of handed-down methods that are ‘practiced’ (or performed) more or less routinely, more or less proficiently, like a musician’s scales. Quite the opposite: professional practice is by its very nature

especially mindful of the standards of *care* that need to be observed when results for human good or ill are at stake. Thus, more precisely, professional practice is a matter of professional *praxis*, where “praxis” is understood in terms of distinctions recognized since ancient Greece, most notably in the ethical writings of Aristotle.<sup>39</sup>

Briefly, Aristotle identifies three types of knowledge and the active form taken by each. *Theoria* is what today we call ‘pure’ or theoretical knowledge of the world (i.e., the cosmos, the divine) learned and contemplated for its own sake. For Aristotle, the pursuit of such knowledge is the highest goal of the good life, and contemplation of such truth fulfills the highest good and end towards which all humans aspire, happiness. It does not arise from personal experience with particulars but, rather, seeks general, eternal, and universal truth. In contrast to this contemplative wisdom are two types of practical knowledge, *techne* and *praxis*.

Techne refers to the knowledge and skill involved in producing or making useful *things*. Its goal, then, lies outside the activity itself and the things thus produced are, by virtue of the unambiguously useful needs they fulfill, not controversial and are thus taken for granted as good. The active form of techne—*poiesis*, or ‘excellent making’—involves training that results in learning and using systematic techniques or skills that do not vary much between equally expert technicians or artisans. It was in the sense of techne that the word “art” (*ars*) was first used in reference to *productive skill*. Today, the skill-drill and technique-building training of certain music pedagogies (e.g., scales and exercises) still qualify as clear examples of techne.<sup>40</sup> An important feature of techne is that mistakes are simply corrected, with no more harm than the loss of time.<sup>41</sup>

Praxis, in contrast, involves the knowledge needed in serving *people*. Instead of ‘making’ skills it involves *action* (or ‘doing’) that creates not things but clear benefits for people. Because people are the focus of such action, mistakes *can* have harmful effects. Thus, praxis invokes the ethically active framework of *phronesis*—the fully mindful *care*-fullness or prudence needed to “do no harm” and, moreover, to produce ‘good’ or ‘right results’ for the person(s) served (as opposed, that is, to no or negative results). For this reason, praxis guided by phronesis is understood as ‘right’ and *virtuous action*; “that is, acting in the right way, for the right reasons and at the right time” (Saugstad 2005, 356). There are always many possible ways of acting, but ‘good’ results are judged

‘right’ according to the particulars of the situation—for example, the particular needs of the student(s) at any moment. Each situation faced is thus approached as unique, and acting ethically is discerning the variables at stake in the novel situation that bear on ‘right’ results for those served. The term “malpractice,” then, is more precisely a matter of *malpraxis*—a failure to observe professional standards of *care* (phronesis) that results in some harm, some negative result, or the lack of a needed result.<sup>42</sup> This has important implications for music teaching that aspires to professional status.

Considered as praxis, teaching music is quite different than the craft-like set skills, techniques, routines, and recipe-like “methods” associated with *techne*. The factory-like, one-size-fits-all approach of *techne* necessarily fails to take into consideration the differences between particular individuals and situations. Teaching is professional—that is, is *praxial*—to the degree it is conditioned by the ethical dimension of phronesis: it is *care*-full in observing the individual needs and particulars of different teaching/learning situations and, thus, in both producing ‘right’ or ‘good’ results and of avoiding harm to students. Just as good health is not a universal condition, but depends on the individual patient and particulars of that patient’s health needs at the moment, ‘right’ or ‘good’ teaching is judged in terms of results for students, taking into care-full consideration the uniqueness of their musical needs, their ‘musical good health’.

When teaching is understood as a professional praxis, *harm* can be direct or indirect. Direct harm is something negative that results from the teacher’s actions; for example, instruction that causes or contributes to overuse injuries, intentional embarrassment of a student, pedagogy that unnecessarily limits rather than expands the student’s capabilities and, in general, any teaching action that encourages or causes a student to drop-out (physically or mentally). Indirect harm involves inaction; for example, not addressing clearly evident needs, not correcting obvious problems or mistakes, and the like. Harm is often the result of malpraxis that is simultaneously direct and indirect. For example, music teachers who impose regimented skill-drill (or the same restricted literature selection, etc.) on all students are often the direct and immediate cause of students’ loss of interest and motivation (and usually, then, to the high numbers of students who drop out) at the same time that a student’s other or unique musical needs



go unaddressed and remain problematic or limit the student's fullest musical success and pleasure.

### **Precision and the Particulars of Teaching as Praxis**

For Aristotle, the Platonic conception of universal, absolute or ideal good 'in itself'—however much it might characterize the gods—was not applicable to the everyday affairs and needs of humans. He demonstrates, then, that what is good is conditioned by the *particulars* of individual people, places, times, and contingencies. Put another way, human good exists only in its always unique practical manifestations for those served—"goods that are good for us" (Aristotle 1998, 10)<sup>43</sup>—and that these differ according to the activities and needs at stake. In this, for example, professional and amateur performances are different "goods" that serve different people and different needs.

Since "good" is thus tied to such ever-variable and changing particulars, it is not ethically possible to standardize good teaching, or to define or describe any fixed standard of good teaching by which malpraxis can be adjudicated. In fact, this is among the reasons that none of the helping professions proceed according to standardized practice. First of all, as has been mentioned already, the practice of any two practitioners in the same field will vary. Despite similarities in training, then, any two doctors will have treated completely different patients and thus will have coped with the importantly unique needs of each. As a result, their *praxial knowledge*—the highly relevant and pragmatic 'details' they learn 'in action' from the observed cumulative consequences of their praxis—will be different.

Different activities, in the Aristotelian view, are also characterized by different degrees of *precision*, and thus virtuous action—namely, praxis, or acting 'rightly'—in different pursuits must contend with different and varying degrees of ambiguity. While good health is a highly variable action ideal, one of the 'advantages' (so-to-speak) of the medical profession is that certain kinds of 'failure' are quite evident, even dramatic: patients clearly improve, get worse, or even die. Many doctors, then, have "a painful tale

of misdiagnosis, but the effect, oddly enough, is heartening. They learn from their mistakes and become better doctors. They force themselves to think in less restrictive ways and to challenge easy conclusions” (Grimes 2007, 8).

Given the clarity of such results in medicine, praxial knowledge gained for guiding future praxis is benefited. Diagnostic tests and other procedures in medicine also contribute a degree of precision that assists in diagnosing a patient’s needs and determining the treatment needed. Finally, self-reports of the patient are central to a doctor’s diagnosis.

Teaching, however, is not characterized by such precision—though music teachers would do well to be more alert to clearly negative indicators, such as incessant misbehavior by otherwise ‘normal’ students, students who do not practice, and large numbers of students who quit lessons or an ensemble. Unfortunately, music teachers are all too liable to account for these symptoms by blaming the student (not talented, undisciplined), parents (don’t enforce or encourage practice), society (wallowing in musical bad taste), school officials (bad schedules and other lack of support), and so on.

More to the point, however, is that music teachers—despite the overt nature of musicking<sup>44</sup>—too often fail to set forth their curricular ends and goals, the benefits they claim to provide, in sufficiently *observable detail* to properly identify pragmatic achievement and its corollary, teaching effectiveness. Where musical learning is imprecisely, incompletely, or incorrectly described or taken for granted, teaching weaknesses and failures go unnoticed and progress is misdiagnosed.

Students in classes are thus “exposed” to a variety of musical activities and experiences in the belief—actually, almost a matter of religious faith—that simple contact with “good music” has some kind of automatic and routine “aesthetic” benefit and that information about such music results in heightened “appreciation.” In contrast, viewed praxially “appreciation” is seen in the *appreciative use* of music to enhance life. And, as befits Aristotle’s perspective, each use of music is a ‘good’ that is supported by its own particular kind of knowledge, understanding, and skill. Specifying common appreciative uses of music as curricular action ideals promotes teaching that is directly relevant to such eventual uses ‘in life’, and it provides empirical indicators of teaching success.

Students in studios and ensembles may enjoy performing but, too often, apparently not enough to promote a lifelong interest in continuing to perform beyond the years of private lessons and ‘school music’; or ‘school music’ has not helped them develop the kind of *independent musicianship* that promotes and supports lifelong involvement. Just “covering” a certain selection of literature is insufficient to the kind of curricular precision needed for teaching to be fully effective. While teachers inclined to traditional aesthetic theorizing may try to argue that the *literature* studied is “good in itself,” it remains to be specified, and thus demonstrated, the particular ways in which the student is musically and educationally profited from studying it. Without clear conceptions of the ‘goods’ promoted by so-called “good literature,” what it is “good for” in the way of advancing a student’s *music education* thus remains imprecise—indeed, so vague that “anything goes.” Thus, benefits are just assumed and all teaching is seen as effective enough. However, that a student seems to ‘progress’ to ever-new literature leaves open the all too common problems of rote teaching and learning and to increasing dependence on the teacher rather than independent musicianship, musicality, artistry and the like.<sup>45</sup> These action ideals of an effective music education go well beyond technical mastery of a particular ‘work’ (notated or not), or a facility for imitating the teacher.<sup>46</sup>

Where musical learning is imprecisely, incompletely, or incorrectly described or its ‘good’ taken for granted, pedagogical diagnoses of a student’s unique problems and needs are also imprecise (or nonexistent). Instead, too often, *needs are typically assumed to be the same for all students*. Thus, certain supposedly “good methods”<sup>47</sup> and “good literature” (often, what a teacher’s own teacher used), and traditional skill-drills are routinely employed.<sup>48</sup> Students who do not thrive on such routines lose the enthusiasm that originally prompted study or participation;<sup>49</sup> and even if they do not quit, they rarely progress to a degree or in ways that inspire lifelong involvement.

Finally, with teaching that is insufficiently care-full, insufficiently professional, ethical and praxial, students’ self-reports—especially complaints, or of problems<sup>50</sup>—tend to be either ignored or handled in routine ways. For example, complaints about literature (viz., the same “good literature” and skill-drill routinely forced upon all students) are too often greeted to with a “because it’s good for you” attitude, and particular technical problems are too often treated simply with prescriptions for more practice. The latter can

be an instance of malpraxis if, as is very often the case, the problem is precisely that the student's practicing strategies are ineffective and inefficient and where doing more of the same will only produce more negative results and thus contribute to decreasing motivation for practicing enough or thoughtfully.<sup>51</sup>

### **Curricular Action Ideals**

In sum, attempting to describe or prescribe so-called "good methods" or even "best practices" in ways that can serve in advance as criteria of "good teaching" is fraught with many levels and kinds of difficulty. Instead, malpraxis is more easily recognized in terms of predictable or common negative or harmful results that should clearly be avoided. No doubt this is why the Hippocratic Oath of medical ethics stresses doing no harm, not what to do. Depending on the particulars of the various kinds of music teaching, determination of harmful, negative, or wrong results can be quite straightforward. This determination depends, however, on the already mentioned need for music teachers, as professionals, to begin with certain *curricular action ideals* in mind concerning what here has been metaphorically referred to as 'musical good health'—the actual improvements to a student's musical life that are to be advanced as a result of the teacher's professional 'services'.

With such generally 'good' or 'right' curricular results clearly in mind as the guiding directions of music teaching, effective teaching will be a matter of predictably moving in those observable directions in an reasonably efficient manner and to a notable degree. Poor or weak teaching will be at stake to the degree that the action ideals in question are not at all, not sufficiently, or not efficiently realized for the typical student.<sup>52</sup> And malpraxis will be at stake where harm is clearly the direct or indirect result of teaching.

As a general rule of thumb, *curricular action ideals* can be identified by asking, "What noticeable changes in musically beneficial directions does the teacher intend to be the typical result of instruction?" Answers to this question provide the general thrust of curriculum and typically result in identifying more particular or *enabling action ideals*. These can be given appropriate precision by asking, "What can a student *do* mindfully

and musically—and thereafter chooses to do—at all (i.e., newly), better, or more often, as a result of instruction.” Here, “mindfully” protects against rote teaching and mechanical or mindless ‘doing’. “Musically” is an important qualifier for it requires that any concepts or understanding be approached as cognitive *skills* that tangibly advance musical production or responsiveness, not taught for their own sake.<sup>53</sup> And the proviso of “thereafter choose to do” protects against the kind of teaching (viz., the “no pain, no gain” school of pedagogy) that, despite having promoted certain learning, turns off students or fails to entice or inspire students to use what they have learned as a basis for continued participation and lifelong learning.

For studio and ensemble teachers, then, the answers to “What can a student *do* mindfully and musically—and thereafter chooses to do—musically, at all, better, or more often, as a result of instruction?” should result in action ideals that envisage some clearly enhanced potential for lifelong musicking. In other words, the proposed benefits of teaching should outlast the period of instruction and should do so in ways that enable and enhance lifelong musical enjoyments.

While every attempt should be made by studio and ensemble teachers to inspire and enable lifelong amateur performance of some kind, other action ideals need not directly involve promoting performance. For busy adults, time for practicing and performing is not always available (although the individual who has been truly ‘turned on’ will often make time for it). Thus, performance teachers should consider other curricular ideals to which performance studies might beneficially contribute, such as audience listening. However, students who have been taught largely by rote usually have little idea of what is musically “good” about what their teacher only trained them do. They may experience a certain degree of pleasure in performing the literature<sup>54</sup> but do not ‘understand’ it in ways that can inform the pleasures of listening.

This has clear implications for such teaching, not the least of which is the avoidance of methods that leave students relatively mindless about key criteria of musicianship, style, and the like that are crucial to the richest audience listening. In fact, so-called “listening lessons” benefit performance instruction and its eventual relevance for students in later life. First of all, listening to recordings (in- or outside of lessons/rehearsals) as part of the total pedagogical curriculum provides learners with

musical criteria they can bring to their own performance. Secondly, when students listen to a variety of musics that feature ‘their’ instrument (or ensemble), they often develop an interest in studying literature that they otherwise would have resisted. Furthermore, the greater the breadth of musics featured in such lessons, the greater the potential transfer of learning both to their performing and to eventual audience listening. Finally, audience listening is a somewhat different praxis than listening as one performs, and listening lessons as part of performance instruction thus prepares the students for the pleasures of ‘just listening’—especially when amateur performing is not an option in a busy adult life.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

Given the criterion of phronesis to reach results that are ‘right’ or ‘good’ for those served, the action ideal of music teaching as praxis, and thus as guided by a professional ethic, requires first of all that music teachers be sufficiently clear in specifying their ends and goals in terms that are sufficiently clear and observable enough to use (and for others to observe, especially students) as evidence of student progress and teaching success. These ends and goals necessarily take the form of action ideals that describe generally valuable and desirable directions for guiding curricular and pedagogical choices, directions that are “realistic” in reflecting the opportunities for musicking typically available to members of society. In fact, a recommended way of proceeding involves analyzing the kinds of musicking that are most common in a society or community and having such kinds of musical praxis serve as the primary action ideals for instruction. In addition, musicking that is not particularly common, but might be if given regular focus as curricular action ideals, can also be targeted. For example, composition software and MIDI open the door to lifelong musical involvement heretofore largely unexplored by formal music education.

With such curricular action ideals in mind, then, teachers who think ethically, as professionals, will scrutinize all their inherited ideas about methods and pedagogy. In years past, doctors routinely used leeches to treat their patients; but critical appraisal and progressive thinking introduced the advances that characterize modern medicine—which, as it turns out, sometimes makes care-full use of leeches for certain treatments. Music

pedagogies and methods of all kinds have been uncritically passed on over generations, largely unchanged. Many of the most common originate from times when music, music teaching, and society were vastly different. A professionally reflexive attitude and resulting critical appraisal can and should begin to identify the music teacher's equivalent of unthinkingly using leeches, as opposed to diagnosing the kinds of contemporary conditions to which previously taken for granted pedagogical practices can be mindfully and care-fully adapted.<sup>55</sup>

Furthermore, teachers who proceed professionally will regard all major pedagogical decisions, even common and predictable ones, with prudence—care-fully—in recognition of the ethical imperatives of *phronesis*. The music teacher as *phronimos*—as a virtuous, ethical practitioner—will be especially thoughtful in the aspects of teaching that involve *planning*. All such decisions, however small, have potentially great ethical consequences. For example, for years music teachers gave little attention to musics from outside the Eurocentric and classical traditions. In today's climate of pluralism and multiculturalism the inclusion of popular and world musics is more likely, but often is equally indiscriminant.

Aristotle regarded “the good” as *that for which something is done*. Under the aesthetic aegis that music exists “for its own sake,” legions of music teachers over history have taken for granted that just performing “good music” is somehow good in itself. This 18<sup>th</sup> century criterion has, of course, increasingly been challenged by recent praxial theories of music and music education (see Alpersen 1991; Elliott 1995; Small 1998; Elliott 2005; Regelski 2005). These argue that music is not a “good” (or god or sacred object) to be done or venerated “for its own sake”; rather, it is admired as an important part of the good life and, thus, for the many and varied ‘goods’ it contributes to society—most of which benefit everyday life outside of the concert hall. Again, then, “good is as good does”; and even the most abstract and abstruse aesthetic theories of ‘pure’ musical contemplation succumb to the argument that such contemplation is not in fact ‘for itself’ but for the benefit of the listener.

With this in mind, then, the selection of musics for classroom and performance instruction needs to consider not only criteria of “good music” but, as well, the further ‘goods’ for the sake of which music is studied or made at all! In fact, apart from claims

of aesthetic purists that this or that music is absolutely good, in the more down to earth sense that Aristotle advanced against Plato's theory of universal and timeless values, "good music" is music that is "good for" particular human benefits, only one among countless others is the kind of contemplative audience listening associated with the Eurocentric canon. It is these down to earth musical 'goods'—these notable functions that musical praxis serves in the life well-lived—that should be kept in mind in planning the action ideals that will guide music teaching that is professional in its ethical conduct.

Beyond planning, however, are daily pedagogical actions that have personal or emotional consequences for students that are potentially harmful. Embarrassment was mentioned earlier because of the proclivity of some teachers, for example, to single out students for humiliation or scorn as a way of "motivating" them to practice their music. Students who in any way have been caused to experience what they consider to be "failure," undue stress, and the like, have suffered the effects of harmful teaching. And, of course, physical injury is increasingly recognized as the direct result of certain faulty methods and pedagogies, of inattention to problems, or even of ignorance on the part of music teachers. An entirely new medical specialty has arisen for treating such conditions (e.g., repetitive stress, vocal damage, hearing damage, even emotional distress.) occasioned by such malpraxis.<sup>56</sup> This alarming development alone should be grounds for reexamining all traditional methods and pedagogies (science, it turns out, shows some traditional approaches to be ill-suited to human biomechanics, for example) and for exercising extreme care and vigilance in virtually all pedagogical decision making.

Given the difficulties of agreeing on what exactly a profession is, being "professional" is thus more of a matter of a personal disposition for *phronesis* than of the meeting of external criteria. For Aristotle, the *phronimos* is a person who has a disposition for ethical virtue. This disposition, he seems to suggest, may well be inborn—or in any case, is not at first consciously cultivated. However, it can be influenced, he teaches, by a functional balance of knowledge, reason, and self-discipline. As concerns knowledge, music teachers as professionals need not just musical knowledge and skills, but competence relative to diagnosing and meeting both the musical and individual learning needs of students. Reason, of course, serves the ethical needs of diagnosing, planning, and evaluating instruction. And self-discipline amounts to the



ethical obligation to recognize that one's teaching is never as good as it could be and that teaching, like music, needs to be "practiced"—constantly improved and updated—over the course of an entire career. With the professionalism of a *phronimos* as an action ideal, there simply is no final or finished state of mastery that can ever be ethically or professionally "good enough."

In general, then, the disposition for regularly practicing the required ethical care-fullness in all pedagogical and curricular decisions is what characterizes a teaching professional. With this ethical standard of care in mind, clearly there are many practitioners in the recognized helping professions whose ethics and practices fall short of professionalism. Given this, the ethical professionalism of the individual practitioner can be advanced as a higher standard than attempting to qualify an entire occupation as a profession. Indeed, it may well be in meeting a high standard of care, the intention of serving particularly well the good for which any occupation is done, that even professional athletes or carpenters earn their deserved status.

However, the personal and social 'good' for which music teaching is done remains all too ephemeral in the minds of music teachers and the public alike. Unless or until this 'good'—the personal and public service provided—is acknowledged by society, music teaching will continue in a state of crisis, verbally defending its importance to society in the absence of unequivocally demonstrating its functional value 'in action'.<sup>57</sup>

Crisis or not, individual teachers who aspire to the professional status of *phronimos* will be altruistically inclined toward diagnosing and addressing the musical needs of their students and of society more than their own musical needs (or the purported needs of music). In doing this, they will be self-disciplined and self-critical and will work unceasingly to improve their 'services'. They will thus be professionally rewarded not only by the contributions they make to the 'musical health' of countless individuals and to society but, as befits professional praxis of any kind, the benefits will arise from the act of teaching itself.

Music teaching as a profession is thus a personal action ideal, realized in the details of prudent and care-full right-action (praxis) on a daily basis, not a status conferred from outside teaching. As an action ideal, it is always constrained by contingencies and thus never fully within reach, but never out of sight. That realization, a

love of music of all kinds, and a dedication to serving the varying musical needs of all students are the foundations of the ethics of music teaching as profession and praxis.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Herein, ‘school music’ refers to classroom music that is offered as part of the general education of all students and to ensembles supported by such schooling (by whatever local name). ‘Voluntary’ music education refers to studio instruction, community music schools (by whatever name in various places), and other forms of community music education, such as amateur ensembles. Given the many formats for music teaching, the present essay does not attempt to systematically address each per each topic discussed; rather, it highlights examples and implications that are most relevant to a particular topic.

<sup>2</sup> “Schooling” refers to educating and teaching that takes place in schools. Schooling, thus, is a *formal* educational practice that is distinguished from other formal educational institutions, such as the church, and from the other and numerous *informal* educational practices provided by the family, community, nation, and even the media. Herein, “teaching” is understood in formal terms, and as conditioned by local and national histories and traditions.

<sup>3</sup> Unlike professions where the professional is paid directly by the client, teachers in schools are paid from tax revenues. Music teachers who operate private studios are paid directly but have to compete not only with each other but also for the monies that families have available to provide other services for their children. This has a certain leveling effect on what such studio teachers (or for-fee ‘voluntary’ music schools) can charge—e.g., in comparison to the services of other providers, such as dance teachers, even health care—and raises the ethical question of whether only the children of the well-to-do can study privately. Where such study is provided in ‘voluntary’ music schools by the state or municipality on non-fee bases, students must often wait—sometimes years—for admission to study; or such instruction is available only to an elite few on a competitive basis. The different circumstances governing the means by which music teachers are paid all have a bearing on professional status and, as analyzed below, on ethical issues of teaching praxis.

<sup>4</sup> This brings to mind the student teacher who, however idealistically or tongue-in-cheek, exclaimed: “I love teaching so much; I can’t believe they pay you to do it.”

<sup>5</sup> In Japan, eating the *fugu* or blowfish fish is deadly if it is incorrectly prepared. The ‘final exam’, so-to-speak, for chefs qualified to prepare this delicacy is to cook it and eat it themselves—and survive!

<sup>6</sup> Some may have taken courses or workshops oriented to pedagogical matters, but typically their background in such matters is very small compared to their musical training and expertise.

<sup>7</sup> Not satisfied with claims to having identified “good methods” in advance of their use and, thus, in advance of any evidence of their effectiveness, some methodolatrists have proceeded to invent degrees or levels of expertise that resemble the ascending ranks of judo practitioners. The inference is that advanced ranks are equated with advanced proficiency in the method that, in turn, supposedly promotes teaching results that are more advanced than for lower levels of training. Despite such attempts to give the impression of certified expertise, the regimentation and routinization of methods and other teacher duties has been analyzed by educational sociologists as a “de-skilling” of teaching that in fact leads to a *decline of professional status* where teachers are seen, instead, more as factory workers on an assembly line (deMarrais & LeCompte 1998, 178-180).

<sup>8</sup> See, e.g., the entire special issue of *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*, Vol. 13, No. 3, 2005 that features critiques by seven authorities, all arguing on different grounds against the general proposition of evidence-based teaching. Since medicine will be mentioned below as a model of a helping profession, and despite our inclination to believe that medicine is conducted on sound and unequivocal research results, so-called “evidence-based medicine” is not as simple a proposition as would seem to be the case at first glance. “Medicine, after all,” writes one commentator, “is a personalized service, one built around the uniqueness of each patient and the skilled physician’s ability to design care accordingly” (Gorman 2007, 37). See also Montgomery (2006), which analyzes the many stumbling blocks to successful medical practice. Groopman (2006) also demonstrates the many variables involved in medical decision-making and how easily mistaken diagnoses can be and are made, despite (and sometimes because of) “evidence-based” premises. Despite relying on the same scientific evidence, different countries legally accept or reject the same medicines according to their own local criteria of safety and effectiveness.

<sup>9</sup> Particularly the teachers they had during their youth, and their cooperating or master teacher(s) from the student teaching apprenticeship. See n. 11 below.

<sup>10</sup> The teacher who studied with the teacher, who studied with the teacher, who . . . studied with Beethoven. Or, for example, complete reliance on a single method that was developed ages ago in accordance with historically and nationally situated particulars that no longer exist, even in those locations or anywhere else. The idea of finding, creating, or adopting a universal, one-size-fits-all method greatly minimizes the many diagnoses and decisions teachers would otherwise have to make. Once the “good method” has been chosen, it follows in such a teacher’s thinking that “good results” are automatically guaranteed if the method is employed correctly (see, e.g., Choksy et al., 2000). On this notion of competence and the resulting “de-skilling” of teaching, see n. 7 above.

<sup>11</sup> The terms used to describe each role may differ in various countries, as do the conditions of the apprenticeship (e.g., the length of time, variety of teaching circumstances, music teaching specialties, etc.).

<sup>12</sup> One result is that an enormous percentage of teachers leave teaching in the first several years. This throws into doubt the criterion of a professional ‘calling’. See n. 24 below.

<sup>13</sup> Despite the similarity of terms, being a professor historically has had more to do with ‘professing’ a thesis than with being a “profession” in the sociological sense. However, today the professional professor (as opposed, that is, to the now rare scholar who is unconnected with an institution of higher learning) is commonplace. Critical social theorists observe that the research of too many professional scholars (including musical scholars) contributes more to their careers than to any knowledge base (e.g., Agger 1998, 23; on music scholarship, see Korsyn 2003, 5-31). Whether professors of music are professional musicians or professional teachers—or both—remains unresolved, and the same ambiguity arises in connection with music teachers of any kind, at any level. Mozart, after all, made his living principally by teaching piano.

<sup>14</sup> This is not an irrelevant opinion, at least in the US where, for example, it is typical for “studio” (‘doing’ and ‘making’) courses in music, theater, and art to not be counted towards graduation requirements from “general” and “liberal” studies—studies from the humanities, liberal arts, and sciences that aim at creating generally well-educated graduates (as opposed to developing professional expertise for a particular profession/vocation).

<sup>15</sup> Originally the helping professions were considered to be middle class pursuits (as opposed to the manual labor of the working class or the privileged leisure of the upper classes). However, today it is difficult to ignore that many of the helping professions provide a livelihood well in excess of the middle class, even in sociopolitical systems that are predicated on a leveling of socioeconomic class differences.

<sup>16</sup> “Functionalism, which has been the prevailing theoretical framework in the social sciences throughout the twentieth century, argues that society operates as does the human body: Like living organisms, all societies possess basic functions which they must carry out to survive. Like living organisms, they evolve structures to carry out the functions” (deMarrais & LeCompte 1999, 5).

<sup>17</sup> Few people with a toothache argue with or doubt the recommendations of their dentist! While the *social role* of “teacher” may be *respected* to varying degrees by different societies, the *authority* of a teacher, and of teachers in general, is too often in doubt. Given that virtually everyone, even children, regularly engage in teaching acts of various kinds, widespread public belief exists that “anyone can teach” as long as they know the subject well. In music education, this gets extended to the claim that any competent musician can teach. In fact, many professional musicians argue that “those who can, do; and those who can’t, teach” and even that, despite their training as educators (or because of the time spent on education coursework instead of in the practice room), too many music teachers are musically unqualified to teach music properly. Thus, despite music educators’ self-identification as professional musicians, a status gap exists between them and other professional musicians that often affects the status hierarchy among music education and non-music education faculty and students in university music departments and, thus, the allocation of resources, the balance of course requirements, and the like.

<sup>18</sup> Demonstrated over time by typically qualified members of the profession, and thus as noted and supported by society.

<sup>19</sup> As well as other ‘professional’ or specialized occupations that offer pragmatic expertise not typically possessed by laypersons—everything from electricians, to barbers, to gardeners.

<sup>20</sup> For example: “As ‘patent medicines,’ including cocaine and Heroin (a brand sold by Bayer pharmaceuticals) fell from grace early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the American Medical Association merged with the pharmaceutical industry to create a notion of ‘ethical’ drugs. This meant in turn that psychoactive drugs expelled from the medical pharmacopeia were deemed ‘unethical’ ” (DeGrandpre 2007, 6). These

latter, in turn, were outlawed altogether (e.g., attempts to outlaw alcoholic beverages) or were controlled by laws that made doctors the sole source of ‘ethical’ drugs.

<sup>21</sup> Allopathy vs. osteopathy vs. naturopathy, etc., for example, where professional “power” is brought to bear on laws, health insurance criteria and policies, and the like, against “alternative medicine.”

<sup>22</sup> In the US, many training programs for music teachers either feature only one “method” as the purported ‘best practice’; or the only music education professor responsible for a music education specialization (e.g., “general music”) is professionally affiliated only with a particular “method” (see n. 7). Similarly, in larger school systems, powerful supporters of this or that “method” have been known to officially impose *their* preferred methodolatry as “the” method to be used by *all* teachers.

<sup>23</sup> See, e.g., Kleiner (2006).

<sup>24</sup> As applies at least to the U.S. “teaching is treated as an interim career by family-oriented women, to be practiced at the convenience of marriage and child-rearing, and as an entry-level occupation for men and women who aspire to administrative jobs or other, more lucrative and less stressful careers. While many people do make teaching their life work, and while the rate of quitting decreases the longer a teacher remains in the profession, teachers on average have among the shortest career trajectories of all the professions. Individuals who actually begin teaching remain for an average of no more than about five years” (deMarrais & LeCompte 1998, 152). A longitudinal study of music teachers in Sweden suggests at least some similar dynamics, and it reinforces observations made elsewhere in the present paper about the motives of professional musicians who enter teaching as an alternative to either a failed musical career or for life style reasons (see Bladh 2004). No doubt the picture differs according to country, but the career trajectories of music teachers in most places is unlikely to match those of the major helping professions.

<sup>25</sup> However, the institutional “level” of teaching has some bearing on at least the impression of professional status. Thus, university teachers—“professors”—are more likely to be accorded professional status by virtue of their advanced and esoteric scholarship and by being able to control entrance to the profession (at the PhD granting stage and in sorting out of qualified candidates recommended for a position). In systems where tenure (i.e., permanent appointment) is at stake, peers can remove incompetent professors by not granting tenure. However, most professors are supposedly judged both on their merits as scholars (or artists) and as teachers. Nonetheless, it is fair to say that among professors there exist many more fine scholars (and artists) than equally fine teachers. The hierarchy of teaching status can also rank secondary school teachers, who specialize, higher than primary school teachers, who tend to be generalists. This can also be a result of gender inequality—in situations where, for example, there are more women in elementary schools and more men in secondary schools.

<sup>26</sup> In other words, a physics teacher is not usually recognized as being a professional “physicist.” Music teachers, however, are typified in terms of two “social roles,” as “musicians” and as “teachers.” Key among the various reasons for this are, first, that the public accepts that a musician’s expertise is acquired over a very long period of time and represents not just university preparation for teaching but years of musical study; and, secondly, a music teacher’s expertise as a “musician” is often on public display, seen in directing school ensembles, but also while performing music in the community (e.g. church choir, club gigs, etc.).

<sup>27</sup> Competing at least in the sense that as *musicians* they are rightfully concerned with issues of musical quality and standards; yet as *teachers* they are obliged to meet the musical needs of *all* their students, not just the talented and motivated ones. How musician-teachers ‘identify’ with each part of their dual role or identity is the topic of a special issue of *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (2007): <http://act.maydaygroup.org/>

<sup>28</sup> As opposed to becoming a music teacher “because I’m good at music (or like music), but not good enough to compete (or don’t like it enough to compete),” or after failing at a career as a professional musician, or as a lifestyle choice (preferring teaching to the demands of being ‘on the road’ frequently or working nights). Furthermore, given the competition and unpredictable prospects for making one’s living as performers, composers, or conductors, parents of musically accomplished children often encourage them to enter music education as a predictable and safe musical career. These are just some of the less than altruistic reasons for which musicians enter teaching. For an account of some of the dynamics of such choice-making and career-change by music teachers in Sweden, see Bladh (2004).

<sup>29</sup> Musicians typically refer to their musical “training,” and this training—as referred to throughout this essay—implies a certain disciplined, standardized, and even unquestioning kind of systematic rigor in skill acquisition that can apply to instruction in many fields, for example military training, animal training, and

the like. With training, ends are typically clear and uncontroversial and the focus is on efficient ‘technical’ processes that result in clear indications of mastery. “Education,” in contrast, is typically understood to be broader in scope and intention (Middle English, from Latin *educatus*, past participle of *educare*, to rear; from *educere*, to lead forth, thus “educer,” to lead forth) and neither the ends nor teaching-learning processes of educating can be prescribed as they often can with training. While “education” typically involves some elements of training, being an “educated person” (or musician) implies much more than training that involves a limited range of discrete skills (or literature).

<sup>30</sup> Some music teachers appear to exhibit the attitude of a physician who complains that all the patients in the waiting room are sick! In other words, they prefer to work only with the talented, ‘musically healthy’ few, when it is those who are in the most need of intervention who deserve at least equal attention. Negative social effects of perceptions of elitism (or professional self-interest) are suffered by all music teachers in terms of the increasingly challenged status of music education when it comes to public monies, scheduling, and other resources.

<sup>31</sup> And, often this elite cadre includes mainly those destined for careers in the classical genre, though the trend toward teaching other musics (especially jazz) is slowly gaining ground, both in ‘school music’ and various forms of community-based music education. Nonetheless, professional musicians in genres other than classical music tend to acquire their expertise mainly apart from formal schooling and, thus, the nurturing and training of such musicians has not been a central or notable function of most formal music education at primary and secondary school levels.

<sup>32</sup> See, e.g., <http://www.isme.org/en/advocacy/index.php>.

<sup>33</sup> It is always useful and sobering to remember that the “public” at any point in time is itself the product of its schooling. Whatever failings one might claim to find in the present musical status of society (e.g., as overly influenced by the media, as under-educated in certain music skills and knowledge, etc.) can thus be visited in part on past generations of music teachers. Yet present generations of music teachers carry on pedagogically much as did the past generations. Even where a different musical menu may be at stake (e.g., one that includes a greater diversity of musics), most often the pedagogy follows in the deep ruts of the past.

<sup>34</sup> Here, used in the sense of a religious zealot, not in the sense of a person who adheres to a religion.

<sup>35</sup> Analyzed in educational terms, competition is a situation where a student achieves his or her educational aims at the expense of another or others. While this is defended in the ‘dog-eat-dog’ competition of the music world outside of school—the very music world in which music teachers seek not to compete—its inevitable and rigorous production of “losers” cannot be defended as an educational practice or ethical principle (no matter how much it supposedly motivates the “winners”). Yet, it is commonplace and readily taken for granted by music teachers who advocate (or accept) that a major function of music education is identifying and nurturing quality and discouraging (or turning away) anything less. These are the teachers who seek to protect music from students and who thus discourage amateurism on the assumption that amateurs somehow defile the musical art.

<sup>36</sup> Herein, “curricular” also refers to, for example, the *literature* selected for study in lessons and ensembles, and also to the *musical* and *educational growth* to be served beyond (i.e., as a direct result of) the study of that repertoire. In other words, what new musicianship and understanding has such literature advanced? What new skills (or new levels of skill) have been gained? How musically independent (of the teacher or other models) has the student become in the process of studying the literature? Are students more or less inclined to continue their musical involvements, and in more advanced ways? Et cetera.

<sup>37</sup> GarageBand® is the composition software available with Apple computers that allows anyone to ‘compose’, e.g., sound tracks for home videos, etc. Guitar Hero® is a video game that can actually advance the player’s aural skills. As to studio teaching, Vivace® software allows the pleasures of performing along with a recorded accompaniment that ‘follows’ the tempo changes of a soloist; MIDI instruments allow creative possibilities that are not possible with their acoustic predecessors (not to mention the ability to practice without disturbing others); audio and video recording can be readily employed in diagnosing and improving a student’s practicing strategies; etc.

<sup>38</sup> Only major considerations are highlighted for present purposes. In truth, it is in the details, the many small aspects, that a given teacher approaches the action ideal and ethics of professionalism.

<sup>39</sup> *The Nichomachean Ethics*, in particular. For more details on Aristotle’s conception of praxis as applied to music education, see Regelski (1998), and as applied to education in general, see Saugstad (2005).



<sup>40</sup> What can be said of pedagogy that is so focused on unmusical skill-drill that students lose interest and either quit or continue to study only as long as forced to by parents and who rarely if ever put their hard-earned technical training to use as adults? As to the virtue of such technique-drill, no less than Daniel Barenboim offers this advice: “I studied with my father till I was about seventeen. . . . For me, learning to play the piano was as natural as learning to walk. My father had an obsession about wanting things to be natural. I was brought up on the fundamental principle that there is no division between musical and technical problems. This was an integral part of his philosophy. I was never made to practice scales or arpeggios . . . [only] the pieces themselves. A principle that was hammered into me early, and which I still adhere to, is never to play any note mechanically. My father’s teaching was based on the belief that there are enough scales in Mozart’s concertos.” (quoted in Booth 1999, 88)

<sup>41</sup> In music, of course, mistakes—wrong pitches and rhythms, for example—are corrected in the practice room, but mistakes made before an audience can “harm” the overall performance and, thus, the reputation of the performer.

<sup>42</sup> A lack of result is “harmful” in not remedying an evident need or condition; for example, in medicine the lack of a cure allows the condition to continue or worsen. In teaching, this involves the kind of unmet need that is either *directly harmful* or *not helpful* in reaching a ‘right’ or ‘good’ result. Teaching music in a way that precludes learning to play by ear (e.g., by studying only notated music) is thus harmful for excluding the many options for performing that involve playing by ear and improvising. Dictating (or teaching by rote) all important musical choices for students may result in fine performances but is harmful for denying them the opportunity of mindfully developing the kind of musicianship that supports intelligent choice-making of their own in the future. In cases where no lasting and discernible pragmatic difference in the musical lives of students can be observed, the lack of clearly beneficial results raises the ethical question of the value of the professional ‘service’ paid for—whether by students’ parents or taxpayers.

<sup>43</sup> In Chapter 6 of *The Nichomachean Ethics* Aristotle argues against the Platonic conception of absolute good and in Chapter 7 for good as relative to the different kinds of happiness that results from different social pursuits and activities.

<sup>44</sup> Coined and defined by Small (1998) “musicking” involves any and all forms of ‘doing’ music; e.g., performing, listening, and composing, as well as a variety of activities in which music is central, such as selecting music for certain occasions (aerobics, therapy, weddings, parties), audiophile activities, and the like. As will be noted below, such “uses” of music are empirical evidence of appreciation

<sup>45</sup> Consider, for example, the music education student who studied one Debussy *Prelude* and who, many years later, wanting to learn some of the others in the collection, had little idea how to finger, phrase, or pedal (etc.) the pieces because all of these matters had been penciled in or otherwise dictated or modeled by her university studio teacher.

<sup>46</sup> To a student who slavishly had imitated the master’s own recorded performance, Rachmaninoff is reputed to have replied with the admonishment, “Fine. That was me. Now you play it!”

<sup>47</sup> From the Preface to a book featuring four “methods” of this kind: “When the first edition appeared we thought it unlikely that it would ever require revision. After all, *the philosophies and practices* associated with Jaques-Dalcroze, Kodaly, Orff, and Comprehensive Musicianship *were immutable*. Superficial techniques might change but the *principles would remain unchanged*” (Choksy et al., 2000; cover flap [italics added]). However, while the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition does reflect some changes in the technology available to music teachers and keys the methods to the U.S. “National Standards” movement, the methods are still described as “immutable” and putatively ‘pure’. In fact, the authors warn against an eclectic approach of picking and choosing from each of the four methods and recommend that readers choose the one method that best suits their own situations.

<sup>48</sup> For example, one professional oboist’s account: “Arriving late by a half-hour or more each week, [Joe] Robinson started me on a fourth year of the same long tone D, adding an occasional sixteen-bar melodic study from my dog eared *Barret Oboe Method*. Robinson taught each of his students with exactly the same routine, regardless of the oboist’s individual strengths and weaknesses. . . . I was advanced for a freshman oboe student, with excellent technique, rhythm, and an ear for playing well in tune. Robinson didn’t assign me the music that would develop these skills while learning the basic oboe repertoire. Because his students played little more than the same old D in lessons, only a few had the wherewithal to perform even a short solo work” (Tindall 2005, 68-69). Later, in professional settings, the author thus often found herself faced with literature she didn’t know. She and others continued to study with Robinson more for the professional contacts than for what they learned about playing oboe and its literature.

<sup>49</sup> “I often feel angry about my early teachers who stressed nothing but technical exercises; they were leading me, they hoped, to the conservatory, but they finally drove me away from playing anything at all, for decades” (“Ben,” as quoted by Booth 1999, 89).

<sup>50</sup> “I could play it perfectly when I was practicing” or “I always make that mistake,” etc.

<sup>51</sup> Why do so many teachers assume that students know how to practice? Teaching students how to practice effectively and efficiently ought to be central to any pedagogy. Failure to improve practicing strategies leaves students in the situation of actually practicing many mistakes as mistakes, of being frustrated with an unreasonable lack of progress for the effort expended (especially in comparison to other interests competing for their time), unable to learn on their own in the future as adults, and thus represents the kind of malpraxis that results from failure to address a clearly central need.

<sup>52</sup> One caveat: All curricular action ideals amount to hypotheses of value that are diagnosed (hypothesized) as appropriate for a particular teaching situation or student. Such hypotheses can be found to be wrong: viz., that the ‘goods’ envisaged were not good, or were not achievable given the limiting conditions of the teaching/learning situation. In such cases, new curricular ideals need to be hypothesized and again ‘tested’ in action. Teaching methods and materials, too, are hypotheses. Sometimes those chosen are simply ill-suited to the needs at hand; others are suitable to the curricular ideals at stake, but require improved execution—more ‘practice’ by the teacher—in order to produce the hypothesized benefits. This duality of hypotheses, and the reflexivity demanded, points to an informal kind of action research for improving teaching where ends and means are constantly evaluated relative to each other: Are the ends sought or reached clearly good, and are they attainable given the limitations of the teaching/learning situation? If so, are the methods and materials aptly chosen and effectively employed?

<sup>53</sup> To reduce the tortured syntax of the formulation, “mindfully” can be omitted to the degree one understands “musically” to entail full mindfulness.

<sup>54</sup> One caution: the principle of the “need for achievement” (nAch) in psychology (McClelland 1961) stresses that people, particularly young people, have a need to succeed, to be “good at” something. Sometimes this need can be satisfied through musical performance without, on the other hand, making much of a lasting impact on the student’s long-term *musical* choices. Once a certain amount of recognition for achievement has been gained through musical performance in the adolescent years, then, too many students forsake performing and seek achievement recognition through other means, and their musical achievements are put behind them.

<sup>55</sup> See, for example, Odam & Banna (2005), which features just such scrutiny and research concerning the pedagogies typical of conservatory training.

<sup>56</sup> For a summary of this new field, see the MayDay Group webpage on “Music and Health,” <http://www.maydaygroup.org/php/ecolumns/musicandhealth.php>. As an example, in the US, the National Association of Teachers of Singing (NATS) has recognized that assigning operatic arias to young voices risks vocal damage since young voices are simply unsuited to the physical demands of that literature. Thus, in NATS competitions, school-age students are not allowed to sing standard operatic arias.

<sup>57</sup> Again, any profession that feels compelled to defend its relevance or function to society is already threatened by feedback concerning its irrelevance.