

Cooperative Education, Ethnomusicology, and Teaching for Freedom: Ethnomusicology as a method for creating equitable education spaces in the pursuit of freedom

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Abstract

This paper explores the role of cooperative education and public-facing ethnomusicology as tools for democratizing learning and resisting hegemonic structures in both traditional and community-based educational spaces. Drawing on bell hooks' theory of engaged pedagogy, it reflects on personal, lived experience as a student at the Educational Center for the Arts (ECA) to illustrate how democratic, student-centered models can challenge the neoliberal classroom. Through case studies such as the Social Science Center in England and Heavy Sound in Scotland, the paper highlights how collaborative, trauma-informed, and arts-integrated practices foster meaningful student engagement and reframe education as a community-oriented process. Public-facing ethnomusicology emerges as a method of "Everyday Learning," both inside and outside the classroom, by using music to build collective identity, support diverse learners, and create inclusive, culturally responsive environments. The paper concludes by advocating for interdisciplinary applications of these principles—across humanities and STEM fields alike—and calls for grading models and pedagogical frameworks that prioritize student agency, intrinsic motivation, and the shared pursuit of knowledge for the purpose of social change.

Introduction

Our current system of education in the United States is broken. It is a product of capitalism, driven by desires for profit and power. I have a love of learning, consider myself a perpetual student, and believe education to be one of the most powerful tools for combating social problems. My interest in education reform began in high school. I first encountered non-traditional education at the Education Center for the Arts (ECA), an urban magnet high school that I attended while simultaneously attending a traditional public school in my small hometown called Daniel Hand (DHHS). I would take math, English, and other traditional academic subjects in the morning and then catch a bus to the city, where I studied theater with students from all over the surrounding county. During my high school career, I was constantly comparing my experiences at the two schools. I was excited to attend my art school, active in class, and made connections across the various art departments with faculty and students. I absolutely loved it. DHHS, on the other hand, was a means to an end: it enabled me to go to art school, and I spent most of my time there counting the minutes until my commute

to ECA. In 2019, when I began my college career at Carnegie Mellon University (CMU), I was surprised to find that my experience at ECA was a rare one and that many of my peers came from backgrounds resembling mine at public school. When my peers were presented with academic challenges, they became very anxious because they were worried that the work they created would or would not result in a high grade—or respond with "I can easily bullshit this, and get a good grade." My coursework at CMU also resembled the same structure as my public school, and my attitude towards the work quickly shifted. In my first year, I noticed that I began the year with excitement for my new academic experience, but at the end of the first semester, I felt frustrated and disengaged from my classes, and was more excited about the upcoming break. I began to question the role of academia in my life—then, that spring semester, the COVID-19 pandemic shut down the world and challenged the conventions of education for educators and students across the globe.

I have come to see the purpose of education as having three main goals: 1) to develop an understanding of who you are, 2) to learn how to express who you are, and 3)

to learn how your expression affects your community. This is the story of how I got there. The intersection of Public-Facing Ethnomusicology and Every Day, Informal Learning creates an effective environment for teaching education as a practice of freedom, advocating overall for cooperative, democratized education for the purpose of forging a non-traditional, non-institutionalized, and accessible means for individuals to liberate themselves from hegemonic structures of domination in society. Equitable, engaged pedagogy and public-facing ethnomusicology are both rooted in an awareness of individual and collective action and its impact on the community, making them interlocutors in the movement towards cooperative education that works to confront and transgress oppression in broader society.

In sharing my educational journey, I will draw on my background in high school, attending ECA while at the same time attending a public, state-funded high school, and the ways that these simultaneous experiences shaped my understanding of the purpose of education. I will then draw on bell hooks' book, *Teaching to Transgress*, to propose that the purpose of education is to ensure greater freedom for everyone in the community by teaching individuals how racial, economic, and gendered barriers in society can be transgressed through their positionality and actions. Then, I will define democratic and cooperative educational models and how they generate environments that are best situated to teach education as a practice of freedom, introducing the topic of *Everyday Learning*. I will suggest that one means to create community-based education that works to transgress barriers in society is through public-facing ethnomusicology, drawing on a previous research project I conducted about *Heavy Sound*, a non-profit organization in Scotland that serves hard-to-reach young people in Edinburgh through music.

Positionality

Education taught as a connection to and awareness of the community

I grew up in a small, affluent, predominantly white town in the suburbs of Connecticut and attended public school from kindergarten through my senior year of high school alongside the same cohort of students. When I was in school, I would count down the minutes until, every other day, I attended my theater class. From a very young age, the theater was my outlet for making meaningful connections with my peers and teachers, working collaboratively, and sharing stories

that helped me to interpret my small sliver of the world. I didn't realize it at the time, but knowing that at the end of the day I got to attend theater class helped me to stay engaged with my broader school community. After my freshman year at public school, I became very unsettled and aware of my frustration with the structure of my high school. Even though I was a high-achieving student, I felt disengaged from my classes and peers, partly because my high school's theater program was neglected and underfunded. I struggled to stay engaged and connect to my broader school community. I was encouraged by a friend to apply to a magnet arts high school and began attending the Educational Center for the Arts (ECA) during my sophomore year.

ECA was a half-day program, which meant that I completed my required "academic" classes at DHHS in the morning, and then left halfway through the day and went to the nearby city to attend my theater classes. ECA was divided into five departments: theater, dance, music, creative writing, and visual arts, and brought together students from all over the county at no cost. ECA reignited a spark in me - I looked forward to my classes every day, and I felt incredibly connected with the community at large. I had good friends, and good teachers, and also formed friendships with the school guidance counselors, the principals, the security guards, and teachers from other departments—in many ways, it felt like one big family because everyone at ECA cared about each other and the space deeply and had a shared passion for the arts.

The classroom was a dynamic environment where students and teachers were learning together. I met people from all over the state, widening my perspective beyond the privileged school setting I grew up in. Students' work was largely influenced by their personal experiences, and teachers encouraged us to step out of our comfort zone, take risks, and indulge in the mistakes that occurred during that process. Much of the artwork responded to political and social events that impacted our lives. Teachers acted as facilitators in the many conversations that broke out during our artistic processes, but were most interested in what we as students were thinking about and nurtured that process. We were also given the opportunity to engage with the community by attending events, going to museums, and volunteering our time. I grew as a theater artist, but felt that my experience at ECA changed how I viewed the world and my role within it. As one student put it at graduation, "ECA was the reason why I continued to attend my public high school, even though I felt that

public school wasn't for me."

Before ECA, I was highly fixated on grades, but my time there revealed to me why grades are a poor measure of student success. Compared with those at my public high school, ECA teachers were much more concerned with the process of learning, which involved taking risks and making mistakes. They engaged us in conversations about problems that arise from fixating on grades and shared that they chose not to put that pressure on us because it hindered the learning process. As a result, ECA students simply did not worry or even think much about grades. One teacher even tried to do away with grades altogether, but faced outside pressure because our grades were being reported to our public schools, which allowed us to receive academic credit for ECA on our transcripts. With this new perspective, I began to approach classes at DHHS with a desire to take academic risks.

In my junior-year English class, my teacher attempted to implement "standards-based grading" (SBG), which is a cooperative system of grading where students and teachers meet twice, once at the midpoint of the semester and once at the end of the semester, to discuss a student's growth in the class and agree upon an appropriate grade. Initially, this system was welcomed because many of my peers felt they could only complete one or two of the assignments to present at their conference and talk their way into a good grade. We are taught in school that grades are an accurate measure of a student's performance of academic skills and comprehension of related curriculum. However, that is not always the case. In my own experience, rigid grading structures make me hesitant to take any sort of academic risk and highly increase stress. At ECA, however, I learned that academic and creative risk-taking is vital to how I approach problem-solving in my everyday life. Although for different reasons, I joined my peers in welcoming the teacher's experiment with SBG.

For one assignment, our teacher presented us with vague guidelines, telling the class that the project was "up for interpretation." My peers became frustrated that we were not provided with a rubric or a step-by-step guide as to how to complete the assignment. Also unaccustomed to such freedom in my academic courses, I came up with something to present that I felt would be acceptable in my other classes. As I sat in an earlier class, though, I was not excited to present my project - I wasn't proud of it, I hadn't stepped out of my comfort zone, and felt that the essay that I wrote did not

effectively prove my point. Five minutes before the bell rang to go to English, I took out my paper and began ripping it to rearrange sentences, removing ones that I didn't like, and writing in pencil stars and asterisks to add words and phrases. When I was finished, the project was different combinations of ripped paper and added sentences laid out on my desk. I felt so proud of myself because, not only did I convey my point more effectively, but I had a creative impulse in response to the project prompt, and I ran with it. I would have never done that if I had been in a class that had a traditional model of grading because I would have not likely been supported.

After the mid-semester conferences, nearly every student received a B. Suddenly, every student in the class, besides me, protested the new grading system. Even as our teacher explained that many students were on track to receive an A at the end of the semester, students pushed back. I attempted to advocate for the grading structure to my peers, describing how it helps to encourage creative thinking and risk-taking. I was met with, "Well Elena, this isn't art school, and some of us are submitting college applications this semester." I was so shocked at how quickly things turned, after receiving (an above-average) grade of a B.

Anna Christine Shearer, a former middle school science teacher, performed a research study at the University of Montana in which she measured the effects of SBG in the middle school science classroom. Throughout her teaching experience, she found that "students often focused on the necessary measures to receive an "A" on their report cards, rather than take the time to learn the material, take risks, and enjoy the learning process" (Shearer 2). She came across the SBG pedagogy as a means to a solution because previous research suggested that in classes where SBG was implemented, students increased their confidence toward STEM education and showcased a higher level of interest and value in their coursework. Her study found that students respond positively to SBG, and 35% of the students said that they enjoyed the learning because they were able to see their learning level. Before implementing SBG, she found that students would look at their grades and not regard the written feedback she provided. However, one of the biggest takeaways was that students were more likely to take opportunities to redo their assignments and apply teacher feedback. As more teachers experiment with this grading system in their classrooms, research suggests that it is an effective means to re-engage students in their learning process.

Years later, still pondering this experience, I spoke with Ellen Ayoob, a professor at CMU who works with masters-level students. Professor Ayoob echoed the discomfort that her students face when given an open-ended assignment. Because students are so extrinsically motivated to receive a good grade, problem-solving and creative thinking are not encouraged, and they freeze up when they are handed anything that feels vague. This is harmful in all stages of education, specifically at the college level, because in life, you will never be handed a rubric. As a CMU student, I have felt that I am most frustrated in my classes when I have to conform my work to predetermined standards that vary from professor to professor. I have felt that I am most successful when I am in classes where the teacher encourages students to pursue things that they are interested in, in a variety of forms. The assignments are less stressful and more enjoyable to do because I have a stake in the material. A successful teaching pedagogy would motivate students to be intrinsically motivated to learn more about things that are of interest to them and help them to understand the world they inhabit. Conventional grading practices inhibit that process.

bell hooks, Teaching to Transgress: Education as a Practice of Freedom

Educational spaces are best suited to “Teach to Transgress”

bell hooks, in her timeless book *Teaching to Transgress: Education as a Practice of Freedom*, suggests that the classroom is the most “radical space of opportunity” (hooks, 12) in which to call out, work through, and work against systems of oppression and domination in society in order to ensure greater freedom for all. Transgression is defined as the movement against and beyond boundaries that exist in society. hooks identifies a crucial boundary and critical problem in education: “students not wanting to learn, and teachers not wanting to teach. (hooks 12)” Students do not feel engaged because the traditional classroom is set up so that teachers are placed at the center, holding the most power, and students are expected to accept the information that the teacher presents at face value and then regurgitate that information on standardized tests in order to receive a grade. Education then becomes the act of a teacher as the “depositor,” and students then must take on the role of “depositories.” The more that students consume and “store” what is being deposited onto them, the less they develop a critical consciousness that allows them to interrogate and break down

hegemonic power systems they encounter both inside and outside of the walls of academia. This reflects the “banking system” of education, which is a term coined by educational philosopher Paulo Freire, who hooks draws on throughout her book.

Freire, in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, introduces and criticizes the banking system of education because it reinforces a disillusioned relationship between the student and their environment, assuming a “dichotomy between human beings and the world: a person is merely in the world and not with the world of with others” (Freire, 75). The banking system is designed to discourage creative, critical thinking and teaches students to be complicit in their oppression. Education has the ability to provide those in power with a platform for nurturing and shaping a particular human character, consciousness, and epistemology because character development and identity building occur in educational settings as much or more than the acquisition of knowledge. (Elmore, 18). In authoritarian, top-down social structures, the individuals in power, in this case, educators, are crucial actors in reinforcing their goal of perpetuating dominant social structures. There are two key factors to understanding how this manifests every day in the classroom. One factor is that educational institutions, particularly at the level of higher education but also within private primary and secondary schools, are businesses selling a product. One of my friends expressed to me that they felt as if they were paying a quarter of a million dollars for a piece of paper and were unsure what value they were getting out of that investment. In order to continue to sell their product, institutions must convince students to consent willingly to these systems of oppression and domination in order to be successful, have a good job, and make lots of money. Many of these universities advertise jobs their alumni receive, tied to salaries with many zeros at the end, on their admissions pages as advertising. For example, on CMU’s Admission page titled, “The Value of a Carnegie Mellon Education,” it is advertised that graduates gain professional success “right out of the gate....working in almost every sector, from emerging startups and Fortune 500 companies to nonprofits and government organizations” The website advertises that the average starting salary for Carnegie Mellon’s Class of 2020 was \$91,243, varying by department, and 82% of the class was either employed or pursuing additional education within six months of graduation (Carnegie Mellon, 2022).

However, the second factor is that educational

institutions are also victims of an authoritarian society. There is a misconception that the domination that students learn to grin and bear from their educators is for the purpose of preparing them for a career when they leave school, in which the workplace replaces the school, and the boss replaces the teacher. One example of educational working to mimic “the real” world—which is a construction by universities to help them sell their product—is through grading. The pressure and stress that comes with grades as a meaningless determining factor of worth as a student reinforces the capitalist mindset that self-worth is connected to the externally determined value of your work product.

The conception of “the real world,” which is perpetuated by universities, is constructed from a capitalist perspective and used by universities as a tactic to sell more admissions. In the posting on CMU’s admission website, they share that 82% of graduated students in 2020 were either employed or pursuing more education. The workforce or further education are deemed by CMU to be acceptable paths for students, which is evident in the fact that they choose to advertise that information. Conceptions of what the “real world” looks like are also changing dramatically as a result of the demands of young people. The New York Times published an article in 2021 entitled *The 37-Year-Olds are Afraid of the 23-Year-Olds Who Work For Them* which explored a shift that is occurring in the professional world as Gen Zers are entering the workplace and Millennials are taking on the role of their boss. The article claims that, unlike Millennials, Gen Zers are more likely to ask for paid time off for things like mental health complications or period pains. Gen Z employees also are more likely to speak up for themselves, advocate for setting their own work schedule, and overall have an instinct to “protect their health and seek some divide between work and life” (Goldberg). Gen Zers are also more likely to call on their workplace to take political stances and respond to events such as the Black Lives Matter protests, Stop Asian Hate protests, and advocate for the rights of marginalized groups within their companies. This is something that many Millennials were not keen on and illustrates Gen Zers’ desire to connect their career, whether professional or academic, to their broader community.

As Elmore highlights in his Essay, *Miseducation, and the Authoritarian Mind*, “when education is conceived as an act of liberating, systems of oppression, it becomes an equally powerful threat to the dominant”

(Elmore, 18). hooks proposes a way forward, introducing “Engaged Pedagogy,” which requires teachers to “be actively committed to a process of self-actualization that promotes their own well-being if they are to teach in a manner that empowers students” (hooks, 15), echoing the work of Thich Nhat Hanh, who speaks of a teacher as a healer. To work towards freedom, educators need to be aware of their social positioning and maintain their well-being if they are going to make meaningful contributions to the lives of their students. Engaged pedagogy also requires that teachers address how hegemonic social structures in society affect the students who sit in front of them. While a principle of engaged pedagogy is active participation, teachers should understand why certain students in the classroom may not feel as though they have a platform to express their thoughts, experiences, and beliefs, and then make connections with those students outside of the classroom. hooks identifies that, among her students, their desire in the classroom is to make connections to the world in relevant, meaningful ways. She is committed to presenting this information in a way that connects it to their life experiences. Engaged pedagogy also gives students responsibility and agency in their decision-making, overall illuminating that this pedagogy views students as whole people, diminishing power dynamics that exist in modern classrooms. In her classroom, hooks “does not expect students to take any risks that [she] would not take, to share in any way that I would not share” (hooks, 21).

I resonate with this desire wholeheartedly and have found that the classes in which I connect most, and am the most successful, strive to make a meaningful connection to relevant political and social events. For example, one of my favorite classes I have taken at CMU was entitled *Body Politics: Women and Health in American Politics*. The summer before I took this course, *Roe v. Wade* was overturned, and women’s reproductive rights were challenged and, in some cases, completely taken away. That same fall that I was enrolled in the course, there was a crucial election in Pennsylvania in which reproductive freedom was at stake. Prior to the election, the class made Zines providing information about reproductive rights, elections where reproductive rights were most at risk, and information on how to vote in PA. We took the information that was taught in class and put it into practical application as a means to take action against a meaningful and pressing problem in society—I felt so empowered and knowledgeable about something that was very important to me.

In order to teach students to “transgress” against racial, sexual, and class boundaries in order to achieve freedom, teachers must be active participants in designing a curriculum that is socially relevant and places creativity and problem-solving at the forefront and implementing it in their classrooms in relevant ways.

Pedagogy of Cooperative Education

A shift to democratic educational models

My experience at ECA is a strong example of an engaged pedagogical approach to teaching and learning at the public-school level. I have come to understand how fortunate I was to be in this space because it is rare to see education framed as a community practice at a high school level. In passing, people have described my experience at ECA as “radical.” The structure of our respective schools, while straying from the norm, illustrates not a process of radicalization but a process of democratization and a shift to cooperative educational models. This is often spoken about as “radical” because the neoliberal classroom can “neither be relied upon as a space for social learning and critique nor as an appropriate institutional structure for the production of humane and useful knowledge,” and therefore, in order to produce social learning, it must be done radically (Amsler, 107). However, the word “radical” is vague and potentially reactionary—instead, employing a model of cooperative education allows educators and students to reframe the purpose of education to be intertwined with and reflective of the community.

Shifting from a neoliberal to a democratic, cooperative classroom requires employing a completely new organizational structure. In England, organizations such as the Social Science Center, Really Open University, and The Free University of Brighton, have been key players in the cooperative education movement as these “schools” have attempted to put cooperative education into practice. These schools are for all age groups, are free to all members, and are governed by both the students and teachers. They do not have standardized tests or state-imposed requirements, and their goal is not to compete with universities but rather to put forth an alternative option to the traditional structure. Their models have worked to create educational frameworks for higher education that are based on the values of self-responsibility, equality, and solidarity and are constituted through democratic member control, autonomy and independence, training and information, and concern for the community.

A 2016 research project brought together scholars, students, and experts predominantly but not exclusively from the Social Science Center (SCC), to assess models of cooperative education. The research study also sought to design a “theoretically informed and practically grounded” framework that could be transferable to teachers and students, inside and outside the classroom. With methodology from participatory action research from five workshops over the course of one year, the workshop topics were: pedagogy for cooperative higher education, governance models, legal and regulatory considerations, business models, and global solidarity and federation coordination of cooperative higher education. At the end of the workshops, participants were interviewed about what elements of the workshops or their experiences were most crucial.

The biggest takeaway from the individual interviews highlighted the importance of a “social-human” relationship between teachers and students as an “organizational pillar” of cooperative education. A core aspect of the SCC teaching pedagogy focused on students working collaboratively with academics on various research projects. One way this democratic relationship manifested itself at the SCC was that teachers and students worked collaboratively to co-design their curriculum. Taking away traditional power dynamics between student and teacher, this practice also allows students to invest fully and take responsibility for their academics and, in some cases, generate their own learning to fulfill their individual needs. This is reflective of hooks’ engaged pedagogy, and also suggests that teachers can learn as much from their students as their students can learn from them. The SCC, unfortunately, has since closed due to financial constraints. Other strong examples of cooperative education models can be found in Finland and Singapore.

Democracy in the classroom builds off of hooks’ engaged pedagogy, requiring that teachers and students work collaboratively and that teachers are actively working against power structures that exist between teachers and students in the neoliberal classroom. Democratic education creates an environment in which students and teachers can work together to develop an understanding of the various barriers that exist in society and to understand ways in which the student can serve as an active member of their community to transgress those barriers.

This also requires that students and teachers are open to creating educational outcomes that are not predetermined, which is a challenge, particularly when

applying this pedagogy to public school settings. State-funded schools are subject to the constraints of local budgets, and this constraint often manifests itself in the classroom through an increased focus on standardized testing as a means to measure the quality of certain schools. From 4th grade through high school, I had to spend three days out of the year taking the “CMT” (Connecticut Mastery Test), which was designed to assess reading, writing, language arts, science, and interdisciplinary knowledge (Ct.gov). I remember our teachers telling us that it was more so to measure the teacher’s performance, and did not have an effect on our academic scores in any way. However, standardized tests have been highly criticized for being too narrow and omitting critical thinking and creative problem-solving skills from their rubrics, as the content is often only applicable in a very specific academic context. Standardized testing on the whole has also been criticized for “rely[ing] heavily on socialization in the middle to the upper middle class” and “unfairly favor white and Asian students” (Sternberg). As a result of standardized tests as a means to measure teachers’ performance, teachers face pressure to “teach to the test,” making it difficult to implement liberal models (American University). However, models of cooperative education, when applied to school settings, either in K-12 settings or in higher education, lead to higher engagement amongst students in the classroom and practical application of their knowledge outside of the classroom.

As hooks points out, in order to teach for freedom, educators must employ the “understanding that anyone can learn.” The rhetorical shift from “radical” to “democratic, cooperative” education allows educators and community members alike to understand how the scope of education is not confined to the walls of institutionalized academic spaces and can be targeted toward the public through “Everyday Learning.”

Everyday Learning and Public-Facing Ethnomusicology

Public Facing-Ethnomusicology as a practical intervention to creating community education spaces that “teach to transgress”

Learning has the potential to occur in one’s everyday life, outside of the academic institution. The practice of everyday learning takes many shapes and forms and exists in public spaces, some examples include community art installations, community meetings or learning events, or through online

platforms like social media. By situating education in a public, community context, and allowing community members to take on varying roles of teacher and student, sometimes simultaneously, everyday learning confronts hierarchical education by inherently putting forth a non-hierarchical model of education. Public-facing ethnomusicology is one example of Everyday Learning taking shape. Public-facing ethnomusicology strives to redefine ethnomusicology as a community tool exploring and positioning music as it “faces the public,” and the ways the study of public music can be a resource for the community and reveal collective understandings and community identities. Public-facing ethnomusicology emerged as a means to create a more equitable, democratized, and accessible field within ethnomusicology at large.

A public-facing ethnomusicological approach assists in developing cooperative, community-based education because “popular music in various contexts...connects disparate populations sonically, while at the same time it can provide new opportunities for people to engage with their own local experiences of place and other factors” (Cannady, 63). This occurs in two significant ways: inside of the traditional classroom as a means to democratize, and outside of the classroom as a means to make education more accessible and equitable. Public-facing ethnomusicology highlights the active role of educational spaces in communities.

The goals of public-facing ethnomusicology align with the goals of cooperative education, as the field emerged from a desire to give ethnomusicologists an alternative path outside of colleges and universities, which reflected dominant capitalist structures. Public-facing ethnomusicology strives to redefine ethnomusicology as a community tool, and through that reframing, create a more equitable, democratized, and accessible field. Crucial to this understanding is that an ethnomusicological lens indicates how music is a unique tool in which to express individual and collective identities. Music is widely accessible and consumed in everyday life, whether that be music that the user plays themselves or music that people are exposed to as a result of being in a public place like the grocery store. For example, when I meet new people, the music that they play reveals their values and interests and serves as a starting point for relationship building.

Public-facing ethnomusicology can be used to establish and work through the variety of backgrounds and experiences that make up a particular student body in the classroom. Music as a part of everyday life

serves as a common denominator in the classroom as most people encounter music and react to it in some way, even if their reaction is that they don't like music. Music, therefore, provides an opportunity to establish a sense of community in the classroom. Music also can propose an alternate way in which performance is evaluated through grading. If a student is, for example, given the option to use music to assist in their studying for a test, or for a final project to be able to write a song about certain topics that are expressed in class for a final assessment, the student is given creative agency. This leads to deeper engagement, and more individual expression, and serves as one means to break down systems of power in the classroom.

Outside of the classroom, however, public-facing ethnomusicology assists in curating community spaces. Ethnographic research in music specifically has the ability to "provide locally informed details of complex situations and musical practices" (Cannady, 64). Community settings that are for the purpose of education can employ ethnomusicological tactics to understand how people in the community react to various events or ideas. That information can be used to approach the community with issues that span from the local to national levels. One successful example of this is Heavy Sound, a nonprofit organization that uses music to reach disadvantaged young people in Scotland.

Heavy Sound

"Music as a means to reach disadvantaged young people"

I came across education and music as a community space through a research project I conducted about an organization entitled Heavy Sound in my introductory ethnomusicology course entitled Music, Power, and Conflict. Heavy Sound is a nonprofit community music space in Edinburgh, Scotland, that serves to "make learning work for disengaged young people by re-engaging them through innovative projects involving participant-led music. (Heavy Sound)" Virtually all of the students at Heavy Sound have experienced trauma, whether that be homelessness or unstable home lives, or have been involved with unsafe people, violence, or other unsafe circumstances. It was created due to a gap recognized by Jordan Butler, Heavy Sounds founder and CEO, between young people and social services offered in Scotland, which he experienced as an unhoused teenager. He found that he was unable to stay engaged with social services long-term because they didn't offer him programs that aligned with his

interests in music.

Heavy Sound operates on an open-door policy, where everyone is welcomed no matter their background, and everything that is done is out of love and care. Students are encouraged to create music that showcases their passions and are met with positive reinforcement. For many of these young people, Heavy Sound is the only place in their lives where there are positive role models and stability. In my conversations with Jordan, he highlighted that traditional public-school settings are inherently unsafe for young people who have experienced multiple traumas because they trigger their fight or flight response, and if they do not leave school themselves, they often get expelled.

Heavy Sound relies on collaborative models of education as a means to connect to students. An emphasis of the program is trauma-informed mentorship. Many of the mentors who work at Heavy Sound also come from similar backgrounds of hardship in their life. This shared and lived experience that is mutual allows students to connect with their mentors on a deeper level than their traditional teachers. The staff and mentors at Heavy Sound emphasize that they are not authority figures in these students' lives, as these students have responded poorly to authority in other settings, and it is therefore not an effective means of connection. A power imbalance between the mentors and the students would undermine Heavy Sound's collaborative model. They take on rather a parental role that considers their health and well-being as the top priority. For several students, they do not have other people in their lives who fill that position.

Through participatory music, specifically hip-hop music, Heavy Sound is effective in connecting to and creating resources for marginalized young people in Scotland. This is exemplified through "the mask exercise," which was showcased in the documentary, "In The Frame," following Heavy Sound's 2016 program in Howden Hall School. Jordan began the exercise by talking with the students about his past and the various labels that society placed upon him as a result. These various labels, "thick," "doesn't he care," "homeless," and "alcoholic," were written on the outside of a white mask. Under the mask showcased what was going on underneath the surface, and words such as "scared," "thoughtful," "unhappy," etc. The students were then given white masks and markers and had the opportunity to do the same exercise. Students were not given any parameters and were encouraged to incorporate topics from their coursework into the

exercise. The mask exercise allowed the students to decipher between the identities that society has imposed upon them and their personal identities. The words that the students wrote on the outside of the mask, such as “criminal,” “thief,” and “failure,” are very harmful, especially when imposed upon young people, because of the potential they have to become internalized within the student and further perpetuate harm and violence if not confronted. In contrast, the words on the inside of the mask serve as a first step for the students to reshape their understanding of their identities, which can then be incorporated into the music that they make. That is then translated into music, which assists in the shifting of the student’s identity and the collective identity of young people in Scotland.

Heavy Sound is reflective of cooperative, community education through public-facing music and is a concrete example of hooks’ pedagogy of teaching to transgress boundaries in society. Heavy Sound has proven to be very effective in creating a safe space for students’ creative expression as a means for reframing their identities to view themselves as positive, contributing members of society. One example of this is Heavy Sound’s success in sustainably reintegrating students back into public schools.

Conclusion

My journey as a student has led me to view the goals of education as to develop an understanding of who you are, to learn how to express who you are, and to learn how your expression affects your community. The intersection of public-facing ethnomusicology and Everyday learning creates an effective environment to do so while confronting hegemonic power structures in society and working towards ensuring freedom for all people.

In this paper, I put forth one way of enacting hooks’ principles of teaching as a practice of freedom, specifically in art spaces. In my education, I have experienced these practices in arts settings because I was interested in the arts and therefore gravitated to those spaces naturally. Often, I feel that it was simply chance that brought me to ECA because the program was not widely advertised in the community, and I was selected amongst a number of students who applied to the program. I came to ECA because I loved theater, and I left ECA with a wider perspective on how education can take shape, how education forms communities, builds mutual understanding, and, when done effectively, is intertwined with the community at

every level.

However, this educational model of integrating ethnomusicology in the classroom is applicable in multiple contexts, even in STEM fields. In the class that I took at DHHS, where the professor implemented standards-based grading, I remember talking to other teachers about this grading system and sharing enthusiastically why I thought they should also implement this in their classrooms. Like my peers who protested this system, teachers also internalized the hegemonic system. They said, for example, that while this system may be effective in an English classroom or at an arts high school, it wouldn’t work in a math or science class because there is “only one right answer.” This reveals a larger misconception that a classroom can only be democratized when the work that the students complete is more “open-ended.” However, in STEM settings, democratizing the classroom through tactics of ethnomusicology can serve rather as a means to understand different patterns or different systematics through mathematical reasoning. For example, hip-hop and rap music employ rhyme schemes, patterns, and various beats that can be understood through math. Rap artist Andre 3000 recently went viral because fans analyzed his feature on Anderson Paak’s song, Come Home, finding that within 20 bars of 252 words, 66.3% of the words used were unique, and 72.2% of the words contained significant rhymes. With 228 significant rhymes in total, Andre averaged 11.4 rhymes per bar. This example showcases the intersection of music and math and could be translated into the classroom.

How performance is evaluated is also a reflection of how systems of domination work themselves in the classroom. When I went to high school, it was assumed that students either excelled at math and science or English and history. In my experience, I was deterred from taking any math or science classes because I did not excel in those settings. However, employing democratized ethnomusicological practices in the classroom, in both STEM and humanities fields, may change how students engage with the material they would otherwise find confusing or alienating. It may also generate interdisciplinary interest amongst those students, which they will carry with them throughout their lives, in the hopes to create a more democratized workplace.

Grading, too, plays a role in the future of education as a force of change, democratic and otherwise. Grades demonstrate extrinsic motivation by students, leading to a more serious concern about

the grade than the content of their learning. Educators, however, should employ grading models such as Standards-Based Grading, which strives for students to be intrinsically motivated and more engaged in their learning processes.

Public-facing ethnomusicology is taken outside of the classroom and situated in community spaces; it accomplishes the goal of democratized, cooperative education by being open to all people. It also allows the roles and relationships between teachers and students to be collaborative, working against power structures in the classroom and revealing that education is an equal exchange in which teachers and students can learn from each other. We can therefore look to our community to inform our educational practices. In the current context of COVID-19 and various political and social unrest, education has proven to be the most powerful tool for freedom and community building.

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