

Dewey's Bastards: Mursell, Broudy, McMurray, and the Demise of Progressive Music Education

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This paper explores the demise of progressive music education in America during the 1940s and 1950s, when philosopher John Dewey and other social progressives were being blamed by conservatives for a lack of educational standards that purportedly hampered the country's ability to fight the Cold War. Whereas Dewey had argued that the central purpose of education should be the creation of a politically informed and engaged citizenry as a check to government and corporate power and control, and that art education could be an important tool in that political project, conservatives contended that education needed to be harnessed in defense of democratic capitalism. The new educational emphasis was to be on the promotion of disciplinary knowledge, abstract thinking ability, and educational specialization—all of which were deemed useful to the Cold War effort—and not the fostering of democratic citizenship. Education was reconceived as a form “of social control rather than liberation” (Crist, 2003, p. 458). The story of the death of Dewey's educational philosophy is told through the writings of progressive music educator James Mursell, government education spokesperson Jerome Bruner, and prominent individuals involved in the shaping of the early aesthetic education movement that arose in response to the new educational regime. The paper concludes with a review and discussion of Dewey's philosophy to explain how those and subsequent educational reforms during the past half century have contributed to the political disfranchisement of children by keeping them in ignorance of real-world problems affecting them and society.

Keywords: progressive education, Cold War, aesthetic education, aesthetic experience, John Dewey, James Mursell, Harry Broudy, Charles Leonhard, Robert W. House, Foster McMurray, Jerome Bruner, Leonard B. Meyer, Richard Rorty, connoisseurship, pragmatism, conservative, Platonic realism, performativity, Reagan Revolution, Occupy Wall Street movement

One hears much nowadays about the Occupy Wall Street movement with its popular slogan “we are the 99%” that is challenging corporate greed and control over the western democracies. Their basic complaint is that the gap between the rich and poor has been increasing and that our respective countries are controlled by a tiny fraction of the population that owns most of the wealth but that remains unaccountable for its actions. In the years leading up to 2008, for example, corporate executives in the United States successfully lobbied politicians to deregulate markets, and this, coupled with low interest rates, contributed to a market meltdown and corporate bankruptcy on a scale not seen since the Great Depression. The subsequent Great Recession of 2008 made it necessary for governments to prop up big banks and major businesses with massive injections of public money (Stiglitz, 2010). Capitalism, to paraphrase philosopher John Dewey (1859-1952), had to be rescued from itself. Nevertheless, and while the aforementioned Recession was largely caused by corporate greed, the resulting economic reforms primarily benefitted the rich at the expense of the middle class and poor (Albritton, 2009).

Most music teachers, though, probably consider the Occupy Wall Street movement a fringe group that has nothing to do with them or education and that it should be ignored or, at best, tolerated in the name of free speech. They would be surprised to learn that Dewey, one of the founders of the progressive education movement, blamed capitalism for art’s segregation from the everyday experience of the masses, which he contended only contributed to their political emasculation. Yet, while American and Canadian music educators have long acknowledged their own indebtedness to Dewey’s philosophy, they have generally ignored his politics (e.g., Meyer, 1956; Leonhard & House, 1959/1972; Schwadron, 1967; Reimer, 1959, 1970, 1989; Woodford, 1994; Elliott, 1995).

This paper explores some of the history of music teachers' avoidance of Dewey's politics with reference to events leading to the demise of progressive education during the early Cold War. Between 1945 and 1960, progressive music education was supplanted by aesthetic music education, even as proponents of the latter philosophy continued to be drawn to Dewey's ideas about aesthetic experience. As readers will learn, among the factors that explain this inconsistency between Dewey's politics and music education philosophy and practice during those years were: 1) a propensity for musical and educational escapism among progressive music educators during the Great Depression and World War Two; 2) the rejection of Dewey's notion of participatory democracy by conservatives in the late 1940s and 1950s; 3) a corresponding reconceptualization of education as social control during the 1950s and early 1960s that worked to divert teachers' and students' attention away from social problems; and 4) Dewey's own occasional "pretense of neutrality" that may have misled the less informed into believing that his educational philosophy had more in common with the aesthetic education movement than was actually the case (Rorty, 1989, p. xi).

One reason why music teachers continued to be drawn to certain aspects of Dewey's philosophy after World War Two was that he had long championed music and the arts in education and was widely regarded as the unofficial national philosopher, "the guide, the mentor, and the conscience of the American people" (Commager as cited in Westbrook, 1991, p. xiv). On first consideration, it is thus tempting to interpret music educators' continued reliance on Dewey during the early Cold War as an act of professional loyalty, courage, and political resistance at a time when he was being blamed for all of the country's ills by conservatives wishing to push the country further to the political right. As readers will see, the uncomfortable truth of the matter is

that music teacher leaders bastardized his philosophy by deliberately ignoring or stripping away much of its political content, thereby rendering it politically correct and safe.

Those leading the early aesthetic education movement in music during the 1950s must surely have known that they were doing violence to Dewey's philosophy, even as they continued to cite him. Education philosopher Foster McMurray contributed a chapter on pragmatism to the landmark 1958 National Society for the Study of Education (NSSE) Yearbook, *Basic Concepts in Music Education*, that was in several respects consistent with Dewey's philosophy and critical of contemporary practice. Progressive music educator James Mursell (1893-1963), in his role as psychologist, also contributed a chapter on musical growth that was somewhat indebted to Dewey, although neither he nor his politics were mentioned. Among contributors to the book who were influential in the early aesthetic education movement were philosopher Harry Broudy and music educators Allen Britton, Robert House, and Charles Leonhard.

The latter two men had nothing to say about philosophy or Dewey in their own chapters, the topics of which—curriculum construction and evaluation in music education—were purely technical. But in their influential 1959 book *Foundations and Principles of Music Education* they drew on Dewey's conception of aesthetic experience to develop a vision for music education while deliberately rejecting his politics. Music education, they declared, had nothing to do with a democratic way life, except very indirectly, while musical groups were about “the most authoritarian groups in which one ever finds himself” (Leonhard & House, 1959/1972, p. 112). As described in *Foundations and Principles of Music Education*, their vision of music education was consistent with Broudy's Platonic realist conception of music education as connoisseurship in which children learned how to think like musical experts. According to this model, which is described later and contrasted with McMurray's pragmatism, teaching for political awareness or

other “extrinsic values” only led to “musical delinquency” (Leonhard & House, 1959/1972, p. 75).

Mursell’s “Apostle of Beauty”

This was a decidedly un-Deweyan social and educational agenda not only because it favored social and cultural elites but also because, to paraphrase Mursell (1950) in his earlier role as social philosopher, it led to the creation of only a handful of expert and oft-times self-centered musicians, rather than to the development of legions of interested and informed amateur musicians imbued with the democratic spirit. The music program, he advised, “should stand, above everything else, for a free, happy, humane association of people, young and old, who rejoice in one another’s successes, who bear with and seek to relieve one another’s weaknesses, and whose experience in working together with the art is transposed into an association for which the only adequate name is friendship” (Mursell, 1943b, p. 11). There was a need and role for expert musicians in all this, but “expertness is abortive” unless it contributes to the pursuit of that democratic ideal (Mursell, 1950, p. 22).

Mursell (1951) also warned that the pursuit of high levels of musical expertise implied increasing specialization, which would only relegate music to the periphery of the school “and more and more overshadowed by competing interests” (p. 24). Music should instead be “a vital and integral factor in general education,” he said, and “we must get out of our heads every vestige of the notion that we are trying to train low-grade professional musicians, and get into our heads the notion of promoting awareness of, and interest in, music on the largest possible scale” (p. 24). Music should be at the core of the curriculum of both school and university, while the role of the teacher and college professor was to create a vital and inclusive musical life throughout the institution. A university faculty or department of music that did not go beyond

training expert musicians, musicologists, and music teachers to engage the wider community was “betraying its most essential trust” (Mursell, 1944, p. 50).

“Catholicity of taste, sympathy, and understanding” (Mursell, 1934, p. 269) was the goal for music education, although Mursell was nonetheless clearly predisposed in favor of the classics. He sometimes appeared to contradict himself by claiming that the “true” or “ultimate aim of music education” was the development of high levels of expertise and musicality (Mursell, 1932, p. 11). Writing in the *Music Supervisors Journal* in 1932, for example, he argued that “if anyone wants to learn to write artistic and powerful English, he does so by writing numerous essays, stories, and so on, and above all by carrying each such undertaking to the highest attainable perfection” (p. 11). Elsewhere, however, he expressly warned against the pursuit of high levels of musical training as an end in itself because, while potentially “a most precious resource” for teachers, attempts to impose unrealistic vocal or technical demands on children, for example, would kill their natural impulse to sing (Mursell, 1950, p. 21). Rather, “our chief emphasis must be upon the emotional and expressive aspects of music” (Mursell, 1934, p. 59). “Every musical undertaking must involve cooperative effort for the very best results” (p. 158), which implied high standards, but these were relative and not preconceived, fixed, or imposed from without by politicians or teachers. The ideal was that each child should voluntarily seek to “do as well as he is able” (p. 159), which was the real measure of educational success.

Despite Mursell’s (1943b) earlier warnings about the dangers of expert music education models, narrow educational specialization, and the “Fascist-like routines of the professional symphony orchestra in our high school instrumental programs” (p. 10), music educators in the 1950s were for political and other reasons more receptive to Broudy’s realism than they were to

McMurray's pragmatism (Colwell, in press). Both of the latter two men's chapters in *Basic Concepts* give the appearance of political neutrality, even though McMurray was actually calling for the development of critical awareness in children by revealing how their musical preferences and tastes were often delimited by socio-economic factors. McMurray (1958), however, contradicted himself and obscured whatever political or socio-economic meanings music education might have by insisting that music be taught purely for its "unique," aesthetic qualities, which was something that Dewey would not have countenanced.

Mursell (1958), in his own chapter in *Basic Concepts*, may also have inadvertently contributed to a tendency of political avoidance among music teachers by declaring that "the purpose of all music teaching must be to bring about the evolution of musical responsiveness . . . to the tonal and rhythmic patterns which are the substance of the art of music" (p. 146). This sounds very similar to Broudy's (1958) connoisseurship, explained later, and also to Leonard Meyer's (1956) description of musical experience as outlined in his book *Emotion and Meaning in Music*. Meyer too drew on Dewey's philosophy to describe aesthetic experience but similarly bastardized it by treating it as isolated from politics and other forms of experience. Musical response was described as individualistic and not, as Dewey (1934) had conceived it, as occurring within the wider context of "collective civilization" (p. 346). Meyer's book, and also the aforementioned *Foundations and Principles* by Leonhard and House (1959/1972), subsequently proved seminal in the shaping of the newly emerging philosophy of music education as aesthetic education as eventually and best articulated by Bennett Reimer (1970).

Earlier in his career, though, in his role as philosopher, Mursell (1934) wrote that "the thing always to remember is that music in a vacuum, music for itself alone, music as a show, loses enormously in artistic [and thus also human interest and] values. In proportion as it

becomes woven into” and enriches “daily living, it acquires new artistic significance” (pp. 18-19). Writing during the middle of World War Two and speculating about the future of music education, he encouraged teachers to “emphasize its aesthetic values, its cultural values, its social values, its human values” (Mursell, 1943a, p. 15). Music was a tool for use in daily living and a potentially powerful means of communication, but it was clearly its spiritual and aesthetic content that mattered most to him. Further, and while insisting that music was a social art and thus susceptible to use or abuse, he consistently ignored or glossed over its potential for misuse. He was an incurable romantic and prone to uttering platitudes with respect to music’s potential for glorifying human life and for conveying “the essence of spiritual experience” (Mursell, 1941, p. 11). In an article published in *The Music Educators Journal* in 1941, for example, Mursell lauds music as “that wonderful creation of the human spirit” through which “man proclaims more intimately, more certainly, more triumphantly than in any other medium a certainty of the reality of good” (p. 10). Beethoven’s *Ninth Symphony* is said to be an expression of this “wordless creed in music” (p. 10), but Mursell seems oblivious to the fact that this same composition both before and during the war years had different meanings to the Germans, Soviets, and Americans and served opposing political agendas.

Similar statements abound in Mursell’s many publications relating to music education. In the abovementioned article speculating about the future of music education in postwar America, for example, music is described as an “adornment, an enhancement, an agency for elevation and delight” (Mursell, 1943a, p. 15). In the end, and despite his own admonition in *Basic Concepts* against “loose talk about the ‘therapeutic’ effects of music” (Mursell, 1958, p. 152), his primary goal was the promotion of “emotional stability and permanent happiness” (Mursell, 1934, p. 36) through musical growth. His ideal music teacher was an “apostle of beauty” who imparted

timeless truths and values to children while also teaching them to make constructive use of leisure time (p. 11). As is explained later, Dewey would have rejected this model as escapist because it ignored music's potential as social and political criticism.

More consistent with Dewey's philosophy was Mursell's (1944) call for a renewal of faith in progressive education among music teachers to ensure that the nation's schools were "attractive and available to all—to develop programs which are hospitable and inclusive rather than snobbish and exclusive" (p. 13). Convinced that the post-war government would want "to use the schools as a major instrumentality for reorienting the nation to the demands of peace" (p. 12), and that government was currently undecided with respect to the direction of education reform, Mursell called for the development of a concerted policy and effort to secure the future of progressive music education. Later, music teachers were urged to abandon all preconceptions about music teaching and learning and to ask themselves: "*What can music mean for the layman?* [italics his]" (Mursell, 1951, p. 24). By then, though, it was too late to save progressive education, as Dewey and other social progressives were already being blamed by conservatives for all of the country's ills, including a lack of educational standards that hampered the country's efforts to fight the Cold War. Education was to be an instrumentality for war—not peace—and the emphasis was to be on the development of expert specialists and not on the creation of an informed and educated citizenry that could make constructive use of leisure time.

One can only wonder how Mursell must have felt reading Thurber Madison's (1958) introductory chapter of *Basic Concepts* referring to "public criticism of some of the extremes of progressive education" (p. 23) and to the growing interest in science, educational specialization, and gifted children. Music educators were also clearly expected to conform to this new model and understanding of the purpose of education. The book's editor, Nelson Henry (1958), stated

that it was designed to promote “more effective orientation of instructional programs to accepted goals of formal education” (p. viii), while Madison (1958) described music teachers as “traditionally loyal to whatever seems to stand for the total philosophy of the schools” (p. 23). This was followed with an admonition that they develop a better understanding of the recent education reforms lest their effort to adapt them to music “come short of its intended mark” (p. 24).

It is also interesting to speculate about what Mursell would have said in response to his historiographer Vincent O’Keeffe’s (1970) claim that the progressive education movement was a victim of its own success—that by the late 1950s its ideas and precepts were by then “commonplace and accepted by a majority of educators” (pp. 254-255), and that the movement had therefore become obsolete. O’Keeffe also claimed that Mursell’s ideas were consistent with those of psychologist Jerome Bruner, who, during the late 1950s and early 1960s, was charged by government with spearheading the new education reforms. In his landmark books *The Process of Education* (1960) and *On Knowing: Essays for the Left Hand* (1962/1970), though, Bruner announced the death of Dewey’s educational philosophy!

Nevertheless, there is some truth to the assertion that Mursell’s ideas, as articulated in *Basic Concepts*, were consistent with those of Bruner, since both men conceived of education in terms of the structure of knowledge and of the development of the requisite perceptual skills and abilities. They differed considerably in political outlook, however, with respect to which social values and ends were most worth pursuing, or at least that was the case earlier in Mursell’s career, when Dewey figured most prominently in his thinking. Mursell’s book, *The Psychology of School Music Teaching* (Mursell & Glenn, 1931), co-written with Mabelle Glenn, for example, concludes with a discussion of “music education as an agency for creative democracy”

(p. 375). Democracy is defined in Deweyan terms as being less about a political structure as a way of life characterized by “wide and intimate sharing of experience, a social situation where lives may meet and may mutually refresh, instruct, inspire, and encourage one another” (p. 375). Bruner (1962/1970), though, scoffed at this notion of justifying “subject matter . . . in terms of its relation to the child’s social activities” and accused Dewey of misunderstanding “what knowledge is and how it may be mastered” (p. 121).

O’Keeffe (1970) would have readers believe that the progressive education movement died a natural death when it was a victim of events and politics as the country’s schools and universities were being “harnessed to the services of power” (Phenix, 1959, p. 270) to fight the Cold War. Following the 1958 National Defense Education Act, each school subject had to be reconceived as a discipline if it was to secure a place in the country’s schools, which meant that it had to be seen as politically neutral and as developing expertise and abstract thinking ability in children (Mark, 1999). The truth of the matter, of course, was that this conception of education was anything but politically neutral. Rather than preparing children to participate as democratic citizens and moral agents in the shaping of a more humane society, as Dewey and Mursell had long advocated, music education’s new political purpose became to “develop the useful powers of every individual” (Leonhard & House, 1959/1972, p. 75) so that America could better compete militarily, economically, and culturally with the Soviets and Europeans. Regrettably, by the time he was entering retirement in the late 1950s, Mursell appears to have had nothing to say about this or in defence of Dewey’s or his own politics. If his chapter in *Basic Concepts* is any indication, by 1958 he had finally conceded the defeat of progressive music education and had abandoned his former dual role as social philosopher and psychologist. His role was now that of developmental psychologist and purveyor of scientific truths.

Broudy's Connoisseurship vs. McMurray's Pragmatism

Given the culture of fear and the consensus politics of the early Cold War, it was almost inevitable that music teachers reading *Basic Concepts* would have been more attracted to Broudy's (1958) Platonic realism than to McMurray's (1958) pragmatism. Broudy's model was more consistent with the then prevailing democratic realist conception of government as rule by social elites and expert specialists. Music experts and connoisseurs, according to Broudy (1958), were "the only reliable source of standards" (p. 84) and thus the measure of educational success. This would have been anathema to Dewey, had he still been alive by then, as he was wary of experts, but also because realists contended that the masses were incapable of participating intelligently in public life, including art and music. Realists conceived of democracy and education as "means of social control rather than liberation" (Crist, 2003, p. 458), as the latter was thought to only lead to chaos and weakness. Bruner's (1962/1970) book *On Knowing*, described in greater length at the conclusion of this paper, epitomized this conception of government and education as social control and involving the development of expert specialists. In this new political and world order, there was no room in education for "the child-centered and sometimes mawkish compassion of Dewey" (p. 163)!

McMurray (1958) shared Dewey's faith in the intelligence of the common man and woman, but he was not immune to the new educational rhetoric and agreed with Broudy that greater specialization was needed. McMurray (1958) may have even contributed to Broudy's success by admonishing music teachers to keep their own counsel and not to seek inspiration and guidance from philosophers and psychologists, because they were currently "at theoretical odds" and would only frustrate the development of a "unified perspective" (p. 36). The latter's disputes would only confuse matters by diverting music teachers' attention away from their own

discipline and its problems. Experts and specialists from other disciplines were similarly to be avoided, owing to lack of musical and educational competence. This was clearly a strategy to secure a place for music education in the schools, but it was a hypocritical and possibly self-serving statement for McMurray to make, considering he was a philosopher and not a music educator. However, it was politically correct for the times and, although probably unintentional, served the interests of those in power by discouraging the wider professional discussion and debate that music teachers needed to understand the new education reforms and their political implications.

McMurray's pragmatism also shared other features with Broudy's realist agenda. Tellingly, a book reviewer at the time observed that, although they seemed to disagree, "they both arrive at the same ultimate goal: the appreciation of 'good music'" (Spivacke, 1959, p. 250). Only serious music, that is, subtle and refined "music that possesses the strongest aesthetic content" (McMurray, 1991, p. 60), was educative. The difference between them was primarily in how teachers and their students were to arrive at that goal. Whereas Broudy (1958) preached reliance on musical experts who were to impose their standards, preferences, and tastes onto children until such time as they were ready to decide their "own tastes on the basis of experience and knowledge" (p. 85), McMurray (1958) argued that this was only possible if children were made aware of the often subtle social forces that shaped their musical tastes and understandings. The teacher's job was to "show his pupils what is to be found in music when obstacles to perception are removed and when the learned capacity to attend and to hear has been developed" (p. 43).

This was a political agenda for music education, albeit not expressly stated in those terms. A quarter of a century later, in *Basic Concepts in Music Education II*, McMurray (1991)

was far more explicit in blaming capitalism for an “oppressive and demeaning” (p. 61) prejudice embedded in mass culture that persuaded working and middle class children that serious music was only for the talented and for social and economic elites. According to the prevailing capitalist scheme, the middle class were more educable than the working class, but neither class of children was in need of “refined tastes in music and art” (p. 61). Broudy’s realist conception of music education as the pursuit of excellence only perpetuated the existing social hierarchy by teaching the masses of children to “accept their humble place[s]” (p. 65) as second or third class citizens. Excellence was by definition only attainable by the few. All of this, however, is veiled in McMurray’s (1958) chapter. Given the anti-Communist hysteria and witch-hunts of the 1950s, it could have been politically dangerous to criticize capitalism in those terms.

Dewey: No “Beauty Parlor”

Dewey (1934) also believed in cultivating the tastes of the masses, whom he regarded as innately intelligent but frustrated in their development by a capitalist system that created a “chasm between ordinary and esthetic experience” (p. 10) that stifled perception of aesthetic qualities implicit in everyday work and life. The resulting aesthetic deficit rendered work a drudgery for most. “Oligarchic control from the outside of the processes and the products of work,” he argued, “is the chief force in preventing the worker from having that intimate interest in what he does and makes that is an essential prerequisite of esthetic satisfaction” (p. 343). The quality of everyday life and work would be significantly improved if workers were allowed some measure of control over the design and production of the goods they made and were “richly endowed in capacity for enjoying the fruits of collective work” (p. 344).

This was a radical call for educational and political empowerment of the masses through art, beginning with their own experience rather than with the so-called ‘serious’ music and art of

experts and social elites. Dewey (1934) was less prone than McMurray to making rigid distinctions between good and bad art, between use and enjoyment, and between art and daily living, rather the opposite. His goal was to re-establish “the continuity of esthetic experience with normal processes of living” (p. 10), and including objects in daily use and enjoyment. As stated in *Experience and Nature*,

Capacity to offer to perception meaning in which fruition and efficacy interpenetrate is met by different products in various degrees of fullness; it may be missed altogether by pans and poems alike. The difference between the ugliness of a mechanically conceived and executed utensil and of a meretricious and pretentious painting is one only of content or material. (Dewey, 1929/1958, p. 378)

Dewey thus did not idealize or reify fine art. “Any activity that is productive of objects whose perception is an immediate good, and whose operation is a continual source of enjoyable perception of other events exhibits fineness of art” (p. 365). But neither was he proposing a crass commercialism, which was also attributable to art’s segregation from ordinary life in that the masses were driven by their aesthetic hunger “to seek the cheap and vulgar” (Dewey, 1934, p. 6). He would have regarded the term serious music as pretentious and a product of “pigeon-hole theories of art” that exacerbated the problem of art’s segregation from the daily living of the masses by fostering “a ready-made compartmentalization” of music or by spiritualizing “it out of connection with the objects of concrete experience” (p. 11). Both tendencies only reinforced the misperception among the masses that art was foreign to their experience and the word aesthetic “a synonym for something artificial” (p. 13). He frowned upon the notion of connoisseurship, because it implied highly specialized training and a snobbish cult of the deliberately esoteric (p. 238). If theory were to contribute to art’s comprehension, it would have to start with “experience of the common or mill run of things to discover the esthetic qualities such experience possesses”

(p. 11) and not with ecstatic eulogies of acknowledged masterworks. “Even a crude experience,” he famously quipped, “if authentically an experience, is more fit to give a clue to the intrinsic nature of aesthetic experience than is an object already set apart from any other mode of experience” (p. 11). Similarly, a philosophy of art, and thus also of art education, is sterile “unless it makes us aware of the function of art in relation to other modes of experience, and unless it indicates why this function is so inadequately realized, and unless it suggests the conditions under which the office would be successfully performed” (p. 12).

McMurray (1956), though, in an earlier article published in *The Journal of Research in Music Education*, rejected Dewey’s instrumentalism and experimentalism, accusing him of “inconsistency and inadequacy as [an] educational theorist” (p. 110) and insisting that music be taught strictly for its own sake, as pure, unadulterated sound. Like Broudy (1958), Leonhard and House (1959/1972), and generations of music teachers to come, McMurray conceived of music appreciation “in terms of a strictly personal relation between. . . selected works and a particular individual” and thus missed “a sense of the *way* [*sic*] in which art exercises its humane function” (Dewey, 1934, p. 346). He misconstrued Dewey’s (1920/1950) definition of education as a growth process that “renders its subject capable of further education: more sensitive to conditions of growth and more able to take advantage of them” (p. 146) as suggesting that the role of the music teacher was simply to promote musical growth for its own sake. The pursuit of non-musical goals such as democratic citizenship, McMurray (1956) opined, amounted to educational philistinism.

To Dewey (1920/1950), however, the educative process was “all one with the moral process” (p. 145). Education should prepare children as moral agents who could help to create a better world, which was a profoundly political purpose that implied the breaking down of the

barriers between school and society, art and politics (Dewey, 1929/1958, p. 363). Art education had moral and political purpose in that it developed imagination, which was “the chief instrument of the good” (Dewey, 1934, p. 348). “The first stirrings of dissatisfaction and the first intimations of a better future,” he wrote, “are always found in works of art” (pp. 345-346). It is true that Dewey was dubious about direct criticism of current conditions through art.

Philosophers might do that directly, but artists should do so indirectly,

by disclosure, through imaginative vision addressed to imaginative experience (not to set judgment) of possibilities that contrast with actual conditions. A sense of possibilities that are unrealized and that might be realized are when they are put in contrast with actual conditions, the most penetrating ‘criticism’ of the latter that can be made. (p. 346)

These social, moral, and political functions of art, however, cannot be fully realized “as long as art is the beauty parlor of civilization” (p. 344).

Dewey admittedly may have contributed to the confusion about his politics and art in that, as Rorty (1989) observes, there is a tension in his work between his roles as social activist and the “philosopher as politically neutral theoretician—a specialist in, and authority upon, such peculiarly philosophical topics as the rules of logic, the nature of science, or the nature of thought” (p. x). *How We Think* (Dewey, 1933/1989), often called ‘the bible’ of the progressive education movement, gives the impression of political neutrality with its description of reflective thinking as based on the scientific method. Elsewhere, though, Dewey is

remarkably frank in commending the philosophy of education embodied in *How We Think* as one calculated to change the character of American institutions—to move society to the political left by moving successive generations of students to the left of their parents.” (Rorty, 1989, pp. xi-xii)

This façade of political neutrality in that particular book may have been constructed for strategic political and professional reasons, but it left him open to charges of “making socialist

propaganda and disguising it as a ‘philosophical,’ and thus presumably neutral, discussion of the nature of thought” (p. xii).

There may be a certain truth to this charge of propaganda, since Dewey in the 1920s and 1930s knew that he was locked in an ideological struggle with conservatives for the hearts and minds of Americans, as did Mursell (1939). However, it is just as likely a reflection of the ambiguity in his own career as he straddled his two professional roles as social activist and sage. As Rorty (1989) explains,

Dewey was, in some measure, forced to acquiesce in the role of neutral specialist. He had to accept, and make use of, his role as sage, even while insisting that the image of sage [as discoverer of objective truths] was a relic of undesirable and obsolete ways of thinking. (p. xi)

The important thing here is that he was aware of the tensions and ambiguities between these professional roles and “moved insouciantly back and forth between them” (p. xi) according to his needs. One could make a similar point about Mursell (1958) during the last years of his career, that his chapter in *Basic Concepts* was intended to give the pretence of political neutrality. However, as already suggested, it was more likely an indication of the reformers’ success in setting the terms for education through increased professional specialization and a “more orthodox adherence to the principles of science and objectivity” (Faye, 2011, p. 12).

Dewey’s “pretense of neutrality” notwithstanding, music education leaders during the 1950s must have known of his political project because it was spelled out in *Art As Experience* (1934) as well as in many other of his books and essays throughout the first half of the century, including *Democracy and Education* (1916/1921), *The Public and Its Problems* (1927/1946), “Shall We Abolish School Frills?” (1933/1986d), “Education for a Changing Social Order” (1934/1986b), “The Social-Economic Situation and Education” (Dewey & Childs, 1933/1989), and “No Half-Way House” (1934/1986c), to name only a few. In “Education and Social Change”

(1937/1939), for example, the utopian belief that schools can be politically neutral is roundly criticized as contributing to the

perpetuation of disorder and increase in blind because unintelligent conflict. Practically, moreover, the weight of such action falls upon the reactionary side. Perhaps the most effective way of reinforcing reaction under the name of neutrality, consists in keeping the upcoming generations ignorant of the conditions in which they live and the issues they have to face. This effect is more pronounced because it is subtle and indirect; because [as we have seen with Broudy's model of connoisseurship] neither teachers nor those taught are aware of what they are doing and what is being done to them. (p. 696)

It is important to understand that Dewey was not proposing that the schools actually align themselves with political parties. Rather, instead of diverting children's attention from the world and its problems, schools should challenge them to explore the often contentious social and political issues of the day (Dewey & Childs, 1933/1989, pp. 46-47). This would be no easy task for teachers. Even in his own time Dewey (1937/1939) encountered resistance from teachers who complained that this politicization of curriculum was fraught with difficulty and was probably futile. This professional intransigence among teachers always surprised him, because it showed "a profound lack of faith" (p. 696) in their own potential and that of the schools to contribute to the improvement of social conditions, in other words, that teaching and education could really matter.

To this very day, music teachers and undergraduates are still reluctant to talk about how music and music education relate to politics (Jorgensen, 2004). Were he alive today, Dewey would attribute this tendency of political avoidance to decades of indoctrination brought about by an institutional overemphasis on abstract thinking at the expense of critical analyses of real world social problems. In *Art as Experience*, Dewey (1934) complained about "theories which isolate art and its appreciation by placing them in a realm of their own" because, once

institutionalized and “embedded in. . . habits of life” (p. 10), people assume that art’s segregation from other forms of experience is inherent in, or natural to, it rather than an imposition from without.

During the early Cold War, American music teachers quickly realized that if their subject was to have a place in the schools and universities, it had to be reconstrued as a discipline and that they had play by those rules. In a very short time, and with hardly any discussion or debate whatsoever, American music teachers enthusiastically rallied “under the banner of aesthetic education” (McCarthy & Goble, 2002, p. 20) with its belief that music had an objective existence of its own, untainted by everyday human values, and that it was therefore only natural that it should be segregated from politics and other forms of experience. The trouble with this model of education, Dewey (1934) warned, was that it politically emasculated individuals by rendering them uninformed and passive:

Compartmentalization of occupations and interests brings about separation of that mode of activity commonly called ‘practice’ from insight, of imagination from executive doing, of significant purpose from work, or emotion from thought and doing. Each of these, too, has its own place in which it must abide. Those who write the anatomy of experience then suppose that these divisions inhere in the very constitution of human nature. (pp. 20-21)

Few teachers during the early Cold War and continuing to the present realized that this educational emphasis on objectivity and disciplinary knowledge was a deliberate attempt by what today would be called neoliberals and neoconservatives to impose a level of social control over education and, thereby, over society. This was actually spelled out to some extent in Bruner’s (1960, 1962/1970) books, *The Process of Knowledge* and *On Knowing: Essays for the Left Hand*, although the political implications were somewhat masked by his doublespeak about achieving mastery over the world and its resources in the name of peace and progress. The new

emphases on objectivity and social control through disciplinary knowledge and expertise subsequently had a profound impact on curriculum development and classroom practice in American and other schools and universities for generations to come.

One of the keys to achieving social control is actually identified in the latter book in a chapter entitled “The Control of Human Behavior,” wherein Bruner (1962/1970) proffers that it is not so much money that shapes behavior as it is

the nature of the job. . . . One gets a job as a mailman and one ‘behaves mailman,’ or if one is hired as a professor, one behaves that way. In time one develops what the French have long called *une deformation professionnelle*, a set of habits and outlooks to match the requirements of the job. One also develops an expectancy of support. To assure that the behaving is ‘professor’ or ‘mailman’ we use the coercive technique of withdrawal or reduction in support. (p. 147)

This is similar to what postmodernists call performativity, whereby knowledge and truth claims are legitimated by the rules of the game or discipline in question. The trick for those wishing to establish social control over the teaching profession and the masses is to be in a position to set the rules of the game so that the desired thoughts and behaviors become self-perpetuating and, because endlessly repeated, assumed as natural (Lyotard, 1984/1996, pp. 491-493).

This was what happened to Mursell and to other educators during the early Cold War, and again during the economic and cultural crises of the 1980s that provided the impetus for the standards movement. In the 1980s, consensus politics and fear mongering made it possible for those on the right of American politics to set the terms for all education by narrowly conceiving the role of the teacher as a purveyor of facts, disciplinary knowledge, and abstract skills and abilities. Today, as during the late 1950s and early 1960s, “the prevailing ideal” for government and education is “good management . . . based on confidence in the application of trained intelligence” (Bruner, 1962/1970, p. 164), which, because of the increasing prevalence of

scientific technology, “involves increasing dependence upon specialism” (p. 162). In this ‘brave new world,’ teachers are too isolated and busy helping students achieve mastery over disciplinary knowledge and abstract skills to have much time for moral judgment, community building, or for political dissatisfaction or protest with respect to educational and social inequality (p. 165). Nor, because education is conceived entirely in terms of preparation for the future, are students encouraged to live in and to enjoy the present (Dewey, 1920/1950, pp. 145-146).

Among the important lessons that music teachers should realize from the demise of the progressive education movement are that policy, curriculum, and pedagogy are never politically neutral and that, if they are to ensure that their own programs are in the best interests of the masses rather than the rich and powerful, they will have to learn more about their own histories and how their own understandings of professional practice have always been shaped by local, national, and global politics and interests. As Max Kaplan (1966) observed almost half a century ago, music teachers have “always tended to live now and think later” (p. 8). However, if music teachers are to avoid Mursell’s mistake during the 1940s of failing to anticipate the use of schools as an instrument for social control and war rather than for peace, they must pay closer and critical attention to national and international politics, economics, and events. If not, they will continue to jump on the proverbial bandwagon of education reform without giving due consideration to its implications for them, their students, and society.

Considerable soul-searching is also in order if teachers are to ensure that their programs and pedagogical practices work to foster good democratic, rather than corporate, citizens by promoting critical awareness of social inequities, such as the Occupy Wall Street movement has been proposing. McMurray (1991) was right that students should learn how capitalist and other

powerful interests often shape their tastes and understandings of music and of the world.

American teachers should also realize that their own avoidance of political issues relating to socio-economic class and distribution of wealth and educational resources was shaped, at least in part, by conservatives during the 1950s and 1980s. “One of the intellectual victories of the Reagan Revolution,” Freeland (2011) reminds us, “was to make it feel practically un-American to talk about how the pie was divided” (p. E6). Conservatives are still playing that political card today to silence those calling for a more equitable re-distribution of the wealth through increased corporate regulation and higher taxes for the rich.

McMurray and Mursell were both right that teachers and teachers-in-training should learn how the hierarchical and authoritarian structure of traditional large ensembles may work to teach the majority of students to accept their humble places as second or third class musical citizens. Mursell (1951) was also right in observing that those same ensembles—because too narrow and exclusive—may continue to relegate music to the periphery of the school. Teachers and university faculty should instead think big and work to promote critical awareness and musical participation involving all manner of activity and levels of ability “on the largest possible scale” (p. 24) and far beyond the music program, school, and university.

Finally, music teachers will have to become more sceptical and critical of authority and of their own professional organizations while demonstrating a greater willingness to engage in wider professional and public debate about social values and the corresponding direction of music education and of education in general. For to repeat Dewey’s warning, and notwithstanding McMurray’s (1958) advice to music teachers to keep their own counsel, avoidance of controversy and debate will only serve to maintain the status quo by keeping all concerned in ignorance of what they are doing and of what is being done to them. Mursell

understood the importance of this as he doggedly defended progressive education almost to the bitter end. Of all his publications, the one that is most inspiring, because politically charged, courageous, and still relevant to our own political experience today, is his 1939 article “The Defeat of the Schools” that boldly challenged the conservative educational view that educational success can only be achieved through “high pressure and rigid requirements” (para 41). The parallel with our own time of neoliberal globalization with its emphases on national and international standards, standardized testing, educational specialization and competition, and vocational training is obvious and requires no elaboration. It will suffice to simply restate Dewey’s (1933/1986a) admonition to government and teachers that “bankers and outside pecuniary interests” (p. 134) should never be permitted to dictate social and educational policy.

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