Chapter Three

From Dilemmas to Experience: Shaping the Conditions of Learning
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Abstract

Music is a demanding art. Learning, from the first attempts to elite performance levels, is fraught with musical, pedagogical, and motivational dilemmas and the needs of the person are often neglected. How can these needs be addressed while pursuing the ideals of the art? We propose the key is the protection and nurturing of the individual’s engagement with the art. We propose that the choices teachers make related to the dilemmas set the conditions of learning and determine levels of engagement: choosing predominantly one way leads to engagement and an experience that will probably be a positive, enjoyable, motivating, and rewarding one that is likely to lead to a life-time of music participation. Choosing predominantly the other way may lead to disengagement and a music learning experience that, for the average student, will probably be a negative, de-motivating, psychologically damaging one, and in most cases lead to a cessation of music-making.

INTRODUCTION

“...competition in one form or another is a pretty basic part of it... We try to keep it down a little bit here by rotating part assignments but, there is a merit base in part assignment. You’re not going to put your worst player to play a first horn on the Bruckner fourth Symphony. You try not to put somebody on the part that will embarrass them and the school.”

“I think a lot of people have a sort of a love-hate relationship. I mean, if you didn’t have a fair component of love you couldn’t make yourself do it forever but the resentment of all the time it takes and how much you miss in your life.”

The study and pursuit of art is a fulfilling and delightful manifestation of a fundamental need of the human spirit. The engagement with new challenges of achievement is invigorating. The pursuit of ideals of excellence gives purpose and meaning to life. But, in the context of a consumer society, art is easily appropriated as cultural entertainment capital. Artistic concepts, aesthetic standards, and creative innovation can become idealizations of perfection forced on performers being exploited for societal pleasure. Individual achievement is mythologized as symbol for the corporate society. In this context emerge dilemmas of teachers’ goals versus the students’ needs, music’s demands versus students’ motivations and commitment, technical requirements of music versus its potential expressive import, and the digital age audience expectations of perfection versus the reality of the limits of human ability. In this context, how can the needs of the individual be balanced with the demands of the art?
A first, and very important step, is the admission that a problem exists – that the demands of the art in our time may not be aligned with the needs of the individual. It requires the recognition that pedagogic dilemmas exist and a conscious awareness of the values inherent in choices and behaviours. As researchers, it requires both a willingness to see beyond the “appropriate answer” of the discursive frame and to confront the “ugly” side of art but at the same time objectivity and responsibility toward time-honoured artistic values and practices.

Sociology of sports (Donnelly, 1997) now very openly admits there is a problem of verbal and emotional abuse of those considered talented as well as of many simply falling short of coaches and parents’ expectation. A recent colloquium addressed the issue “head-on” (Talented Children in Sport, Music and Dance: How can we Nurture Talent without Exploiting or Abusing Children? – University of Toronto, Centre for Sport Policy Studies, Sept 28-29, 2001). In music education we have essentially no research looking at this issue and little if any acknowledgement it even exists. In dance there is acknowledgement that there is risk of physical injury and eating disorder, but less attention to emotional issues of pedagogy. In music education we have the further concern of “legitimised deprivation” of opportunity for children on the basis of “talent.” Since music is a naturally occurring intelligence, education for the development of musical potential should be every child’s right.

Social justice literature points to places where the “system” deprives a certain group of the opportunity to develop a natural potential. Epp & Watkinson (1997), in a book entitled “Systemic violence in education,” state that they view as “violent” any practices and procedures that adversely impact individuals by “burdening them psychologically, mentally, culturally, spiritually, economically, or physically. It includes practices and procedures that prevent students from learning, thus harming them.” Parker (2000) and Bartel (2000) have pointed out applications to music.

Whether emphasizing technique over expressivity, selecting the “talented” for inclusion and the “untalented” for exclusion, or selecting music that is culturally understood by children or is musically foreign to them, teachers daily face pedagogical dilemmas. In this chapter we argue that the choices teachers make related to the seemingly unavoidable dilemmas of music teaching establish the conditions of learning and determine the experience children have with music. These experiences can be motivating and positively transformative but just as surely debilitating and alienating. We argue that the traditional music education paradigm, both school music and private instruction, is positively motivating in the long run for only a small percentage of the population. The rest “face the music” that they are untalented, unwanted, and unnecessary. We propose that, by attending to a particular side of the dilemmas we identify, music education could be reshaped into a positively motivating, transforming, and engaging experience for a much larger percentage of the population.

THE FOUNDATION FOR OUR VIEW

This chapter is based on the findings of a series of research studies we and a number of graduate students have conducted since 1996. Our research has had three facets:

Conditions of Learning (Written Personal Narratives). In an article entitled, “What really matters in music class” (Cameron & Bartel, Fall, 1996), we invited students and educators to submit personal narrative accounts of memorable experiences with music learning - positive or negative. We also gathered
accounts from students at the University of Toronto. We were looking for learning conditions facilitating engagement. Initial findings were reported at the Canadian University Music Society conference in 1997 (Bartel & Cameron, 1997). We have now acquired some 200 individual usable accounts. We conducted a thematic analysis of the narratives and compared our results to the conditions of learning model of Brian Cambourne (1988) and the student-centred philosophy of Max Van Manen (1986). We found that our findings matched these models but extended the significant categories to include aspects perhaps specific to music learning. We reported the findings at a commission of the International Society for Music Education (ISME) in South Africa in 1998 (Cameron & Bartel, 1999; Cameron & Bartel, 2000).

**Self-Efficacy of Generalist and Specialist Teachers Teaching Music.** In 1997 we began a questionnaire study on teachers' self-perception of confidence to teach music and perceptions of musical talent (Bartel & Cameron, 1998). The questionnaire asked teachers to describe in detail any critical incident or series of incidents that affected their self-perception of ability and confidence to teach music. In 2001-2002 we continued this research in a comparative education study focused on the “generalist” teacher required to teach music. This study, conducted with Jackie and Robert Wiggins, compared teachers in New Zealand and Canada in self-efficacy and related factors. Most recently we expanded this to include in-service and pre-service music specialists. Findings have been reported at the International Society for Music Education in South Africa in 1998 (Cameron & Bartel, 1999; Cameron & Bartel, 2000) at American Education Research Association (AERA) conference, 2002, and ISME conference in 2002 in Norway.

**Face the Music (Interviews on Systemic Issues).** During 2000-2001 we focused our research on broader systemic issues and began in-depth interviews. A graduate student working in our research program conducted a small pilot study with interviews stimulated by movie excerpts (Jacques, 2001a) that replicated our results in the Conditions of Learning but re-focused analysis and proposed several new themes in the data. Jacques (2001b) conducted further interviews to explore the effectiveness of various approaches to the use of video excerpts. We then began conducting semi-structured interviews with musicians (School music teachers and private studio music instructors teaching beginners, intermediate, advanced, and pre-professional students, n=31). Interviews used video clips from popular movies as thought stimulators and memory “joggers” and focused on the following themes: (1) Value of excellence, (2) importance of virtuosity, (3) role of teacher as conductor, (4) perceptions of human motivation and ability, (5) concept of talent, (6) role of music in culture. We used qualitative theme analysis to examine data and identified factors in the perpetuation of the “talent-oriented” system. Partial results have been reported in papers at AERA 2001, AERA 2002, and at the Research Alliance of Institutes for Music Education in Oslo in 2001.

Since 2001 we have also interviewed dancers and dance teachers, done initial work on theatre, and are currently beginning with gymnasts. We believe that there are pedagogical and psychological commonalities in the teaching, learning, and practicing of artistic performance in time – temporal expressive performance. Here, however, we focus on what we have learned from music.

**MUSIC EDUCATION DILEMMAS**

The study and pursuit of music seems to be fraught with constant tensions and dilemmas: the student likes the positive teacher but feels something is being missed; the teacher emphasizes technique but
then demands expressivity; to be an excellent performer a child must start very young but loses out on holistic development; all students deserve equal opportunity to participate but some students achieve a better performance; there is motivational benefit in competition but psychological cost in not winning; critical ability must be developed to be artistically responsible but the inner critic can ruin confidence and the love of the art. The decisions teachers make regarding these dilemmas determine to a great extent the quality of the experience of students. Setting the most productive conditions may vary from student to student, so possibilities for error are great. Because the decisions are not all “student-related,” dilemmas become more complex. There are at least three categories: music-related dilemmas, pedagogy-related dilemmas, and student-related dilemmas. There is certainly interaction among these and some are not an “either-or” situation, but rather a matter of emphasis or balance.

**Music-related dilemmas**

There is a cluster of dilemmas related to the characteristics of music itself or the choice of music to be learned. Although they are music-related, it really is a matter of philosophical beliefs and musical values that influence a choice on these binaries or dilemmas. It is how music is viewed. It is what the teacher considers important, and what musical practice or tradition the teacher is perpetuating, that determines which side of the dilemma is emphasized. The most pervasive and evident is the binary of expressivity and technique.

**Musical Expressivity — Technical Proficiency.** Music experienced from the perspective of a listener is sound with structure and expressive import. Dance from the perspective of viewer is gesture with stylized technique and interpretive expressivity. So even from the perspective of audience, the technique-expressivity binary is evident as the listener/viewer may attend to the syntax, the form, the compositional elements, and the traditional movement elements but may respond primarily to the expressive elements. However, when you experience music as a performer, the technical aspects—the repetitively practiced motions of muscle and bone—are inescapable. When the music is performed is a replication of a composer’s or choreographer’s intent, “mistakes” become glaringly evident, and a first priority of the performer. An excellent performance is one “not only technically competent but also musically good” (study participant).

In the study of music this demand for technical competence seems to be the basic ingredient but it is meaningless without artistic expressivity. Technique is a prerequisite but expressivity is the justification.

*"I want to be amazed but I also want to be moved and that is the dichotomy of the technical vs the artistic and the really amazing performances obviously combine the two.” D011*

*Looking back in retrospect, sometimes you feel you’re always being told a double theme from your teacher. You know you’re told that musicality is important — you should feel this, feel that, or whatever — but it has to be perfect. I’ve always found that those two things shouldn’t really, fundamentally be put together. And yet, as a student you are always being bombarded with this idea that there is perfectionism that’s absolutely required. This is technical perfectionism?*
That’s right. So, the idea that he’s fuming at him [Shine- movie] to have everything, all the notes there—“don’t disappoint the composer, don’t disappoint me” — that sort of thing, yet at the same time, “feel the beauty of the notes.” It’s a double message.

What do students usually opt for?

[laughs] well I find that at least today — I think there is at least in the top conservatories a real over-concern with perfectionism at the expense of real character and musicality.

If it is a dilemma for students, it is equally a dilemma for teachers. Expressivity is limited by technique. But an emphasis on technique may ignore the expressive. For teachers the question is whether you go through technique to expressivity, through expressivity to technique, or whether you go back and forth. For sensitive teachers, the dilemma seems more evident because, as in the experience of students, they seem to feel that insisting on technical matters is an expression of discipline, of rigidity, of the “tough” side of teaching and misses the motivation and “heart” of the art.

...if that trust is created between teacher and student, the teacher can later on go on and become just technical for a while, but actually you shift from this to that — you need to do both sides. You need both sides but you can start off by creating the trust and then you can become more rigid at certain moments....

Because artistic excellence is associated with technical perfection and the rigor and discipline of its development, students may feel a need for the “whip” of technical discipline.

there was one girl who asked me a couple weeks ago to help her. She wants to do her masters and she really needs work on technique, then I heard her sing in recital and I thought, she’s got a wonderful singing spirit, and to really focus on technique would be detrimental to her because a lot of that is happening naturally—so I wondered what makes her think that she needs to do this, because she doesn’t feel brutalized, perhaps?

The expectation of performative perfection, which always means note perfect, technical perfection, may come from teachers, may come from the students’ internal competitiveness, but both may be fueled today by the image we set up as the ideal.

There is a higher premium on technical perfection and accuracy than there used to be and it’s easy, and very possibly correct, to blame recordings. We hear so much perfect playing that you expect that live.

The cost of greater technical perfection may be the richness of individual expression.

...for some people it’s a major accomplishment to let go of worrying about technical growth and focus on musical growth, and on your own personal character identity in you’re playing. And, that’s what we are missing, of course, these days.

The “Bar” is technique...but that is a circus trick...Get people to value excellence...of passion, vision, ...raising the bar so that there is more beauty or passion or thought or idea...and it isn't about better “technique”
But, the greatest cost of an emphasis on technical perfection is not just “these days” — it is a long-standing problem of instruction. Technical imperfections are blatantly evident, especially when they result in “mistakes.” Consequently, teachers are often sticklers for technical development, intolerant to mistakes of any kind, and upset at a lack of similar values by students. A student’s inability to achieve the desired perfection is most commonly attributed to a student’s lack of ability or lack of sustained effort. Rarely is it considered a weakness of pedagogy. This translates easily into a sense by students that the teacher is justified in being upset, that being upset is attributed to such a strong passion for the demands of the art, and that is it is the insufficiency of the student that is ultimately at fault.

I had some classes with someone in Israel actually who was the sort of person who just badgered you over and over again until — that was more in a musical sense— you could tell he felt so strongly about phrases and this and that — even though it was difficult you felt he was doing it for a certain point.

We weren’t allowed to learn any pieces at all—only scales and studies. [The Cleveland teacher] was a bit horrified that our wonderful quasi-Suzuki teacher had no interest in any of that, any of what you would call standard technique... so there was sort of a corrective summer. And probably really great in a sense because after that point there was always a sort of double teaching — [The Cleveland teacher] was very regimented in Galamian technique and the [London teacher] was always talking about sunshine and the soul and the spirit, and that sort of thing and it was a really good combination. So this sort of dual studying thing went on the right up until I was 14.

As is evident from these last quotes, the emphasis on technique seems associated with one kind of teacher, usually a demanding, picky teacher who may be considered necessary like bad tasting medicine, while expressivity is associated with a pleasant, inspirational teacher. However, since technique is so essential, the unpleasant teacher is sometimes considered more important and in fact more desirable.

Relative standards — Objective standards. The first response to music or dance by audience, performer, adjudicator, or clinician always seems to be critical judgment. In fact, we teach strongly for such a response stance. This critical judgment can be norm referenced – relative to the person’s potential and progress, the age level of the performer, the size of the school, etc or it can be criterion referenced — with objective standards or criteria set by the ideals of the art. Most striking in the data from our participants was the tension experienced between these two bases for critical judgment. They might begin with avowing adherence to a relative, student-centered approach, but slip into an objective artistic standard.

“As a teacher I am nurturing, as a director I’m a bitch” D09

I think you can have an excellent performance by even a young ensemble which would necessarily be judged at a different level than a professional ensemble. So is it then the personal best of the performer or the group in the moment? Maybe, although some people may not be capable of a personal best which would rise to the level of any definition of excellence.
So there is an objective definition of excellence in music to which we aspire, we rise toward, we work toward? 
*Well, in terms of musical phrasing and being together and obviously right notes and right rhythm— it’s not going to be excellent in the way I would feel about it unless they meet the standards of the music.*

A sub-category of this dichotomy between relative and objective standards is the dilemma for teachers of **personal best effort versus musical perfection.** When responding with relative musical standards, the teacher can give recognition to personal best effort and reward it with praise and encouragement and public celebration. However, if the teacher has strongly in mind objective standards of musical achievement which expects nothing less than musical perfection, it is very difficult to give unqualified praise and celebration. The high school teacher may want to encourage and praise a student’s best effort but if the teacher knows the student will go and audition at a prominent music conservatory and the teacher’s reputation will be associated with the student, the teacher may be much less ready to respond to the student in terms of the student’s best effort, but rather “be realistic” about the student’s potential. This problem can also be phrased as a **learner focused - art focused dilemma.** It is the very nature of the art.

*I remember doing a lot of high school clinics, and a teacher would say oh I’ve got a great group they’re playing really great, and I’d go in there, and they could hardly blow their nose, they could barely put their instruments together, and you don’t want to say anything to the high school instructor that you’ve been deceived or something like this—you think, it’s nice that the instructor is so enthusiastic about his students and thinks so well of them.

When you say, “that was an excellent performance” what do you mean? 
*I mean, for them where they are now. There was a student who sang today “that was really excellent” I said, those are the words I used. Was it as good as he could do?  No, but for where he is at right now, those are the goals he set, and considering all that went on before, things he’s got out of alignment, he did well. It’s different for each student. You don’t hold up a fixed musical criteria?
No, no it’s school.
How important is the pursuit of what you perceive as the standards, even though the student may be this far away, are you still gunning for those artistic standards?
Yeah, it depends, if the student really has it, then I really push them with lots of encouragement. I always let them know that they’re good and I believe in them, but they really need to do the skill work, or the structured work. If I don’t think that that is there, I don’t tell them that. I get them to be the best that they can be.

Self-judgment is a powerful and constant element in learning and performing. The teacher may be fuelling this self-judgment by pointing to the standard, the ideal, or possibly the unattainable goal for the student’s potential.

*The musicians self-esteem is so highly based on how you actually play, and even without Kiwanis and competitions, almost everybody is constantly aware where the level is around them and, you know, even with students I have here we set up unattainable goals. Because, we say go to the Toronto Symphony and listen to the soloist. And they’re playing the same piece*
but we know that they are never realistically going to play in that same vein, and yet that’s what we set up for them as the pinnacle.

Culturally-familiar repertoire --- Artistic exemplars. One of the choices that must be made in music education is what music will be the focus of music-making and ability development. In the traditional music education paradigm, this choice is made by the teacher. Granted the teacher may give students some choice among a few options equally acceptable to the teacher, but, the “study repertoire” is controlled by the teacher. And, usually the teacher places great emphasis on “great music,” “classics,” on “artistic exemplars” of valued music. In a private study situation the “artistic exemplars” are probably determined by the “canon” of acceptable and approved literature. In the British – Canadian conservatory system, the “curriculum” is set out in grades with literature lists for each grade, controlled through required selection for the centrally administered examinations. In school music programs, teachers select music with the strong consciousness of the expectations at music competitions and peer assessments of public presentations. Along with this comes a societal assumption about the symbolic cultural value of art: to be an indicator of achievement and “getting somewhere” by being aligned with the dominant elitist values. So when students from an urban school in New York city play “classical” music on the most symbolic instrument of elitist European art, the violin, the hearts of an audience and a nation thrill at the “hope,” the “elevation through art,” the sign of cultural progress that they are witnessing. Like changing from regional dialect to dominant language, from local accent to mainstream pronunciation, learning “classical” music is a sign of becoming educated, cultured, and worthy of respect. Like learning Latin or Shakespeare the value of learning classical music within our culture has a utility apart from its inherent functionality and even personal enjoyment value for the person.

The alternative choice of repertoire is music selected for its cultural familiarity to students, perhaps even selected by students. In most contexts today that means popular music. As Senyshyn in his chapter in this book illustrates with personal narratives, considerable discontent among students can arise over repertoire. Music teachers may ignore it and over time establish programs where students not willing to work with the repertoire selected simply elect not to take music. But, where students do not have a choice regarding participation, repertoire can become a significant factor in motivation and enjoyment. For many students today “classical” music is like a second language. Some students have the motivation and ability to adopt and adapt. Others, the majority in our schools today, simply elect not to participate. And, the dominant music education paradigm that accepts that music is essentially for the talented and the motivated 10 percent, finds this reality acceptable.

Music teachers do recognize the dilemma and attempt to address the problem in places by using jazz or music theatre as possible options. In a way, jazz and music theatre have reached “classic” status and the “artistic exemplars” within those styles are acceptable school fare. But like “classical music” they are really not the musical language of children and youth today. They may feature more of the “groove” and sensuality of today’s popular music and thus give them a greater sense of cultural relevance, but participation still requires a “second language” approach and commitment.

This dilemma is made difficult for teachers not only by cultural and societal forces but by their personal musical language ability. Music teachers tend to teach the way they were taught. Our present music education system selects classically trained musicians and inducts them into classically oriented programs. Most do not have the “chops” to deal with popular music even if they personally like the
music. And, the culture of perfection has resulted in a culture of fear of mistakes and a desire to be able to know all the answers and control all eventualities before trying something in class. As a consequence, music teachers like to stay with band or choir playing and singing the “standards” and a few new “sanitized and concertized” arrangements of film or pop tunes to keep the less serious students happy. Only rare teachers have the ability and courage to add or change to steel pans, guitars, rock band, or other approaches strongly connected to many students’ real culture.

**Manipulable Elements --- Replicable Prescriptions.** A choice of most music teachers, without even recognizing it as a choice, is to make the replication of existing music prescriptions the primary focus of music lessons. This is so because the traditional music education paradigm is premised on notated musical works created by the “specially gifted composer.” These may be the great classics of the past centuries or songs and arrangements specially created for educational purposes. But regardless of type they are primarily notated. The music teacher then focuses on teaching children to decode these notations and to replicate the composers intentions as perfectly as possible.

The alternative choice teachers could make is to make the manipulation of musical materials a primary activity of music lessons. Young children learn through play. And the observation of young children reveals that the “play” with musical materials as well – they experiment with sound, with melody, with timbre, with rhythm. But when most adults and most teachers take control of children’s learning by formalizing learning, play with sound is reduced and the teaching toward replication begins. We even reduce acceptable sounds to a small set of “domesticated sounds” (cp. Marsella in this book). The problem with replication is that you can get it wrong. And so teachers focus on mistake elimination, on precise tuning, precise rhythms, desirable timbres, and contrived performance disassociated from the real social community of children. In the process many children “get it wrong” and before fifth grade decide music lessons are not for them.

There are real possibilities for teachers to make musical material manipulation, music composition, and improvisation a mainstay of music lessons. Many music curricula give it a place, but many teachers give it little because they themselves are not comfortable with composition or improvisation. In our study of teacher self-efficacy we found that music teachers rated their confidence lowest in the area of teaching composition. In language learning research has informed practice to the point where most teacher now have children compose their own stories as they learn to read others’ stories. The two processes synergistically support language learning. Imagine children in the first six years of schooling learning to read by reading fine literature, but never being given an opportunity to write their own ideas and stories. In most cases that essentially is what is done in the traditional music education paradigm. The music teacher may deal with the “phonics” of musical notation, may even have children do some musical “spelling,” “copying,” or “dictation” assignments, but never ask children to write a musical “story” or create their own “book.”

**Pedagogy-related Dilemmas**

Regardless of what music or what dimension of music becomes the focus of instruction, teachers are faced with a cluster of dilemmas related to pedagogy itself. Of course, some types of musical contexts demand a certain general approach to pedagogy – the concert band requires a conductor, a program of chamber music groups requires a coaching style. However, there are many other choices to be made.
that reflect the teacher’s motivations, philosophy, personality, learning style, and perhaps even psychological health.

**Encouraging Teacher—Pushing Teacher.** A clearly evident theme in our data was the experience with teachers considered difficult, demanding, harsh, and unpleasant and in contrast, teachers who were pleasant, supportive, encouraging, and inspirational. In some cases students quickly left the unpleasant teacher, but disturbing in our data was the evidence that students often do not leave harsh and demanding teachers, and may in fact consider them necessary to the difficult challenge of conquering the “monster” of the non-compliant body or instrument.

*I had a range of teachers some of whom were very harsh and some were extremely nice, and the extremely nice teacher didn’t produce the same results, in a sense. I got the impression that he was, like, very happy with his own playing, all of that, and that shined — that was always apparent, and so maybe in a sense that was a learning experience, because one did feel inspired, but one wasn’t actually feeling like “oh my God if I don’t prepare well for the next lesson he is going to skin me alive.”*

*He was not a mean man at all but he was very picky and inside of a couple of years I was so unsure about what to do that I’d pick up the horn and I’d almost freeze. ...and actually I started taking lessons on the sly with other teachers. In the summer in Boston there was this wonderful former bass trombonist of the Boston Symphony who had actually been a roommate of my Curtis trumpet teacher when they were both at Curtis but they couldn’t have been more different — one was very fussy and this trombone player was very casual laid-back rather crude and had a very simple approach: “tongue and blow kid—play it louder faster”—and he’d take you through easy stuff, “play it out a kid — tongue and blow”—he got me going again. And then there was a Boston Symphony trumpet player, Armando Ghitala, who is a wonderful almost father figure and the combination of this got me playing again and I think the teacher at Curtis probably thought his lessons were finally kicking in.*

These study participants described what they recognized as harsh and demanding teachers. Yet, they found some value in these teachers and, in fact, felt that the more pleasant teachers had perhaps not served them as well. This phenomenon seems related to a belief in another dilemma: students may have the **desire to achieve** but they **lack the ability to self-motivate** adequately. This may be a belief absorbed from the teacher’s impatience and “pushing” while being a student. There may in fact be a different basis for the “pushing” in teachers than is perceived by students. The teacher may be so “envious” of the perfection of the art that lack of attainment of this perfection is upsetting and angering, and to justify this anger a scapegoat is created – the student’s lack of motivation and commitment (an application of Rene Girard’s memetic theory, Jordan, 2000). The student comes to believe this is his or her personal short-coming and that the teacher’s pushing is needed.

Further, the demand of the art is such that growth in technical and expressive excellence is “a forever thing” and therefore, the belief and feeling that one is “good” can be considered inappropriate. The feeling “I am really good at this” can be interpreted as being out of touch with professional artistic reality since this could only be held by the most elite performers of the art and if held by a student would probably serve to inflate expectations unrealistically and probably place a damper on
motivation. The tough critical teacher is then viewed as being the voice of realism and honesty. Data from our interviews with dancers illustrates this, but we believe the same is true in music.

they were very lenient ...I took advantage of that and I tried to run the class myself and I thought I was so much better than everyone else ...My dancing went downhill a lot...those four years...really factored on me progressing... when I left there I had a lot of catching up to do... when I went to the National...it was hard because I had to go back to what I did when I was younger...

The theory that students may have the desire to achieve but inevitably lack the ability to self-motivate adequately is not in fact true. Several participants in our study described their development as entirely lacking in teachers who had to push them. They admitted knowing about such teachers, hearing fellow students descriptions of such teachers, and even fearing the possibility with their own teachers. However, they counted themselves “lucky” in not having such teachers or in avoiding the teacher’s displeasure through conscientious work and commitment.

and then the guy at Eastman was the most humanistic beautiful person you can ever meet. He could have taught any instrument and you would’ve just loved what you were doing. One time I played something for him — and he was 80 years old — he taught most trombone players — he turned out a lot — he was legendary — and I played something for him and he goes “wheww!” and he brushed me on the shoulder. I didn’t know what he was doing. He says “... you keep playing like that and you’ll be in the Philadelphia Orchestra someday.” I mean ...it was tough playing lessons for him because, he’d say “what’s wrong?” — I’d make a mistake or something wouldn’t sound right because I was smiling— and it’s tough to play when your smiling. I was so happy to be studying with the guy and I’d break into a smile sometimes. I never had any experience like that [movie clip from Shine] at all thank goodness, because I think it would’ve turned me right off.

Some students recognize that “abuse” may not be about themselves as people or about the art:

Sometimes it is not about the art, making the dancer better, its not about anything but making someone feel small...to hurt them so you feel better.

As well, difference in personality is involved in the perception of “pushing” and the response to it:

Some people who are pushed, push back...I’ll do that better than you can even imagine. It comes down to ego...some push back others leave...

Some student’s who managed to avoid teachers who really pushed them, still felt somewhat guilty that they had not been pushed – and attributed some of their technical short-comings to this lack, and therefore their own inadequacies or personality deficiencies.

—she was the one I had after Mrs. Teacher, so I would have been 9 or 10 or 11 in there—I just didn’t like her, her face was stern, and things weren’t good. And then we moved to [another town]. I had [this new teacher]—I spoke to her this morning on the phone actually —lovely lady, and I liked it because she didn’t push me. So back then I could explore my own—I could
do a watered down version of the Hungarian Rhapsody……I still got the joy of it. I’m still not great doing all the scales and chords and so on...
And why does it matter?
I don’t know — maybe, it’s the “I must work harder” mentality.

Is there such thing … that without that moving catastrophe of being insulted or embarrassed and generally torn apart, that you might not have worked as hard and achieved as much. Is there justified abuse in the pursuit of excellence?
I would have to say yes. I don’t think it needs to go to the degree that it sometimes goes to, but I think everybody, no matter what field they are in, needs somebody at a certain point to say “hey, make sure you’re serious about this. If you are I’m going to kick your butt and try to realize your potential.”

There is no doubt that participants in this study have experienced what must be called abuse – physical, verbal, and emotional. Many participants named it as such. But is it justified abuse as the quoted participant above seems to think? Other participants agreed:

I guess that [physical abuse] helped me a great deal, seeking for perfection.

In a way it [physical abuse] also made me stronger; ‘cause I really want to prove to her that “you’re wrong! I can do better—a lot better than you think!”

Maybe to some people because it pushes them to want to progress…but to some people it makes them give up…A couple of times I wanted to quit because I was so embarrassed but I think then my mom tells me not to worry about it. It does push me to want to do better…but it also makes me step back and look at it and think whether Do I really want to do this? Do I want to keep going at this…do I want to get embarrassed EVERY day I go to… class…You have to deal with this…if you do, then obviously you really want it bad and that passion… is there.

The teacher has the ability to affect your emotional state and can create an emotional environment that either leans more to the pleasure of the movement or can be a very uncomfortable environment…the great teachers are the ones who make the environment a positive place to be even when they are working on you and correcting you and letting you know that it isn’t working. Change can hurt…but in the long run, I am glad that I got totally emotionally trashed by teachers-- in the long run it was necessary. That happens to everybody…that trashing…It can be a terrible thing…depending where the environment is that it is happening.

We recognized the effects of abuse in many expressions, beliefs, attitudes, reported and observed behaviours. The scope of this analysis and implications are, however, beyond this chapter.

**Performance-focused feedback—Person-directed feedback.** The data of our study and much of the foregoing discussion makes it clear that the teacher’s “pushing” may be directed subjectively at the student and be perceived as a personal attack, or directed objectively at the requirement of the art and an insistence on artistic perfection. The later is not perceived as abusive, and when associated with
expectation of the student’s ability to master the challenge, may be productive and rewarding. However, if expectations of the teacher are unattainable or never satisfied, the student comes to the ultimate realization of inadequacy and develops a powerful inner critic.

> Well it is needed to drill you and needed to embarrass you somewhat but to an extent that they are telling you that you aren’t any good and you can’t do it anymore and you should leave…that shouldn’t be a part of it….there is nothing wrong with telling you you need to work harder at this.

How to direct criticism is a pedagogical choice. This choice is partially related to the attribution the teacher makes regarding the imperfection addressed. If the problem is attributed to an inherent characteristic of the student -- inability, lack of talent, laziness, stubbornness, dimwittedness, lack of effort, lack of focus, etc. – then it is likely the teacher will “attack” the person, rather than insist on particular standards of achievement. If the teacher fundamentally believes in the students' ability and effort, the teacher is more likely to make demands accompanied with expressions of positive expectations of the student. So, how to direct criticism is not really a pedagogical dilemma. Directing criticism as an attack on the person is rather simple mispedagogia. It may stem from many sources, not the least of which is the psychological state of the teacher which in itself stems from many sources. It may be mispedagogia conducted with good intentions. Teachers most often teach the way they were taught. They are trapped in a model of learning. They may honestly believe that they need to put this sort of pressure on students to get them to reach their potential, unaware of the long-term damage being done to the psychological make-up of the student.

Positive person-directed feedback on the other hand can be very motivating and inspiring. For the teacher to compliment the student’s ability, effort, energy, intelligence expressive sensitivity, and so on may prove to be very important to the development of self-confidence and motivation. The mistake too often made on this binary is to compliment the quality of the performance and criticize the inherent person, rather than criticizing the performance and complimenting the inherent person.

**Optimistic expectation—Pessimistic expectation.** One of the crucial factors in student engagement in music learning is expectation. If students expect to achieve they achieve; if they expect to fail they fail. The teacher's expectation of the student is particularly influential because it has a strong effect on the student’s expectation of themselves.

> From the first note I made on the instrument, he [the teacher] knew that I had potential, and fuelled my desire to be a better player. By the time that a few months had passed, he had me playing solos at feeder schools...

But expectation has to be appropriate. Like the related concept of self-efficacy, people may believe they are competent when they are not, or may believe they are not competent when in fact they are (Cameron, Wiggins, et al 2004). Similarly a teacher may have an expectation of the student that is appropriate to the student’s ability or not. Having too high an expectation for the skill level results in anxiety and worry on the part of the student and possible abusive demands and feedback from the teacher. Having expectations that are too low for the student’s skill level results in boredom, apathy, and discouragement (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). But here lies the dilemma. If the teacher is somewhat pessimistic and believes that the pessimistic assessment is in fact “realistic,” students without exceptional “talent” are easily regarded as not really worth that extra effort, that perhaps risky opportunity, because they might fail and
that would look bad for the teacher and might result in an embarrassing experience for the student. A teacher’s low expectations quickly communicates, “I don’t think you are capable of doing this.”

She told me that I had an excellent touch and could feel and interpret music well but for the more technically difficult pieces she always gave me the easiest choices. Her attitude made me feel that I was not able to play these pieces. I was never challenged to try and when I wanted to play a particular piece that I loved she would not allow me to do it deeming it beyond what I was capable of doing.

Another student expressed it like this:

When I went back to her saying that I actually succeeded in playing it at a certain speed, she didn't believe me because I was unable to do it again, with her being in the room.

If the teacher holds optimistic expectations, believing that the student is indeed capable of meeting challenges set, this can be very motivating to the student. If the teacher is right in those expectations and sets the challenge appropriately for the skill, the result can be optimum progress. The key is for the teacher to be able to determine what Vygotsky called the “zone of proximal development” (Wiggins, 2000) – the range of challenges that can be met with appropriate help from the teacher.

**Challenge appropriate to the student – challenge stimulating to the teacher.** Another pedagogical dilemma possibly contributing to the existence of harsh and abusive teachers is the difference between the level of challenge appropriate to the student, especially the beginning to intermediate student, and the level of challenge rewarding and stimulating to the teacher. This is a basic problem of music since the task of the student is determined by a “repertoire” of performance prescriptions in notation and often available in immaculate recordings. If the teacher is expecting to find his or her primary musical fulfillment, stimulation, and reward in the music-making of his or her students, and those students are not able to cope satisfactorily with the musical repertoire this requires, the teacher will experience considerable frustration. Data seemed to indicate that music teachers who find personal music-making opportunities appropriate for their own level (apart from teaching, perhaps in the community), have more understanding and patience for students. The teacher whose primary artistic self-expression is “through” students, either as a teacher or conductor, is likely to experience more frustration at imperfections and is more likely to express this frustration as anger directed at the students.

**A Caution and Concern.** We recognize that a teacher’s self-report of pedagogy may not be completely accurate and neither might a student’s version of that pedagogy. But, perhaps most troubling is the possibility that the social psychological theory (Helson, 1964) of adaptation-level operates here. Adaptation-level is a level of stimulation that becomes neutral through repeated exposure and serves as a reference point for judgments on that dimension. Music students may learn to expect and tolerate certain behaviours and accept them as normal, although these very behaviours may have adverse psychological effect. As well, teachers may teach in a certain way because that simply is the “model of learning” in which they themselves were trained and the model used by their peers. One teacher seems to recognize this possibility:

I have been watching teachers...surrounded by teachers that are so strict like... that it obviously feeds off to me...and I think when I teach that is exactly what I do... even though I say I don’t like it.

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Holistic Approximation – Fine Grained Perfection. Often associated with the encouraging teacher versus the demanding teacher, this dilemma really reflects a choice music teachers make constantly. Presumably, music teachers facilitating students’ music-making can hear a myriad of “flaws” in every student attempt. However, does the teacher react to each flaw? Or does the teacher respond to the larger picture, the broad strokes of the attempt, and possibly find several things to compliment and select very carefully as to which flaws to address. This may well be a somewhat personality dependent aspect of pedagogy, but musicians are educated to listen for minute flaws, to make mistake elimination the first priority. So, all musicians face the choice of when and what to celebrate in students’ attempts and what things to criticize. The choices teachers make ought to be informed by educational psychology. Psychology suggests that focusing on what children do well is more motivating and productive for achievement than focusing on what they do poorly. Further, observation and study of how children learn language shows that focusing on the positive attempts at speech and continually modeling the desired target is particularly productive. Pointing out incorrect attempts and scolding are not productive. Following the language learning model in music education, Suzuki advocates that an error made by the child is corrected by improving and increasing the modeling of the parents. These progressive attempts at approaching the ideal model is known as approximation. In the rehearsal model of music education that dominates the traditional music education paradigm, modeling and progressive approximation are often perceived as inefficient, and inefficiency in rehearsal is one of the greatest sins a music teacher can commit. The alternative is the identification of flaws and directive “fixing” of these imperfections. Pedagogically this is a dilemma, more acute in music education than in some other fields.

Equality of opportunity—merit-based assignment. Another tension in the pedagogical/performance task of teachers exists between the benefits of providing equal opportunity for all students (especially for solos or chair placement) and the performance excellence advantage of merit-based assignment.

Well, I think competition in one form or another is a pretty basic part of it. You know, it’s what kick-started me. Getting any job is a competition—an audition or an interview is a fact of life. We try to keep down a little bit here by rotating part assignments but, there is a merit base in part assignment. You’re not going to put your worst player to play a first horn on the Bruckner fourth Symphony. You try not to put somebody on the part that will embarrass them and the school. I don’t like competition particularly. I much prefer adjudicating or going to noncompetitive festivals or category festivals than ranked festivals, but it’s all around — competition is all around and it is not something you can ignore because it’s there. The trying out for parts, the auditioning to get into the faculty of music — some are accepted and some are rejected. You can’t just say yes to everybody.

This is a pedagogical dilemma with considerable input as a music-related dilemma. The difficulty of music presents a challenge that not all students equally can meet. However, it is the level of excellence expected or required in the context of peers and community that often determines the choice rather then the learning possibilities inherent in a performance. One student might benefit from the challenge of a particular piece while another might offer a more predictable performance. So in a way this really is a dilemma of educational excellence versus musical performance excellence. The very attitudinal context created by the teacher may determine the choice.
Another aspect of this problem lies in the subjective assessment of ability that can well be influenced by personal “favourites.”

...they have their pets, their students...they know who is going to have the solos...

Teachers may profess equality and yet favour particular students, or may profess assignment on basis of merit but in fact act preferentially. This is a dilemma that requires both a philosophical stance as well as conscientious self-monitoring for either position.

**Collaborative environment—competitive environment.** This is a dilemma of how to create the musical community and is strongly related to the dilemma of equality versus merit. It is quite blatantly a philosophical and political choice. Those who believe that the pursuit of excellence is the highest good, will likely be willing to acknowledge that if there are to be winners there must be losers, that the possibility of winning over fellow competitors is highly motivating and that this motivation leads to greater excellence, even if for only a few. Those who value collaboration, cooperation, and a community of equity will likely value the process over the product, the maintenance of equanimity, goodwill, caring, sharing, and the lack of “losers” over possible slight gain in achievement excellence by a few at the expense of the many. The competitive approach leads to the scenario in the movie *Shine* where one competitor says to the other, “It’s a tough game isn’t it Roger.” And the other replies, “It’s a blood sport.” The music educator must weigh the educational costs and benefits of the social climate established. The teacher must attend carefully to the nature of the community created among learners. Principles of social justice and democracy must become decisive determinants of pedagogic practice in the music classroom.

**Authentic music-making—Contrived performance.** Music-making has a natural meaning and function in the rites and rituals of a society. Music made in a church worship context has a functionality apart from the very act of performing. Music at a football game, a party, a funeral, a parade, a political rally, a protest similarly serves a particular function and does not specifically draw attention to itself and the act of performing. These are all authentic music-making contexts. Presumably music at a concert serves the purpose of artistic fulfillment, aesthetic response, sensual enjoyment or something like that, although many members of the audience are focused on criticism – they judge the performing quality of the artist. However, the Chicago Symphony does not create a concert to demonstrate that they have learned a new piece, reached a new level, or can out-perform the Toronto Symphony Orchestra. But, students are frequently subjected to these contrived music-making experiences – to be patronized in their progress and achievement, to “make their parents and teachers proud,” to compete against each other, to be judged for opportunities, to play simply to play what has been studied to develop technique, to perform to get used to performing, and so on. These are inauthentic music-making experiences, contrived for an “educative” purpose and usually associated with particular stress and terror, especially if “losing” is going to be taken as an indicator of personal worth and character. Music educators are constantly faced with choices about music-making context. They feel an obligation to have students perform, and feel that “education in performance” is needed. When music learning is not valued as a process, when the community of students itself is not seen as a fully worthwhile context for music-making, when there are few real community and cultural “rites and rituals” in the school context, teachers have few opportunities to involve students in authentic music-making experiences. The best they can do is create a public concert. And, of the possible performing
experiences, concerts are the most tenuous and hazardous of authentic experiences because audiences
find “moving artistic experiences” difficult to achieve and critical reaction easy to express.

**Student-responsibility – Teacher-responsibility.** The question of who is responsible for what is to be
learned in music lessons is related to the dilemma of culturally-familiar repertoire versus artistic
exemplars but is broader than merely repertoire. As in some previous dilemmas, this may not even seem like a dilemma to music educators—teachers simply select what is to be learned, what is to be rehearsed, what is to be performed. However, teachers exist that do encourage student responsibility and choice and evidence indicates that allowing and encouraging student responsibility increases engagement and motivation.

*She had me choose my own repertoire and prepared me for my grade 10 and for my auditions. He also helped me start up my first brass quintet.*

*He was limiting my musicality and making me play a piece the way he liked it. He then entered me in a music festival and forced me to play a piece that I did not like at all.*

Teachers may be ready to encourage student responsibility of repertoire or interpretation at advanced levels in individual study contexts but hesitant to do so at lower levels or in group contexts. The traditional music education paradigm features large ensemble performance or at least whole class activity with the teacher firmly in control of all decisions. Consequently, few places seem to exist where student responsibility is possible (other than the way the term is often used, be responsible to show up on time, look after your instrument, etc). If a more project-oriented approach were used in music class, choice and responsibility would immediately become a greater possibility.

The real issue, and dilemma for a progressive music educator, is who is responsible for what goes on in a learning context. Does the student take responsibility for what is to be learned, when, and how? Does the student have responsibility for decisions about interpretation or expression? Or is this responsibility carefully guarded and exercised by the teacher? Music teachers have been educated in a tradition of control – we need to control every sound, every expression. We are loathe to take on any situation without adequate preparation and rehearsal because we are afraid to lose control. And so music teachers may believe they are “sharing responsibility” for interpretive decisions or are developing “critical thinking” in students through a process of Socratic questioning about performance decisions. In fact, the Socratic process is a very teacher controlled discourse. The teacher “leads” to the “right” answer. A process that gives students more choice and more responsibility shifts control to students. It trusts students to “get to a possible answer” even if it is different from the teacher’s.

**Dilemmas related to student motivation and personality**

The dilemmas related to music and to pedagogy interact directly with the dilemmas related to student motivation and personality. There is no doubt that certain students respond positively to technical challenges, to competition, to the replication of prescribed musical works, or to a focus on fine-grained perfection. Some students may even be more resilient or tolerant to personal criticism and coercion. In fact, there may be a generational “vicious circle” in music related to who “survives” the system to be come the perpetuators of the system. The traditional music education paradigm has operated to a great extent with a conservative Darwinist approach: an assumption of survival of the fittest that finds ways
to select the fittest without wasting time or resources on the ones not likely to survive anyway. We have heard this frequently in comments made by music teachers who say they have no patience for the students who do not practice or come prepared to lessons, who believe they have little role in motivating students but rather “turn on the heat” assuming that “if you can’t stand the heat, get out of the kitchen” applies and prepares students for “the real world” of music. If the goal of music education of all types is to develop the potential of everyone, as we believe it should be, then greater attention to motivation and personality variables is required. The following dilemmas are not directly related to personality differences but reveal the effects of the interactions with the previous dilemmas.

**Social Play—Secluded Practice.** One dilemma faced by most parents of children taking music lessons is the desire of the child to engage in social play and the demands of music for secluded practice. This demand increases as the ability level of the child increases. It is probably one of the principal reasons for drop-outs from music lessons in childhood. One, of course, attributes the problem to the child’s motivation, and perhaps indirectly to the motivational ability of the teacher. In fact some of that attribution is in place as is evident from our discussion of the previous dilemmas. However, the child may in fact experience some motivation to learn but greater need and motivation to play with friends. One must also worry about the type of person and personality that therefore succeeds in music in isolation from social play. For many children this is a minor problem since they are not required to practice many hours, but it becomes an especially serious problem in the period heavily social oriented adolescence when “serious” musicians are expected to practice hours every day. It is also a very real problem of the gifted child as we discuss next.

**Healthy Childhood Holism—Singular Focus for Peak Achievement.** One of the really serious dilemmas is the tension between the need to start a child very young and keep them consistently practicing for them to become peak performers, and the damage done by the removal of that time from the normal holistic pursuits of childhood.

> Because kids are brought up musically, that becomes their only way to be loved and appreciated, so it becomes this overwhelming search for appreciation... I think parents and teachers contribute to varying degrees. I don't have a solution. To be a successful violinist you need to create that facility and technique when you're younger, it's a sort of fact of violin playing. And so you have a real problem there.

> Having been through what I consider perhaps a mildly abusive musical upbringing, it seems to me that there are some things to do that could enrich a child’s education that would not be terribly difficult. I wouldn’t really advocate dismantling the entire Kiwanis system, but at the same time the Kiwanis can be very detrimental— so much is up to the parents — and the parents are not aware of these kinds of issues. I don’t really know how one would solve that besides having some kind of counseling to go along with every Kiwanis class which actually probably would not be a bad thing.

A related issue to this dilemma is the investment parents make in the achievement of their child. During the time the child is subject to parental influence, a great weight of obligation can be placed on a child.
they had put in a tremendous amount of money and emotional effort into me continuing...you can’t quit...we have put too much money into it...you have to keep going until you make it ...we are not going to waste the money we have put in...Keep going!

Little thought or research has been given in music education to considerations of the ethical issues inherent in the development of gifted musicians. As stated in the introduction, sports sociologists and psychologists are beginning to recognize this problem and are raising alarms related to these ethical issues. Music educators urgently need to do so.

Musical–soulful reward—Ego–Achievement reward. Artistic achievement can be pursued for several reasons. A person may in fact love and enjoy music and find great fulfillment in its study and performance. However, the act of achieving is in itself ego-rewarding. Achievement in a field where there is essentially little recognized challenge will not be particularly rewarding for someone who seeks recognition for the act of achievement. But, a field that presents great challenge and in addition, the meeting of that challenge is in public performance, presents great opportunity for ego-driven achievement. Music seems especially subject to such ego-driven effort.

Even if one professes love of music it’s often, you know, still sort of a clever veil for one’s ego. You mean what one actually loves is achievement, the recognition of achievement rather than music itself?
I think it happens quite often.
Is it typical that the teacher starts to want the student to succeed for their own ego…
Oh sure
Rather than the student’s goals?
Yes, I think it’s a real danger all of the time, because the way you are seen as a teacher whether in the community or in the larger context, gives you access to better students who will then know your reputation. If you can start with better students you’ll be producing even better — you know, it’s sort of a chain. Because people often say that derogatorily about various very famous teachers who don’t seem to actually teach at all but they always have terrific students.

Certainly everyone who is going to stand up or sit and perform for others, there has to be ego there. How much varies considerably and I think it varies at different times of our own lives. I think ego is not really enough to sustain a career. It’s sort of insatiable — you need constantly new conquests. I also think that the love of playing an instrument is not enough to sustain a career. I can think of trumpet players that I think love playing their instrument but they get bored with the music and I think that’s sad. It’s really the love of music that can sustain a career.

When can a musician stop struggling for greater excellence and enjoy competence?
Boy, that’s a hard one... It’s probably when your love of music becomes stronger than your ego that you can enjoy competence and if you’re good enough to play well — competently at whatever level you’re playing.

When you think of your own personal inner critic, what fuels it or where does it come from in your case?
Probably ego, that we always want to be the best, that typical American thing of being the best you can and working hard at it — no pain, no gain, kind of thing. Always perhaps wanting to be the best and that’s unfortunate.

Factors other than a focus on the real meaning and experience of the art can also be a parental motivation. The ego of the parent may thrive on “showing off” a child.

Putting little girls on display to show off instead of a sharing of an art form....

This may be the motivation of parents from the “impromptu living room concerts” when guests appear, to the interest in monthly, quarterly or annual recitals at the teacher’s house, to the kindergarten holiday concert or the recital hall debut concert. It is the very act of achievement that is the motivation and reward rather than an authentic love of music or the experience of the music itself. And, this thrives in a culture where fascination is with the new “child star” or the new talent on the concert stage, and a culture where the very attendance of the concert may be of greater value than the experience of the music at the concert.

Love the Music — Hate the cost. Music is an art that is exceptionally demanding in terms of the time and effort involved in the development of the ability required to reach a professional level. But not only must the performer spend much time and effort during the formative years, this time must continually be spent if the ability is to be sustained. Even those who have an abundant love of the art and are not simply pursuing ego-driven achievement, the cost of maintaining ability is great but without the ability being maintained near its peak, the enjoyment is lost.

I think a lot of people have a sort of a love- hate relationship. I mean, if you didn’t have a fair component of love you couldn’t make yourself do it forever but the resentment of all the time it takes and how much you miss in your life. Armando Ghitala, the principal in Boston and the man in the poster up there who is such a great artist said, he resented all of the time it took, all of the books he couldn’t read etc.

Music has many similarities to dance in this regard. Musicians experience some of what this ballet dancer said in an interview:

Ballet is unforgiving, it’s ruthless. It is an absolutely cruel and horrendous world, but it’s beautiful!”

But, the cost is not only a personal one. We may, as a culture, so value something that we are willing to close our eyes to things we should not, or perpetrate things we might not except for the great value we place on a certain experience.

Do we still allow things to happen or justify things because finally we have these elevating experiences with the arts and, therefore, almost anything is justified in the creation of this experience? The end justifies the means?

I think that happens. There’s been books written about a certain conductor and his opera orchestra and yet everybody seems to be totally willing to overlook all his personal failures because of his great musical successes.
Incredible Art—Rotten Profession. Related to the “love the art--hate the cost” dilemma is the conclusion that a number of the participants seem to reach, music is an incredible art but a rotten profession.

*I feel really guilty about all of the students who are trying to become musicians — I think it’s an incredible art and a rotten profession, because it’s so poorly paid and the failure rate is so high. I worry about all the students here and other places that have such a hard road and are probably not going to make it in terms of traditional performing. I think the music schools are guilty, but on the other hand who do you tell “no.”

*There’s a difference between the music business and the business of music— one is great and the other is horrible, but you have to combine the two. Some people are just scraping by... But, they seem to enjoy what they’re doing—maybe they’re just unrealistically waiting for their break.*

CONDITIONS OF LEARNING

Music is a demanding art. Learning, from the first attempts to elite performance levels, is fraught with musical, pedagogical, and motivational dilemmas and the needs of the person are often neglected. How can these needs be addressed while pursuing the ideals of the art? We propose that the key is the protection and nurturing of the individual’s engagement with the art. We propose that the choices teachers make related to the dilemmas set the conditions of learning and determine levels of engagement: choosing one way or another may lead to engagement or to disengagement. Further, the dilemma choices are inter-related: a choice on one dilemma may influence the effect of a choice on another.

The dilemmas we have discussed are the following:

- Musical Expressivity — Technical Proficiency
- Relative standards — Objective standards
- Personal Best effort — Musical perfection
- Learner focused — Art focused
- Culturally-familiar repertoire — Artistic exemplars
- Manipulable Elements — Replicable Prescription
- Encouraging Teacher — Pushing Teacher
- Desire to achieve — Lack of ability to self-motivate
- Performance-focused feedback — Person-directed feedback
- Optimistic expectation — Pessimistic expectation
- Student-appropriate challenge — Teacher-stimulating challenge
- Holistic Approximation — Fine Grained Perfection
- Equality of opportunity — Merit-based assignment
- Collaborative environment — Competitive environment
- Authentic music-making — Contrived performance
- Student-responsibility — Teacher-responsibility
| Social Play | — | Secluded Practice |
| Healthy Childhood Holism | — | Singular Focus for Peak Achievement |
| Musical–soulful reward | — | Ego–Achievement reward |
| Love the music | — | Hate the cost |
| Incredible Art | — | Rotten Profession |

In a general way, if the conditions of learning are predominantly those from the left hand column, the music learning experience will probably be a positive, enjoyable, motivating, and rewarding one that is likely to lead to a life-time of music participation. If the conditions of learning are predominantly those from the right hand column, the music learning experience for the average student will probably be a negative, de-motivating, psychologically damaging one, and in most cases lead to a cessation of music-making. The “talented musicians” that endure and survive this approach to music-making are likely to have suffered some psychological damage that leads to a life-time of struggle in various forms of stress and anxiety, ego-gratification, and a tendency to perpetuation of the abuse on others.

The model of the conditions of learning (Cameron & Bartel, 2000) that we have been developing for the past few years has engagement at its core – primarily engagement of the student with learning music but also the engagement of the teacher with pedagogy. This model expands with the adaptation of these dilemmas and particularly needs to demonstrate the dynamic between the psycho-social and the socio-cultural dimensions of music education.

References:


Schools and Teacher Education Commission Seminar, Malmö, Sweden, August 2002. With Linda Cameron, Publication in the MISTEC Proceedings


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