

## **Sociocultural Dialogue in Music Performance**

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Music making is primarily a sociocultural experience (Mitchell, 2019). From this perspective, music education must serve the purpose of developing sociocultural values, which requires that time is spent in dialogue with students, exploring music within its context, and understanding our identity in relation to our music making. A distinct value system is at work in this kind of pedagogy. If sociocultural learning is the goal, value must be placed on the experience and relationship performers have to each other and the music. In practice, it will look quite different from a performance-based program where evaluation and assessment of the final product are the goal. When value is first placed on a polished performance, the instructive practice can often limit dialogue for the sake of time and as a result become exclusive to diverse students. Limited dialogue can silence and minoritize students whose classroom or musical experiences do not conform to the dominant group. This is an example of an educational structure that perpetuates privilege as discussed by Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017). Sociocultural learning requires a shift away from this kind of pedagogy towards one in which dialogue and exploration are encouraged.

Ansdell (2002) writes that “music is the aim, music the means” (p.18). How can this concept be applied to the classroom? If music is the aim, instead of presentational performance, the pedagogical approach of the teacher should help students to experience music in their sociocultural context. The collective mindset should shift from regarding the final presentation as the goal to understanding that daily musical engagements are inherently meaningful.

Should performance then be removed entirely from the classroom? Mitchell (2019) argues that participatory performance can encourage inclusivity and acceptance in the context of music therapy. The primary principle here is that performance success is achieved through participation. Although her discussion is based on music therapy, it is interesting to draw this kind of philosophy into the classroom. Participatory performance can be considered a form of dialogue in which students can engage with their peers, learning about and accepting one another's identities and cultures.

It is important to further consider how participatory performance as a form of dialogue could lead to inclusion. A more flexible learning system that places primary value on participation could offer new opportunities for acceptance of disabled students and hopefully remove some of the barriers that they face in the standard music classroom. Such a focus aligns itself with the social model of disability (Shakespeare, 2017). In addition to providing opportunities for music making, this system must also invite the dominant students to learn from minoritized students (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Such a learning environment can allow participants to utilize their individual voices, while also contributing to the music community.

Musicing in the classroom can guide the exploration of personal and collective identity and the development of sociocultural values. As educators, we have the responsibility to facilitate these kinds of learning experiences for our students, encouraging them to practice critical thinking and to be inclusive.

## Resources

Ansdell, G. (2002). Community Music Therapy & The Winds of Change. *Voices*, 2(2), np.

<https://doi.org/10.15845/voices.v2i2.83>

Baldwin, A. (2017). Community music-making for everyone via performing ensembles: here are five groups that make an inclusive, musical difference in their communities.

(Lectern). *Teaching Music*, 24(3).

Mitchell, E. (2019). Community Music Therapy and Participatory Performance. *Voices*, 19(1).

<https://doi.org/10.15845/voices.v19i1.2701>

Sensoy, Ö, & DiAngelo, R. (2017). Chapter 6: Understanding Privilege through Ableism. In *Is everyone really equal?: An introduction to key concepts in social justice education*

/ Özlem Sensoy and Robin DiAngelo. (Second edition.). Teachers College Press.

Shakespeare, T. (2017). Chapter 13: The Social Model of Disability. In L.J. Davis (author) *The disability studies reader / Lennard J. Davis [electronic resource]* (Fifth edition.).

Routledge.