

Music Education as/for Artistic Citizenship

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Another Perspective

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by David J. Elliott

If music education is going to meet its full potential in the twenty-first century, then we may need to rethink our assumptions about the central values of school music. In other words, I am less concerned at the moment with what and how we teach—by means of, say, bands, choirs, iPad orchestras, Orff, jazz ensembles, Suzuki, composing, listening, improvising, world musics, Standards, and so forth—and more concerned with revisiting *why* we do, or should do, any of these things.

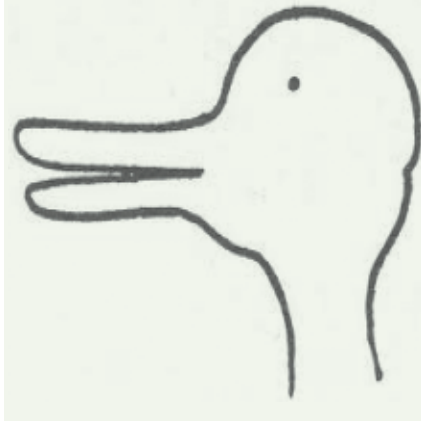
Please do not misunderstand me. I fully support all effective, educative, and ethical ways of teaching and learning music, as well students' critically reflective and democratic engagement with a reasonable diversity of musical styles and pieces, as I explain in *Music Matters* and elsewhere.¹ What I am suggesting here, however, is that we may have unrealized opportunities and responsibilities to integrate traditional means and ends—to integrate musical processes, products, experiences, and outcomes—in the service of additional or alternative aims.

Let me elaborate my point from another angle. Anything in the world, including worthy endeavors like music education, can be seen and interpreted in many ways. Look at the image shown in Figure 1.²

Perhaps you see this image as a duck, a rabbit, a dog, or something else. Perhaps you see it from a top-down perspective, as if you are flying overhead in a helicopter. If so, the image might look like a lake with small rivers at the side and a boat

FIGURE 1

Anything can be seen and interpreted in many ways.



or a swimmer's head in the water. If you play golf, you might look down and see a large golf green (or a sand trap) with a ball on the surface. Many interpretations are possible.

Whatever your answer(s), the more illusive question this diagram fails to answer is *why*? Why do you interpret this image in the ways you do? The short answer is that perceptions are simultaneously cognitive, emotional, social, cultural, political, embodied, and so on. In a nutshell, what we see or believe is largely a matter of what we have learned to see or believe as a result of all our informal and formal life experiences.

What does this mean for music education? For one thing, it means that all the important beliefs and assumptions that

anchor and drive our decisions about what and how to teach and learn in the music classroom and beyond are open to multiple interpretations. Depending on the perspectives that a teacher uses to envision music education, his or her view of aims, values, teaching strategies, curriculum, assessment, and so forth may be well-informed, reasonable, broad, deep, or not. Which perspective is best? This is for each one of us to decide, revisit, and re-decide based on our critically reflective considerations of what we know, what we think we know, and most important, what is most educative and ethical for our students, which brings me back to my main concern.

Regardless of the ways we choose to interpret the what and how of music education, the logically prior question we must always keep asking ourselves is *why* are we doing the things we do? There is a wide range of options. Some teachers may answer by saying that we teach music to motivate students' love of creative music-making and listening, or deepen students' musical-affective experiences, or win state festivals, or raise students' math scores and future salary prospects, or prepare students for lifelong musical learning. I will not debate these options here, but suggest another answer, which teachers may or may not wish to consider when they envision the aims and values of music and education. The term I use to label my answer and to indicate where I am heading is *music education as/for artistic citizenship*. Please note that when I use *artistic*, I mean *all* forms of music-making and

listening and *all* types of formal and informal musical interactions at *all* levels in schools and communities. More specifically, music education as/for artistic citizenship includes three related themes:

1. Music-making for intrinsic musical experiences is a key aim of music education, but it is not enough. We should also prepare students to “put their music to work” for the betterment of other people’s lives and social well-being.
2. Music educators should help students conceive and practice “music-making as ethical action” for social justice.
3. We should aim to infuse school music with an “ethic of care”—care for oneself and for the health of our social communities.

Where do these themes originate? For me and many other writers, the themes of artistic citizenship derive primarily from the concept of “praxis,” which originated with the Greeks in general and Aristotle in particular. Many other philosophers (e.g., Martin Heidegger, William James, John Dewey, Joseph Dunne, Richard Bernstein, and Paulo Freire) have refined and expanded the concept. Thus, common translations of praxis as “to do” or “to make” are partly correct, but simplistic. Fully understood, praxis combines several integrated themes: (1) active reflection and critically reflective action dedicated to (2) human well-being and flourishing, (3) the ethical care of others, and (4) the positive empowerment and transformation of people and their everyday lives.

Thus, praxial music education conceives the musical actions we carry out and teach—performing, improvising, composing, arranging, listening, leading, conducting, recording, moving, and dancing (when applicable)—in two integrated ways: (1) as actions embedded in and creatively responsive to both the traditional and the ever-changing musical-cultural values of musical pieces and processes and (2) as actions that should be conceived, taught, guided, and applied ethically for the positive transformation of students’ individual and community lives.

When music education is ethically guided—when we teach not only in music (i.e., to do music) and about music but also (and crucially) *through* music—we empower people to pursue what many philosophers throughout history consider to be the highest human values: a virtuous life well lived, a life of well-being, flourishing, fulfillment, and constructive happiness for the benefit of oneself and others. In other words, praxial music education includes but goes beyond the preparation of students for lifelong engagement in amateur music-making and listening of all kinds. Praxial music education is guided by an informed and ethical disposition to act musically and educatively with continuous concern for improving human well-being in as many ways as possible—artistic, social, cultural, ethical, political, and so forth.

Although these themes may seem impractical to some, the fact is that more and more school and community music educators are, in fact, succeeding in their efforts to teach music in relation to the themes that underpin the nature and values of praxis, praxial music education, and music education as/for artistic citizenship.

The Big Picture

Consider the vast spectrum of local, national, and world problems: violence, poverty, starvation, disease, environmental disasters, gender and racial discrimination, and so forth. How do school and community music programs help students, families, and communities address and deal with these fundamental human problems? Can creative music-making and teaching make a contribution?

In general, we focus our energy on empowering students to make and listen to music for their personal satisfaction. We teach musical skills and understandings using many different methods, musics, and technologies, which we continuously refine and update. Music teacher education programs prepare students to teach bands, choirs, orchestras, pop and rock music, new computer music technologies, and so on. When these efforts are carried out in educative and ethical ways, they are entirely worthy of support.

However, and notwithstanding the profound values of learning, experiencing, and producing musical beauty of all kinds, let me be provocative for a moment and ask the question that Miles Davis made famous on his album *Kind of Blue*: “So what?” Viewed in the context of today’s profound social problems, how is music education making a significant difference? Many forms of music education seem rather insular and narrow. Music and music education are often set on a pedestal, out of touch with real-world problems. Is this a good thing? I think not. And I am not alone. For example, in addition to arguing against a simplistic split between means and ends, John Dewey was opposed to the separation of art and life.³ A central tenet of Dewey’s philosophy was to “recover the continuity” between the arts and the processes, products, and needs of people’s everyday lives.⁴ Are there ways we can add social and ethical weight to some of the things we do? Yes, but doing so involves several steps, which include unpacking the words *artistic* and *citizenship*.

Artistic Citizenship?

At first glance, *artistic citizenship* may seem like a contradiction in terms.⁵ Why? First, *artistic* often conjures up romantic and sanitized images of musicians as unique, isolated, and mysterious individuals. From this perspective, all musicians, including music students, may seem more or less “odd” to laypeople. We are often perceived as having magical gifts that allow us to perform, improvise, compose, and otherwise make sounds that move people in deep and exceptional ways. This is true to a point, but most popular portrayals of musicians are naive.

Second, people often use *artistic* narrowly to mean extraordinary levels of musical expertise, or classical masterpieces, or complex musical structures. From this viewpoint, any values outside “the music itself” are merely social or extramusical and, therefore, not to be taken seriously. However, the counterargument made by most of today’s leading musical scholars is that since all music, including classical music, is made by people, with people, and for people who

live in specific historical-cultural times and places, musical sounds are always inherently multidimensional social, cultural, political, gendered, and economic constructions.⁶

This does *not* mean that we cannot or should not listen to pieces or performances for the beauty of their musical structures and expressive details. It means that in addition to learning to make, interpret, and listen to formal and expressive features, the concept of “artistic” can and should apply more broadly to the music that all people (students, amateurs, and professionals) listen to, perform, improvise, compose, arrange, conduct, and record for a wide range of human purposes across cultures, as the majority of today’s “new musicologists,” theorists, and music philosophers maintain.

The paradoxical nature of artistic citizenship comes into sharper focus when we examine the basic meanings of *citizenship*, which contrast sharply with conventional meanings of *artistic*. As Richard Schechner explains, citizenship emphasizes that a person is *not* an isolated individual.⁷ A citizen is part of a larger community. The idea of “being a citizen” originally developed around the need to unite people with varying beliefs to protect shared values and motivate beneficial community actions. So when someone says, “I am an American citizen,” it means that he or she has a degree of commitment to a constituted group of people, or what we call “a nation.” Of course, this does not mean that all citizens share exactly the same beliefs. Citizens must agree on only two things: “that the polity is worth preserving, and that preserving it requires participating in its governance.”⁸ In return, citizens receive the advantages and responsibilities of being part of something much larger than themselves—a homeland—that many are willing to die for. This is the first and most straightforward meaning of citizenship, but there is much more to consider.

Citizenship Expanded

In reality, citizenship is a multidimensional concept. It includes personal, social, cultural, historical, embodied, eth-

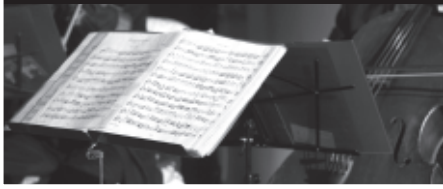
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ical, and emotional dynamics and commitments that ebb and flow as a person’s and a nation’s circumstances change.⁹ Also, citizenship is infused with images, symbols, metaphors, longings, memories, myths, heroes and heroines, anthems, marches, slogans, and stock characters, for example, the warrior, the hardworking immigrant, the dangerous alien, and the nomad. Thus, citizenship is an ambiguous and fluid phenomenon, especially when citizens interact to create multiple citizenships or “subcitizenships”—local, regional, institutional, national, international, and professional.

What citizenships do you hold and practice? In addition to your American or Canadian citizenship (or whatever), you are also a citizen of your local community, school, and faculty, as well as the domain called music education. In each case, you have privileges and responsibilities that you may or may not choose to accept.

Bad Citizenship

An expanded concept of citizenship is not only more realistic; it also opens a range of possibilities, including the possibility

that a citizen could deliberately choose to engage in acts of “bad citizenship” to improve the conditions of his or her social group, including injustices of race and gender discrimination, poverty, abuse, bullying, violence, and so on.

Fredrick Douglas, Henry David Thoreau, and Albert Einstein supported actions of bad citizenship to various degrees, if and when needed. Thoreau originated the concept and practice of civil disobedience, which he viewed as acting as an “oppositional” citizen for the betterment of the larger citizenry.¹⁰ That is, and ideally, civil disobedience draws attention to and moves the majority to perceive how bad specific conditions really are. By suffering the inevitable consequences, “good-bad” citizens can often spotlight, pressure, subvert, attack, and overturn unjust laws, policies, and politicians, among other things. Martin Luther King Jr. and Mahatma Gandhi led millions in courageous, masterful, and successful “performances” of resistance, or bad citizenship (in the context of prevailing norms), that changed their nations and the world. By courage and example, Rosa Parks sparked a key event in the U.S. civil rights movement. Consider what

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should we follow? Can we be perfectly law-abiding with regard to our nations, communities, and profession and also be bad citizens of, for, and through music and music education? Yes. To start with a very simple example, some people (e.g., some benefactors of symphony orchestras) might argue that composers, conductors, and performers of radical new musics are bad musical citizens because they intentionally challenge the status quo of the "great music" establishment. Composers and performers of protest music are often seen in the same light. And in what ways is it possible or appropriate to be a bad citizen of "the state" called music education? I leave it to you to reflect critically and/or act on possibilities.

Moving toward Answers

The mysteries of musical ability and the intrinsic values of music do not prevent or excuse us from teaching all forms of music-making for the betterment of our social communities. We can have the best of both. In fact, many music makers—students, teachers, amateurs, and professionals—already make music in Henry Thoreau-type ways, meaning that they apply their musical abilities, and the emotional powers of music, to resist or subvert the harmful conventions and politics of their locations, or create various forms and degrees of musical-civil disobedience and "musical-ethical spectacles." There are many examples. Think of Pete Seeger's protest songs and performances, which were intended to alert, inform, and move listeners—to move listeners emotionally and to move them to act against the oppressions of American social and political policies of the time. The West-East Divan Orchestra, founded by Daniel Barenboim and Edward Said, is a youth orchestra that unites young musicians in politically and religiously opposed countries of the Middle East. To Barenboim, "music has an intimate life with politics. It is unthinkable that a political project would be influential and resonant without the legitimacy and power of music and the arts."¹¹

Before offering more examples, let me reemphasize some key points. I am *not*

is happening now in Egypt, Libya, Syria, and other nations—thousands of good-bad citizens are fighting and dying for the betterment of their families, communities, and homelands.

These thoughts lead to yet another concept of citizenship, which I will introduce with several questions: Is there a

specific kind of citizenship that applies to musicians and music educators? Or do our mysterious talents and the artistic values of music exempt us from the responsibilities embedded in citizenship and the social-political-ethical potentials of music and music education? If not, what responsibilities do we have and what practices

saying we should replace any viable and ethical way of teaching music that is aimed at lifelong musical participation and personal fulfillment. I am suggesting that we should aim to make additional contributions to and changes in society. This means expanding our vision of musical means and ends and heightening our students' understandings of why, what, and how to implement the powers of music and music education as/for artistic citizenship.

Again, I am not alone in making these suggestions. John Dewey, Richard Shusterman, Wayne Bowman, Thomas Regelski, Tia DeNora, and many other scholars and musicians argue that music and the other arts should *not* be placed on an aesthetic pedestal, above the everyday world, isolated for contemplation and consumption in concert halls and museums. This statement is *not* a rejection of classical music, or masterworks, or concert hall performances, or musical organizations that embrace all or some of these mainstays. Rather, my statement is intended to mean that the powers and values of music and the other arts include and exceed conventional notions of art. To Dewey, the values of music (poetry, painting, dance, and so on) do not reside solely in what Westerners typically conceive as "art objects." Rather, the values of music and other artistic pursuits are to be found in the dynamic social-experiential activities through and in which music is made, experienced, and *put to work* for a variety of overlapping and interweaving human purposes and benefits—practical, democratic, social, cultural, ethical, and so forth. Viewed from this perspective, music and music education gain even more value and significance. By integrating music and music education with all aspects of social life and community, we do not forfeit music's greatness and profundity; we fortify and increase it.

If this seems utopian, be aware that music educators around the world are already practicing artistic citizenship. And consider the words of the eminent educator and social activist Jean Anyon: "The utopian thinking of yesteryear becomes the common sense of today."¹² Utopian dreams of freedom were in the minds, hearts, actions, and music of enslaved



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black people in the early 1800s. Because of their visionary thinking, slavery was officially abolished sixty years later, an event that continues to fuel many movements for social change in the United States and around the world. Far from being useless, visionary thinking is a necessary prelude to the transformation of people's lives.

"Particip-action"

What needs emphasis now is that raising people's consciousness about bad laws, corruption, poverty, disease, oppression, and other societal injustices through intellectualizing, reading, dialogue, and talk is not enough. As sociologist Doug

McAdam says, “people’s personal identities *transform* as they become socially *active*, and actions for social justice create new categories of participants and political action groups: identities modify in the course of social interaction.”¹³ People—including music students and music educators—develop a social-political identity and commitment from walking, marching, singing, or otherwise working musically with others toward effective and ethical social change. Note, too, that young people are often at the heart of many successful social movements. For example, in the ranks of protestors in the civil rights movement were many young men and women, including college students. Thousands of protesters in the Middle East today are young people who combine many forms of culture and media—music, visual art, dance, and social media—in fighting oppression.

As music educators, we are fortunate to work with energetic young people, and all of us work with music’s powers of emotional arousal and expression, which, in turn, can fire the engines of social arousal and expression. But what do we do with these potential powers? Often, we focus our efforts on preparing students to perform “Lincolnshire Posy,” or identify musical elements, or work democratically in classroom garage bands, or sight-read accurately, or improvise jazz creatively. Taught and learned artistically, contextually, and ethically, these are worthy endeavors, of course, but they are not enough. On another level, some teacher education programs engage students in dialogues about Freire, Marx, Foucault, Derrida, and so on. Dialogues are important, as far as they go, but they don’t go far enough. As Miles Davis asks, “So what?” Where are the other values of music, and where are the musical-social actions and musical-ethical participations? Where is the development of students’ sense of musical/social/civil/ethical responsibility? What do the excellent artistic-musical achievements of school music programs do for students, their families, and others who face debilitating local, national, and international social problems and injustices?

There is absolutely no doubt that individual and group music-making and listening comfort, sustain, and inspire people and transform individual lives. But in larger terms, I am moved to suggest that many school and community music programs are capable of much more. Again, we cannot forfeit what we do so well. I fell in love with music and music education through my school and community music-making programs and experiences, and through my interactions with thoughtful, democratic, and inspiring teachers. I’ve spent my academic career trying to improve and protect such programs, and I will continue to do so. But what I see in the world prompts me to question music programs that fail to include ways of empowering students to practice lifelong music-making for *both* musical and social transformation.

Artistic Citizenship

Examples of music education as/for artistic citizenship stretch from Africa to the Arctic, from Estonia to Ireland to the United States and beyond. Allow me to begin with the work of two of my former students, Mary Piercey and Casey Hayes.

After graduating from the University of Toronto in the 1990s, Mary Piercey chose to teach in Arviat, a small Inuit community on the shore of Hudson Bay in the Canadian region of Nunavut. After decades of neglect and oppression by the Canadian government, Arviat was a largely underserved and culturally marginalized community. To make a very long story short, and because of Piercey’s continuous efforts to activate music and music education in the service of social justice, negotiation, and group transformation, both the people and the traditional culture of Arviat have blossomed in numerous ways, as I detail elsewhere.¹⁴

Casey Hayes, an esteemed band and choral teacher for twenty years, was fired from his school music position in 2002 when his colleagues discovered he was gay. After coming to New York University (NYU) for his doctoral work, Hayes performed and conducted with the New York City Gay Men’s Chorus and founded the Ambassador Chorus. His gay, lesbian,

bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) choral work focused on commissioning and performing original works aimed at empowering high school students and members of the adult community to understand and practice artistic citizenship musically for the welfare and liberation of GLBT citizens locally and nationally. These works included, for example, “A Great Generation,” by Eric Lane Barnes, which is a dramatic musical expression of GLBT issues related to the military, AIDS, and loneliness.

The GLBT musical repertoire has benefited enormously from contributions by many composers and performers since the 1970s. As artistic citizens, pop, rock, and hip-hop composers/performers (e.g., James Taylor, U2, Elton John, Madonna, Tori Amos) took a major role in supporting AIDS victims when AIDS was a “socially unacceptable disease.” Contemporary classical composers have produced many compositions motivated by GLBT themes (e.g., John Corigliano’s *Symphony No. 1*, Meredith Monk’s *New York Requiem*, Pauline Oliveros’s *Epigraphs in the Time of AIDS*, and Lawrence Axelrod’s *Common Threads*), and band composers (e.g., Mark Camphouse and Frank Ticheli) have created several works on themes of social justice. To some members of the public, these musicians might qualify as bad musical citizens because they chose to “compromise” the so-called purity of their art by infusing their compositions with “socially disturbing” material. This is an all-too-common but logically, ethically, and artistically indefensible attitude.

Sheila Woodward’s DIME project—Diversion Into Music Education—began in Cape Town, South Africa. Later, she linked her Florida music education program to her Cape Town university program. DIME focuses on gaining judicial approval to liberate juvenile offenders from prison on the condition that they engage actively in and benefit personally and socially from participating in DIME’s marimba programs. Research documentation suggests that DIME has been extremely effective in transforming the social, emotional, ethical, and economic lives of the participants, their families, and their communities.¹⁵

In addition to teaching community music courses at NYU that emphasize and exemplify ways of infusing music education with artistic citizenship and social justice, I teach a graduate course called “Teaching Composition in Junior High and Secondary Schools.” Some background may help in understanding the means and ends of this course, which includes the why, what, and how of composition teaching and composing as/for artistic citizenship. I began teaching composition in 1973 in my secondary school’s general music courses. Since then, I have continuously refined the scope and sequence of the curriculum models I’ve developed to make composing accessible, achievable, and meaningful for a wide range of students with varying interests and abilities.

My NYU students learn to teach composition by composing themselves and by teaching each other in relation to the curriculum models I’ve generated and the models they generate themselves. Basically, I engage the students in composing across a progressive range of musical styles beginning with twenty-first-century soundscape and aleatoric forms, followed by electroacoustic music, rap and hip-hop, serial music, songwriting, and more. In each musical style context, students’ compositions include pieces they create to express their own musical, emotional, and personal meanings, as well as a variety of social/political/cultural themes related to (for example) peace and reconciliation, race and gender discrimination, bullying, violence, disease, abuse, and poverty.

Another real-world example of students involved in artistic citizenship relates to a horrendous Irish Republican Army car bomb that killed and injured more than two hundred people in the town of Omagh, North Ireland, in 1998. In the aftermath, Daryl Simpson, a local music teacher, formed the Omagh Youth Choir. Simpson sought to unite Catholic and Protestant young people by engaging them in performing and composing pieces that centered on issues of peace, mutual understanding, and reconciliation. As a result, the choir’s many acts of artistic citizenship were so powerful and

widely distributed in Ireland and beyond that they were able to spread their messages of peace and unification effectively, produce moving recordings, and seed similar programs.¹⁶

An extraordinary example of artistic citizenship is detailed in the film *The Singing Revolution*.¹⁷ This documentary chronicles how tens of thousands of Estonians participated in ending the Soviet occupation of their nation in 1991 through the power of mass-singing events that began in 1989. Of course, the powerful musical-social activism of the Estonian population was anchored in deep traditions of Estonian music-making and music teaching, as well as the long-standing devotion of hundreds of dedicated and highly skilled school and community music teachers.

Music’s Potential

I could mention many other instances of artistic citizenship in schools and communities. Some are modest in scope, others are large scale. Nonetheless, they all count as important examples of efforts to rethink and revision dimensions of music education for the betterment of others’ lives. I believe it is possible to enact music education as/for artistic citizenship. I believe it is worth the effort. Music has much to offer the world. We should unleash its full potential.

NOTES

1. David J. Elliott, *Music Matters: A New Philosophy of Music Education* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). Chapters 2, 7, 9, 10, and 11 emphasize the importance of teaching and learning all forms of music-making. Chapters 4, 6, 8, 10, and 11 explain the natures and values of music listening and musical works. See also David J. Elliott, “‘Socializing’ Music Education,” *Action, Criticism and Theory for Music Education* 6, no. 4 (2007): 60–95 (http://act.maydaygroup.org/articles/Elliott6_4.pdf); and David J. Elliott and Marissa Silverman, “Why Music Matters: Philosophical and Cultural Foundations,” in *Music, Health, and Wellbeing*, ed. R. MacDonald, G. Kreutz, and L. Mitchell (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2012), 25–39.

2. John Jastrow, “The Mind’s Eye,” *Popular Science Monthly* 54 (1899): 312. This image is in the public domain in the United States. Many different versions have been published since 1899.
3. John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Perigee Books, 1934), 16.
4. Ibid.
5. Randy Martin, “Artistic Citizenship: Introduction,” in *Artistic Citizenship: A Public Voice for the Arts*, ed. Mary Schmidt Campbell and Randy Martin (New York: Routledge, 2006), 1.
6. See the writings of Susan McClary, Kathleen Marie Higgins, Tia DeNora, Noël Carroll, Jenefer Robinson, Richard Shusterman, Patrik Juslin, Ian Cross, Wayne Bowman, and Thomas Regelski.
7. Richard Schechner, “A Polity of Its Own Called Art,” in *Artistic Citizenship*, 33–41.
8. Ibid.
9. Martin, “Artistic Citizenship,” 10.
10. As explained in Schechner, “A Polity,” 34.
11. Adel Iskandar and Hakem Rustom, eds., *Edward Said: A Legacy of Emancipation and Representation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 229.
12. Jean Anyon, *Radical Possibilities: Public Policy, Urban Education, and New Social Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 6.
13. Doug McAdam, *Dynamics of Contention* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 126.
14. Elliott, “Socializing.”
15. For verification of this research, contact Sheila Woodward at scwoodwa@honors.usf.edu.
16. For a commentary on and a performance by the Omagh Community Youth Choir, see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z1ohx398P7I>.
17. *The Singing Revolution*, directed by James Tusty and Maureen Tusty (Tallinn, Estonia: New Video Group, 2009), DVD.

Editor’s note: The views expressed in “Another Perspective” are those of the author and may not concur with those of the National Association for Music Education. The goal of this column is to remind us that great minds sometimes think differently!