

Polarizing

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Interpretations of Society as a Challenge for Music Education

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In What Way Can Music Teachers and Musical Leaders Foster the Ability to Cope with Plurality?

A Suggestion Based on the Cultivation
of Ethical Capacities

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How can music educators respond to and actively deal with the globally increasing phenomena of antipluralism and populism? This question can be tackled in manifold ways, and this paper is an attempt to present an answer that is based on ethical considerations. The answer is based on the idea that music-making is “a social and even political act” (Small, 1998, p. 12) and on the idea that music teachers and musical leaders can choose to be *ethical practitioners* (Elliott, 1995, p. 69) when making music with others¹. As ethical practitioners, they can decide to tackle the problem of antipluralistic attitudes by actively cultivating *the ability to cope with plurality* in their classrooms. In this paper, I intend to clarify what this pedagogic decision might imply.

In agreement with Hannah Arendt’s philosophical thinking on plurality, Christina Thürmer-Rohr argues that

Plurality is ... an irrefutable *fact* and at the same time a political *demand*. We are to accept it and have to protect it. It is destructible, and this destruction is not only tantamount to the destruction of human diversity, but also to ... the destruction of human potential and the decline of the political that deals with the coming together of distinctly different individuals. (Thürmer-Rohr, 2019, p. 53; translated by DB)

In what way can music teachers and musical leaders do their part to ensure that plurality is protected? I suggest that the concept of plurality can be protected by regarding the coming together of distinctly different individuals (see Arendt, 2018, p. 176) as a gain for both societies and the groups coming together in music classrooms—even though the distinctness of human beings can be challenging for everyone involved. Accepting the challenges connected to plurality is worthwhile, since “the destruction of human diversity” would lead to societies that are rather bleak. When it comes to making music in groups, this can lead to dull (school) concerts in which the same repertoire of songs is performed again and again, and the interpretation of these songs stays the same. Realizing plurality through *deliberate pedagogic actions* can prevent this from happening. I consider the concept of plurality as being very valuable for music education, for the following reason: when groups make music, human plurality and human potential can become visible in beautiful ways. In music classrooms and in choir or band studios, valuing plurality through our actions can lead to musical results that reveal the individual (musical) potential of diverse group members and this is what makes a repertoire interesting. Hence fostering plurality is not only an ethical endeavor; it also has musical merits.

¹ In this paper, I focus on the action of making music with groups as an ethical action. Hence I will regard both music teachers working in schools and musical leaders working in other places as practitioners who have the capacity to reflect on their actions and their possible effects on their own life and other people’s lives.

Based on perspectives from the book *Ethical Education* edited by Scherto Gill & Garrett Thompson, I argue that the ability to accept the challenges of plurality requires that humans develop certain ethical capacities. Gill & Thomson are interested in educational approaches that foster peace and dialogue, and they present a modern approach to ethical education that is focused on relational ethics. This approach “seeks ways for young people to develop ethical capacities in their relationships within the life of a school community, which are equally applicable to their lives beyond the school” (Gill & Thomson, 2020, p. 8). Kenneth J. Gergen explains a central aspect of this modern approach to ethical education as follows: “Rather than the traditional emphasis on learning about ethical behaviour, the focus shifts to learning within an ongoing community of practice” (Gergen, 2020, p. 24). A group of adolescents making music in a music classroom can be regarded as a community of practice in this sense. David T. Hansen’s book *The Teacher and the World: A Study of Cosmopolitanism as Education* presents another, earlier approach to an ethical form of education that can be practiced in schools. Hansen emphasizes that cosmopolitanism is an ancient concept that “signifies the human capacity to be open reflectively to the larger world, while remaining loyal reflectively to local concerns, commitments, and values” (Hansen, 2011, p. xiii). This ethical understanding of cosmopolitanism goes hand in hand with an ethical orientation that teachers can deliberately cultivate, and Hansen explains very clearly what the cultivation of cosmopolitanism means for the everyday practice of teachers. It means that they “deeply value learning from other persons and cultures. They value the distinctiveness and singularity of local community and of individual character” (ibid., p. xiv). Obviously, this understanding of cosmopolitanism differs from sociological understandings based on dualistic concepts in which cosmopolitans stand opposite communitarians. Hansen’s understanding of cosmopolitanism as an ethical orientation takes into account that “a local banker, janitor, or cab driver, or a small-town schoolteacher, fisherman, or market seller, may have a livelier cosmopolitan sensibility than the most globe-trotting, well-connected executive, who in any case is all too often camped out in airport lounges and chain hotels” (ibid.).

Right at the beginning, I want to emphasize that the development of ethical capacities in ongoing communities of practice within high schools is not just something that happens “within the students”; it is also an inner process that needs to happen in their teachers’ consciousness. I suggest that music teachers can deliberately enable adolescents to develop certain ethical capacities in groups in relating to one another. But at the same time music teachers need to practice a critical form of self-reflection by first and foremost asking *themselves*: Do I enable my students to experience plurality when we listen to and make music together? Do I enable them to deal with plurality? In which moments do I feel challenged when trying to cope with plurality in the music classroom? Do I perhaps even suppress plurality at times? For what reason might I sometimes suppress plurality?

I pose these questions because I occasionally wonder: are music teachers and musical leaders willing to expose themselves to plurality? Taking into account my own experiences as a music teacher and choir leader, I must admit that coping with plurality can be a difficult task. That is why I have come to think about the question of what reasons might speak against realizing plurality when making music with a group. In the following section, I want to discuss some challenges connected to plurality that could prevent music teachers or musical leaders from actively cultivating the ability to cope with plurality in classrooms and other places where people make music together.

Apart from discussing the challenges, I intend to directly specify some opportunities to take up these challenges. Having a clear idea of these opportunities is significant if we strive to create a “common world” (Arendt, 2018, pp. 57–58).

Accepting and Taking Up the Challenges Involved in Plurality

The idea that there are certain challenges we cannot avoid accepting if we want to foster plurality springs from the philosophical thinking of Hannah Arendt, Martha Nussbaum, Kwame A. Appiah, and Christina Thürmer-Rohr. It is self-evident that these thinkers set different and individual priorities in their work. Nonetheless, I would say that all of them support the cosmopolitan perspective that “all human beings are equal and deserving of equal political treatment, a treatment based on equal attention and consideration of their *agency*” (Taraborrelli, 2015, p. 2). Kwame A. Appiah has made it clear what it means to respect each person’s individual agency: “Whatever our obligations are to others (or theirs to us) they often have the right to go their own way” (Appiah, 2006, p. xv). Accepting that all human beings are equal in the sense that they have the right to be agents who make their own decisions and have the right to go their own way can be hard at times. Christina Thürmer-Rohr puts it bluntly when she states:

The trivializing of the term plurality by claiming it is synonymous with sheer diversity and beautiful colorfulness of the social environment suggests a harmlessness that reduces all differences to sheer aesthetic pleasure and to personal enrichment. Plurality not only makes the world colorful. It is also a source of lasting controversies and sets limits that are necessary. (Thürmer-Rohr, 2019, p. 54; translated by DB).

I believe that taking critical perspectives like this one into account is a first step if we want to protect plurality. In groups that make music, challenges arise if individual members try to go their own ways. Musicians playing in ensembles and bands strive to go on a shared journey. At times, a music group might be in need of a captain who makes sure that the crew of her ship contributes to this endeavor. Christian Rolle argues that sometimes there is “a necessity to reach a consensus in an aesthetic debate” (Rolle, 2014, p. 1). He gives the example of an upcoming school concert which requires that an aesthetic decision be found regarding how a piece should be played. According to Rolle, this question cannot be answered in a way that acknowledges all personal tastes. Situations like this one can be challenging for a group because individual members need to accept that personal tastes differ and that different group members value different interpretations of the same piece. Hence one question that is relevant for music teachers and musical leaders is: how can they enable groups to cope with situations like this one?

An ethical perspective proposed by Kenneth J. Gergen shows one way of coping with such a situation: “The challenge is not that of achieving a conflict-free existence but of locating ways of approaching conflict that do not bend towards mutual extermination” (Gergen, 2020, p. 20). Extermination might be a very strong expression and it might seem a bit extreme when applied to situations in which music groups are challenged by a diversity of (aesthetic) views. Nevertheless, this ethical perspective can help human beings accept that conflicts are a part of life.

Kwame A. Appiah puts it this way: “You don’t need to leave home to have disagreements about questions of value” (Appiah, 2006, p. 45). With regard to the question of how human beings can cope with disagreements, he suggests the following: “[The] fact that we have all these

opportunities for disagreement about values need not put us off. Understanding one another may be hard; it can certainly be interesting. But it doesn't require that we come to agreement" (Appiah, 2006, p. 78). When comparing Christian Rolle's and Kwame Appiah's lines of thought, I noticed a difference: Appiah suggests that human beings can accept that others disagree with them and also choose to accept that there are situations in which they will not reach a consensus. Christian Rolle, on the other hand, speaks about the *necessity* of reaching a consensus in an aesthetic debate. Arguably, music groups sometimes have to make decisions based on the point of view shared by the majority of group members, but there are other ethical options they can choose from.

To focus on the rehearsal process: music teachers who want to realize plurality in their classrooms first of all have the opportunity to make sure that individual (aesthetic) viewpoints are heard and considered by all group members. This is one significant ethical action that music teachers and musical leaders can decide to perform. As Lauren Kapalka Richerme points out, it is also important that music groups "resist perceiving the viewpoints of the majority as universal" (Kapalka Richerme, 2020, p. 94). However, just perceiving the diverse viewpoints in a group might not be enough. If viewpoints of minorities within a group are just considered and the ideas and suggestions of these minority voices are never put into practice or even just tried out in a rehearsal, plurality will remain an idea that human beings pay lip service to and the creation of a *common world*—a concept that I will come to below—does not take place.

With regard to the aim of actually realizing plurality by appreciating differing perspectives, groups can decide to pay attention to the question of whether equity is being safeguarded in the long term. For example, they can come to an agreement to also put the (aesthetic) ideas of the minority voices within their groups into practice—in moments when this makes musical sense. Music teachers and musical leaders can for their part regularly ask themselves how the individual members of the groups they work with can dwell together and what they need to do to make sure that the group succeeds in this respect. They then start creating "a community of human beings aspiring to dwell together" (Hansen, 2011, p. 113), which is an aspect of cosmopolitanism as an ethical orientation suggested by Hansen. This practice of perceiving, talking about, and reflecting on individual and collective needs also has to include the process of perceiving and reflecting on one's own well-being as a music teacher or musical leader. I agree with Kapalka Richerme that "unbridled selflessness" (Kapalka Richerme, 2020, p. 92) cannot be a teacher's goal, because it might be at the expense of "the ethics of caring for oneself" (*ibid.*, p. 93).

Nevertheless, music teachers and musical leaders have the pedagogic opportunity to invite individual members to share and explain their ideas in front of the group in moderation. When teachers and leaders perceive that certain students have interesting ideas or perspectives that could contribute to the groups' growth, they can encourage students to voice these during the process of rehearsing. Teachers and leaders can also encourage students to convince others about certain (aesthetic) options available to the group. This is a way of enabling young people to take part "in the coactive process of meaning making," of "enabling participation in the generative process of relating" and "creating and sustaining intelligible action" (Gergen, 2020, p. 24).

If music teachers decide to foster the communication between group members in this way, all participants get the opportunity to acquire a special form of experiential knowledge that is an aspect of a cosmopolitan orientation:

All persons live in the same world, and all develop modes of perception. But persons see that same world differently depending on their upbringing, experience, and concerns. To listen *with* others, is to try to discern *their* response to being in the same world. This orientation pushes beyond tolerance—a posture in which I can listen to others but without being affected by the experience—into a realm of formative learning, in which who and what I am comes into play. I open myself to being influenced by my encounters. (Hansen, 2011, p. 116)

The last sentence in this quote almost sounds as if this process is something very natural, as if all of us are open to being influenced by our encounters. My personal life experience has shown that this kind of openness is something we have to *deliberately cultivate*. Being open to other ways of perceiving the same world and other ways of being in the same world is something we actually need to practice.

If I share my response to being in the same world with others in a music group, who and what I am comes into play. In such moments, the members of a music group experience and witness what Hannah Arendt has called the “disclosure of the ‘who’ through speech” (Arendt, 2018, p. 184; see also Bartels, 2020). Entering this process requires courage because I might then expose myself with all the values I have developed and cultivated in my life. If music educators encourage others to let this happen in music groups, human plurality can become visible. This can foster their human flourishing because in situations like these the members of a music group feel acknowledged as the persons they are, or acknowledged to be experts in a specific musical praxis. In situations like these their music teacher—or: their musical leader—needs the inner strength to acknowledge that somebody else within the group has something unique to contribute, to step back for a while and find out in what way this unique contribution can enrich the musical process and the musical products that come into being.

Apart from that, Hansen’s statement above reminded me of another passage in Hannah Arendt’s *The Human Condition*:

Under the conditions of a common world, reality is not guaranteed primarily by the “common nature” of all men who constitute it, but rather by the fact that ... everybody is always concerned with the same object. ... The end of the common world has come when it is seen only under one aspect and is permitted to present itself in only one perspective. (Arendt, 2018, pp. 57–58)

Christina Thürmer-Rohr’s reading of this passage is as follows: “With that, the world becomes a space for action that produces a common ground, but not a homogeneous community” (Thürmer-Rohr, 2019, p. 65; translated by DB). Both Arendt’s and Thürmer-Rohr’s line of thought can be transferred to the space for action that music groups create: their individual members are concerned with the same objects when they rehearse or talk about a musical piece, but this does not mean that they are a homogeneous community of individuals who have the same ideas or thoughts about the musical pieces they create together or listen to. At times, they will be faced with disagreements that cannot be resolved, and they will not reach a consensus. This could be a human experience that we subconsciously try to avoid because it complicates our relationships. It can also trigger a process that “causes individuals to feel vulnerable” (Kapalka Richerme, 2020, p. 92).

For realizing the concept of plurality, it seems to be significant that human beings accept that we share a common world, but that we perceive it differently. I argue that the development of

certain ethical capacities might help us to cope with this. The cultivation of these ethical capacities within groups requires regular self-reflection. Music teachers and musical leaders can decide to incorporate moments of a shared self-reflection into their work with groups. They can regularly aim to make visible that while sharing a common world, we perceive it differently, and that this is nothing to be afraid of. Entering this process might at first complicate relationships; it can cause feelings of vulnerability; and it certainly requires time. But it can enrich relationships long term.

Opening Fields of Dialogue

In the previous section, I referred to Lauren Kapalka Richerme's thinking within the philosophy of music education because she tackles significant ethical dilemmas that music teachers can face in their profession. In *Complicating, Considering, and Connecting Music Education*, Kapalka Richerme weaves personal narratives into her line of thought that date from her years as a high school teacher. With great honesty, she writes:

Reflecting on my own Pre-K-12 and collegiate teaching, I see many points when I might have openly acknowledged the ethical nature of everyday questions and actions. Although one middle school student's asking if Tchaikovsky was gay or another's assumption that all indigenous peoples play drums presented opportunities for thoughtful ethical conversations, my curt responses deadened those moments. (Kapalka Richerme, 2020, p. 67)

This passage reveals in what way music teachers can reflect on their actions in the classroom. Considering other people's perspectives in the music classroom, Kapalka Richerme notes: "I think that teachers and students can develop dispositions important for ethical decision-making throughout their lives. However, given the limits of my own narratives, I will have to let you be the judge of that" (Kapalka Richerme, 2020, p. 98). The point that our own narratives are always limited is an important one, but I would like to argue that personal narratives have the potential to trigger both individual and collective reflection about our daily actions and the way these actions influence others and are influenced by others. This is the great potential of sharing personal narratives with others.

Apart from not deadening moments in which we can enter conversations by first of all listening to personal narratives, we can deliberately cultivate a specific form of reflection that Hansen suggests:

Cosmopolitanism constitutes an orientation in which people learn to balance reflective openness to the new with reflective loyalty to the known. The orientation positions people to *learn from rather than tolerate others*, even while retaining the integrity and continuity of their distinctive ways of being. (Hansen, 2011, p. 1)

Applied to our daily actions as musical and ethical practitioners, this could mean that we ask ourselves whether we are actually open to new thoughts that other people express. It can also mean that we regularly ask ourselves which ways of being in the world are new to us, and how we want to deal with these other ways of being. It can mean that by perceiving other ways of being in the world, we realize that our way of being in the world is different and that we *want* to be loyal to certain values that are a part of our own being in the world. As long as nobody in a group is seriously harmed or hurt, the decision to be loyal to certain values is not unethical. What I find

significant about David Hansen's suggestion is that a cosmopolitan orientation does not mean that people have to choose between *either being open to the new or loyal to the known*. It is possible to be loyal to the values I grew up with, and at the same time to be open to get to know values other humans grew up with.

The forms of self-reflection suggested by Lauren Kapalka Richerme and David Hansen are demanding. Teachers who decide to practice these forms of self-reflection with their students need to cultivate a specific form of communication. Moreover, they need to be attentive when it comes to value judgements that are expressed in their classrooms. They need to be able to spontaneously go into these judgements *with* their students and ask them open questions in order to find out what beliefs inform these judgements. If they want to enable their students to practice self-reflection during this process, they should restrain from sharing their own reflections on a matter that is being discussed too early. If their students request to know their teacher's perspective on this matter, they have a right to hear it. Hearing this perspective will help them realize that a matter that is being discussed can be seen under more than one aspect, and that this does not mean that the common world is at risk. The common world is not destroyed by human disagreements. In agreement with Hannah Arendt, I argue that the common world is at risk when it is permitted to present itself in only one perspective. That is why the deliberate pedagogic decision to make different perspectives visible in classrooms is of high importance if we want to protect plurality.

There is another thought related to Arendt's concept of a common world that is fruitful for discussions about plurality within music education because it offers music teachers a positive perspective on the plurality in their classrooms: "If we presume that we as distinct humans have something to say to each other and that we have to tell something distinctive, fields of dialogue open up" (Thümer-Rohr, 2019, p. 66). In a music education seminar that I taught at the University of the Arts in Berlin, we experienced this opening up of a field of dialogue, and neither the students nor I expected that this might happen. It happened during a music lesson at a Berlin high school in December 2019, in the middle of a small project that was supposed to bring a group of university students together with a music course consisting of high school students who were between sixteen and eighteen years old. During that winter term, we visited these students and their teacher once a week to perform live for them, and to start open conversations about the musical pieces the music education students performed for the high school students, and vice versa². My idea behind this music education seminar was that the music education students would share the musical pieces they were working on as part of their studies, or that they just love performing, with adolescents who grew up in Neukölln, a part of the city that used to be known as an "Arbeiterbezirk" (blue-collar area) but is today highly diverse, including large Arabic and Turkish communities that have developed over the last six decades. The seminar's title was "Ways of Music-Making," and at the beginning of the semester I suggested that our goal should be to perform a diversity of musics that we could talk about in the music classroom. With regard to the university students' growth, my intention as a music educator was that they strengthen the artistic side of their personalities as future music teachers. My idea was also that they start an open and responsive conversation with the group about the musics they love playing. With regard to the high school students' growth, their music teacher's goal was that they practice verbalizing aspects they hear in a piece of music,

² The high school students of this group were shy, but we had one lesson in which they played some songs for us with their school band, which gave us an opportunity to listen to them playing for us.

by taking up the offers of conversation being made by the university students. Apart from that, the project was also inspired by Thomas Ott's thinking about the possibilities of diversity in music classrooms. Ott suggests the following:

The German educational system and thinking still distrust heterogeneity. Instead of taking advantage of it in terms of cooperation and diversities of perspective, it tends to homogenise learning groups by selection. But dealing with examples of music and arts could particularly benefit from the learners' different socialization backgrounds: They could negotiate fruitfully the diversity and contradictoriness of their perceptions. (Ott, 2013, p. 139)

What happened in December 2019 was that two female students thought about performing the religious song "Maria Walks amid the Thorn." They came to my office to talk about their idea, and told me straightaway that they were a bit worried about performing a Christian Christmas tune in front of these high school students³. I asked them what exactly they were concerned about, and they answered that the majority of the high school students were of Muslim faith. I then asked them why they liked singing this song. Their answer was that it is a piece that they both enjoyed singing when they were high school girls, and that they especially liked singing it as a two-part tune. I suggested that they could tell the high school students what they had just told me, and that I was sure that the high school students would be interested in hearing the tune. When the day of the performance came, I was very curious to see how the group would react. While the students were performing, their audience listened attentively. When the students started talking about the lyrics of the song and their meaning, a Muslim girl raised her hand and said that she thought that it was interesting how Maria was depicted in the Bible. She then told us how Maria was depicted in the Qur'an. In that moment, I was quite happy that I had encouraged the university students to perform this song and that they had mustered the courage to disclose themselves in front of their audience on that day, despite their initial worries. When we had our group reflection with the university students after the lesson, they told us the same thing.

Looking back on this experience now and looking at it from a perspective informed by diversity, I am aware that our decision can be criticized: two white university students performed a traditional Christian Christmas song in a music classroom where a large number of the high school students were of Muslim faith. After having read texts on the ethical aspects in the concept of cosmopolitanism, I argue that these students remained loyal to their own personal musical biographies. At the same time, the students were open to a new perspective on a song they had sung many times. They did not claim that the song they picked is of higher value than any other song they could have picked instead. They shared a little piece from their musical biography with a diverse group of high school students, and in the process of talking about the lyrics and their possible meanings, everyone in the group expanded their knowledge and individual horizons. Starting a conversation about the different stories told about Mary in the Bible and in the Qur'an was not a problem; it led to a mutual enrichment of perspectives. We allowed space for plurality, and in the process overcame some fears the two performers and I had felt before entering the shared space of that music classroom. We entered a coactive space of meaning making.

³ I thank Johanna Tirrel and Elinor Metzke for giving their approval for me to tell this story in this paper.

Fostering the Cultivation of Ethical Capacities

In this final section, I will summarize the ethical capacities introduced and explained above. In the process of writing this paper, I have come to the conclusion that the cultivation of these ethical capacities is very closely connected to the pedagogic ability to open fields of dialogue. Once again, I want to emphasize that the realization of the suggested ethical capacities is a deliberate decision. The decision to realize and foster these capacities when working with groups in schools and other places is thus up to music teachers and musical leaders. The short list I propose is inspired by Martha Nussbaum's idea to name and specify ten central capabilities that human beings should be entitled to cultivate because these capabilities enable them to realize a good life based on their own choices.

In her version of the Capabilities Approach, Nussbaum's aim was to "ensur[e] dignity and opportunity for each person" (Nussbaum, 2011, p. 16) by discussing philosophical views "that focus on human flourishing or self-realization" (ibid., p. 23)⁴. The ethical capacities I suggest aim to achieve human flourishing and self-realization within music groups *as well as* the ability to cope with plurality. I think that they need to be cultivated in schools because these are the places where future citizens are educated. In agreement with Nussbaum, I argue that this education should entail the following aspects: it should enable children and adolescents to "nourish the development of their powers of mind" (ibid., p. 22) in ways that serve their own and other people's well-being. I also support Nussbaum's point that "[we] need a way to talk about these innate powers that are either nurtured or not nurtured" (ibid., p. 23).

Young people are capable of learning to perceive which actions serve their own and their classmates' well-being and to reflect on this. This ethical learning/reflection process does not necessarily entail that the music-making of a school band is connected to deep philosophical discussions, but it does entail that opposed values can be expressed and openly discussed. In other words, in an ethically oriented music education, band leaders allow for opposed values to be voiced, become visible, and be discussed. This does not imply that music teachers and musical leaders need to teach moral reasoning. As mentioned above, Scherto Gill and Garrett Thomson suggest a "new approach to ethical education in schools" (Gill & Thomson, 2020, p. 1) that "seeks ways for young people to develop ethical capacities in their relationships within the life of a school community" (ibid., p. 8). They also suggest that teachers "enliven the ability to appreciate that others may see a dispute quite differently from oneself" (ibid., p. 2).

The following list of ethical capacities that contribute to the ability to cope with plurality in classrooms and rehearsal studios is just a beginning, and it can certainly be expanded. I invite you to question these ethical capacities. In order to create a connection with the previous sections of this paper, I again name the thinkers who have elaborated these capacities:

⁴ Those interested in the differences between Martha Nussbaum's and Amartya Sen's versions of the approach, and in how both approaches can inspire our thinking and research in music education, can download the paper "Music Education and the Question of Freedom – Applications of Amartya Sen's and Martha Nussbaum's Capability/Capabilities Approach" that I presented with Valerie Krupp-Schleußner at the 19th International Seminar of the ISME Commission in Music Policy: Culture, Education, and Media here: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327120395_Music_Education_and_the_Question_of_Freedom_Applications_of_Amartya_Sen%27s_and_Martha_Nussbaum%27s_Capability_Capabilities_Approach [March 2, 2021].

- the capacity *not* to be put off by opportunities for disagreement about values (Appiah, 2006)
- the capacity to be willing to discern other people’s responses to being in the same world (Hansen, 2011)
- the capacity to open oneself to being influenced by one’s encounters (Hansen, 2011)
- the capacity to enable coactive processes of meaning making (Gergen, 2020)
- the capacity to make actions as intelligible as possible to all group members (Gergen, 2020)

My own practical experience as a choir leader and my observations of other musical leaders have shown that the pedagogic decision to foster plurality by having these ethical capacities in mind goes hand in hand with a specific style of leadership that focuses on the human beings making music. Music teachers and musical leaders who value these capacities focus on creating opportunities for communication on equal terms (see Bartels & Theuner, 2021) and on the potential that individual group members bring into the group. They regard all members of a group as creative human beings who are able to develop their own ideas, to share these ideas, and to contribute in creative ways to the music-making of a group. They are curious about the musical ideas that are voiced by group members and look for the potential of these ideas. They are willing to safeguard everybody’s interest to be on a level playing field when making music in a group.

My aim has been to present a way we can think about music education and the opportunities of music educators to shape the societies in which we live. If we decide to be music educators and practitioners who actively work against antipluralistic attitudes, the aspiration to realize and develop certain ethical capacities will help and guide us. If we develop our musical and ethical capacities with others, in a coactive manner, instead of trying to convince others to adopt our values or our beliefs about how something “should” be done, we might do our part to ensure that plurality is protected.

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