

Amateurism and Belonging in Music Education

Local Voices, Global Resonances

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School Music Curriculum

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Introduction

Regelski (2007) has argued that musical amateurism requires reconceptualization so that its many positive affordances can be realized within music education in schools. Although the term amateurism has not been applied explicitly in the school music education context, Regelski uses Booth's (1999) neologism "amateuring," and considers how the best dimensions of amateuring—passion, commitment and independent engagement—might be utilized to reinvigorate school music education in general. The significant changes in secondary school music education in New Zealand over the last 35 years could be theorized as moving toward a recognition and celebration of amateurism that Regelski and Booth might find heartening. This transition toward more diverse music-making or "musicking" (Small, 1998) was driven by teachers as well as reflecting broader changes within society (McPhail et al., 2018). The aim was to prepare students for both amateuring in its best sense as well as laying the ground for further development should a student choose to take a professional route.

In this chapter, I utilize Regelski's positive view of the concept of amateuring to describe and analyze the paradigm shift that has occurred over the last 35 years in secondary school music education in New Zealand. I undertake this theoretical exploration from a broadly sociological perspective, noting that these changes, which include a stylistically open curriculum designed to provide access to both established music knowledge and areas of student interest, have been brought about by significant socio-political and cultural forces that, for ease of discussion, I condense under the terms postmodernism and neoliberalism (McPhail, 2023). For example, postmodernism in education includes the influential discourses of learner-centered pedagogy (Hoadley, 2017) and ethnic identity (Lynch & Rata, 2018; Siteine, 2017); and neoliberalism's effects can be seen in the marketization of schools and in the outcomes and standards-based approaches to curricula and assessment (McPhail & McNeill, 2021a). In the case of secondary school music, many of these changes have been positive, since music education has responded to the societal changes in values and attitudes that see the need for education to become "more relevant,

inclusive, experience-based, student-centered, culturally responsive, and technologically enhanced” (McPhail et al., 2018, p. 3).

However, as with any major paradigm shift, there have been some unintended, more negative consequences as well. I will discuss some of the positive and negative consequences. My discussion is centered on music as an “option” or “elective” subject, chosen by the student, rather than the general, introductory “core” music classes usually offered in most New Zealand schools’ first year of high school. Within the context of “option music,” I frame the overarching problem or challenge for the subject as a persistent tension between music education conceptualized as (i) a space where all students engage with and deepen their interests predominantly through experiential learning and (ii) access to specialized knowledge and ways of knowing, possibly yet to be experienced and understood by the student. The two conceptualizations need not be mutually exclusive; however, it is typical of educational “swings” in New Zealand that we tend to subscribe to philosophical positions in the way described by John Dewey in 1938:

Mankind [sic] likes to think in terms of extreme opposites. It is given to formulating its beliefs in terms of Either-Ors, between which it recognizes no intermediate possibilities ... the history of educational theory is marked by opposition between the idea that education is development from within and that it is formation from without.

(p. 17)

Dewey’s observation seems apposite to the current state of education generally in New Zealand, where the swing away from traditionalism to postmodernism has, in some contexts, been extreme, to the detriment of New Zealand’s students’ overall achievement compared internationally (Gerritson, 2023). Currently, there is a swing away from postmodern ideas such as a localized curriculum (i.e., schools can make curriculum decisions locally) toward guidance for teachers about learning that “cannot be left to chance” (Johnston, 2023; Ministry of Education, 2023, p. 5).

In this chapter, I utilize Regelski’s (2007) positive view of amateurism, which is closely associated with the idea of music as praxis (see below), as a lens to examine the curriculum changes. The key ideas about amateurism that I take from Regelski’s paper and apply to my discussion of the New Zealand secondary school curriculum are the utilization of students’ prior interests and passions, the tendency toward independent learning and listening as foundational for all music learning. All these concepts link to the broader notion of music as praxis (Regelski, 1998a, 1998b, 2004a, 2004b) and the idea that music education needs to realize both generalist and specialist outcomes for students. I also use recent ideas from the sociological school of social realism and a key concept from that scholarship, “powerful knowledge” (Muller, 2022), to provide a counter-argument to an absolute focus on amateurism in the secondary school.

The Old Problem with School Music

Since late last century, music curricula and pedagogical approaches in schools have come under a great deal of criticism in the international music education field. A seminal paper by Ross (1995) in the United Kingdom, “What’s wrong with school music?” set the tone for the next 30 years of music education scholarship. Ross (1995) argued that school music at the time was artificial in the sense that it was “uprooted from actual musical experience and rendered in an abstract form” (p. 195) (see Vignette 1 below). Music education, he argued, was not engaging students in meaningful, active and creative ways. Moreover, in North America, despite music education being dominated by participation in large ensembles, several scholars argued that the prevailing aesthetic ideology was failing to deliver tangible results for students (Elliott, 1995; Regelski, 1998a, 1998b, 2004a, 2005). In what these scholars term “music education as aesthetic education” (MEAE), the underpinning ideal is to develop music appreciation and understanding by bringing students into contact with Western Art Music (WAM). At more advanced levels of the curriculum in the United Kingdom and New Zealand, the focus of learning was on developing knowledge about WAM’s works, its forms, structures, styles and ideas about music, rather than making music (Tagg, 2002).

In contrast to this aesthetic approach centered on WAM, the concept of music education as praxis has gained significant traction worldwide as music educators have responded to criticisms about subject music’s lack of relevance for many students (Elliott et al., 2005). Put succinctly, music education as praxis is an active process aimed at bringing about contextually and personally valued “goods” or “right results” for students (Regelski, 1998a). In other words, music’s value is defined by the meaning it has for those involved rather than by the modernist notion of a universalized, predetermined aesthetic quality that students must seek out or have pointed out to them. The rejection of music education as aesthetic education draws on a new postmodern relativism regarding musical value, emphasizing making music or “musicking” in various ways (Elliott, 1995; Small, 1998). For example, equipping a student with the skills to accompany themselves on a guitar—to play and sing well—could be considered the most valuable outcome in an educational praxis where the student has input into what may be considered valuable in their musical life (Regelski, 2004a, 2005).

Such a result might be understood as music skills for lifelong musical amateuring. At a deeper philosophical level, music education as praxis challenges the modernist view of music encapsulated in the concept of a canon of great music to be known. Postmodernism rejects universalism in favor of the local and the contextual (Elliott, 2001). Also, we find ideas such as constructivism, culturalism and localization taking their place as prominent narratives within the postmodern orbit in education. These narratives are underpinned by the ideology of relativism—both cultural and epistemological—which envisions an ideal world where all ideas are of equal merit and worthy of inclusion in the curriculum (Bowman, 1998; McPhail, 2016a).

The development of a broad musicianship through the praxis of musicking, a curriculum of progressive musical problem-solving through performing, composing, arranging, conducting and listening, has been championed in particular by Elliott (1995, 2016) within the field of school music education. In this praxial conceptualization, formal music knowledge is seen to support active music in an adjunct role. Several influential scholars (e.g., Goehr, 1992) have argued that music-making before the nineteenth century was much closer to this praxis approach. Goehr suggests that “music was conceived as a ‘performance’ rather than as a productive art, it was not generally understood as involving the production of works” (p. 151). We can imagine J. S. Bach preparing a weekly cantata for Sunday performance as a pragmatic response to the reality of his job rather than to a nineteenth-century notion of creating a great “work”—a finite, autonomous, perfected object. Bach’s work was very much related to a social, cultural function and to getting the job done (Butt, 1994).

The idealized notion of “the work” and various ideals associated with WAM, such as universality, complexity, originality and autonomy, became reified and legitimized during the nineteenth century, creating an ideology of the aesthetic that assumes a single essential and universal musical essence to be found in the great works of WAM (Goehr, 1992; Green, 1999; Martin, 2006; Spruce, 2002). In the United Kingdom and its dominions, music education became formalized during this period in a process of rationalization aimed at capturing these ideas. The status and content afforded to music specialization were used to create a structure that became typical of university music curricula in the late nineteenth century, and this structure was used in turn for the study of music in secondary school.¹ We can see this “academization” of music for example in the curriculum for the Bachelor of Music at the University of Birmingham in the first decade of the twentieth century. It comprised harmony, counterpoint, acoustics, music history, the organ, the pianoforte, the orchestra, orchestration, the history of choral music from Palestrina to the present day, of the symphony from Haydn to Elgar and opera from Mozart to Debussy. Students were also required to “pass a practical test and score an exercise for full orchestra” (Rainbow, 2006, p. 273). More practical instrumental pursuits were pursued in European conservatories of music, where the focus was on music performance (instrumental and vocal studies) with supporting theoretical, compositional and historical knowledge (Rainbow, 2006).

Regelski (2007) notes that “by the end of the 19th century, many practices of lay enthusiasts had been pushed aside ... [and] their continuing practice was accorded a lowly status by specialists” (p. 22). The preference afforded to classical music over popular, the emphasis on developing skills in musical literacy over oral or practical fluency, and the ordering of musical knowledge into “sequential learning, prescriptive goals and materials, tests and national examinations” (Drummond, 2003, p. 54) are indications of a process Drummond terms *ratiocination*. Drummond (2003) argues that subject music had to undergo this *ratiocination* to enable it to join the ranks of accepted

academic subjects. In North America and the United States, in particular, the “formalizing” of music education was less an academic process than one aimed at rationalizing music education as education in large ensemble participation. Kratus (2019) observes a move away from an explicit aim of fostering amateuring in music education, such as that articulated by Mursell in 1936 (“the music program should aim at the promotion of active and intelligent musical amateurism” [Mursell, quoted in Kratus, 2019, p. 33]) to one of “semi-professionalism.” The new aim was to foster high levels of instrumental attainment, and it was facilitated by the impact of the first Schools Band Contest of America in 1923, which Holz argues “changed the course of music education history” (Holz, 1962, quoted in Kratus, 2019, p. 33). Instrument production, competitions and a pedagogical and textbook industry grew around this American music phenomenon. Some more recent scholarship regards the large ensemble approach in the United States as anti-educative and an intractable negative influence on practice (Allsup, 2012; Allsup & Benedict, 2008). As Hoffer (2009) notes, in the American context, “music became the only curricular area in which ‘directors’ conduct ‘rehearsals’ instead of teachers teaching classes” (p. 106).

In New Zealand in 1945, the process of rationalizing music mentioned above was completed as music took its place as a subject amongst others, and was afforded the status of being examinable for the national School Certificate examination. The universities had direct input into the structure and content of the senior curriculum, as it was assumed students taking music at this level were bound for university study:

the structuring of the curriculum in this way had a “downward” effect on what was taught in the junior levels of the secondary school. Music at this level was regarded mainly as a preparation for the talented few who would take on specialist music studies in the third year of high school.
(McPhail, 2023, p. 71)

Given that the majority of students at secondary school experience a broad education in subjects not always aimed at professional levels of specialization (e.g. mathematics and geography), it is somewhat of an anomaly that secondary school music education has traditionally been based on what Kratus (2019) terms a “semi-professional” curriculum model; in New Zealand and the United Kingdom, this semi-professional model was a simplified version of what a student might study at university, while in North America it comprised training in instrumental or choral proficiency. However, as the massification of education ensued during the 1970s and beyond, in the United Kingdom and in New Zealand such a specialized curriculum was deemed more and more irrelevant for the many students now staying longer at school; music was likely to prove a meaningful subject for them if it was taught in such a way that amateuring rather than tertiary study was the likely outcome.

The Paradigm Shift in New Zealand

In the late 1980s, “considerable ‘grass-roots’ political pressure was brought to bear upon the Ministry of Education ... to make secondary school music more ‘accessible’ and ‘relevant’” (McPhail et al., 2018, p. 4). Changes observed in music education in the United Kingdom influenced the work of several music educators in Christchurch, New Zealand. The development of a local secondary school music course in Christchurch, “CantaMusic,” was innovative in including “individual performance and composition, with an emphasis on a more relevant and accessible range of musics in classical and popular styles” (McPhail et al., 2018, p. 4). This move to a more open, varied and “relevant” curriculum was used as a model for national changes where eventually “the written examination [school certificate] was soon replaced with several assessments, some carried out by the teacher rather than an external examiner and included performance and composition in contemporary and popular styles” (McPhail et al., 2018, p. 4). In the wake of neoliberal reforms in education, new outcomes-based national curricula were developed during the 1990s, and in the early 2000s, the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) was introduced. The NCEA is a complex assessment and qualifications system unique to New Zealand, in which “packages” of knowledge and skills are assessed in formats known as Achievement Standards. Teachers and students select from a suite of Achievement Standards to create learning courses. This was never the intention of the Standards, which were supposed to support the broader New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007); however, the Achievement Standards more commonly provide curriculum content (Hipkins et al., 2016). This largely came about because the NZC itself sets out only generic learning outcomes.

These changes to the assessment system saw more students choosing music as a senior school option for study. Students could now perform as soloists, or in a small group (maximum of seven musicians), and compose in any style. Teachers could now have free choice to select set works (two) rather than be confined to a selection of nationally prescribed pieces. More recently, there has also been a shift toward “decolonizing” the curriculum, and students can utilize music from their own cultures in various ways (Philpott, 2022). In particular, Māori music as a component of *mātauranga Māori* (Māori knowledge) has been emphasized because of its unique place in the culture of New Zealand (Webber, 2023).

The outcomes-based character of the curriculum and the standards-based assessment system are clear examples of the influence of neoliberalism in action in education (McPhail & McNeill, 2021a). Some adverse outcomes from this influence have been the fragmentation and instrumentalization of knowledge, overassessment and the indoctrination of students into an assessment and qualifications system that “has come to act as a type of knowledge and assessment supermarket, where students trade in a currency of credits” (McPhail & McNeill, 2021a, p. 52). These problems with the NCEA system

and its washdown effects in secondary schools generally have not gone unnoticed, and reforms are in progress to defragment the senior school curriculum, reduce assessment and indicate more clearly the knowledge learning progressions sought at all levels of the curriculum (Aitken & Wood, 2023; New Zealand Qualifications Authority, n.d.).

However, the senior school system has produced more worrying unintended outcomes as a result of knowledge under-specification in *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007), and the amount of choice offered to teachers and students in national assessment (students can often choose which NCEA Standards they will be assessed against). The result for many students has been a general reduction in epistemic coverage, as their contact with music's more conceptual and generative concepts and ideas is reduced. In social realist terms, they have less contact with "powerful knowledge" (McPhail, 2023; McPhail et al., 2025; Muller, 2022), in the sense of knowledge "that gives students the intellectual ability to analyze, explain, predict, evaluate and think about the world in ways that are beyond their personal experience" and provides students with the capacity and language to "think in new ways" and "to make generalisations and apply them to new contexts" (Maude, 2020, p. 232). The drive for relevance combined with the high level of local autonomy in curriculum content carries a risk that curricula do not always provide nationally equal access to the conceptual grounding necessary for students to take music beyond the level usually associated with amateuring, developing conceptual knowledge along with practice knowledge (McPhail, 2023). This becomes a social justice concern, as access to various types of knowledge varies from school to school (Young, 2008): "curriculum principles drawn from postmodernism, such as constructivism and culturalism, and principles from more recent twenty-first century and neoliberal instrumentalist economic discourses, such as genericism and trainability, can undermine a 'powerful knowledge' approach to education" (McPhail, 2023, p. 230). As a result, students may be "short-changed" by the access to knowledge their school provides. This issue goes well beyond the music classroom (Young, 2013).

What Has Been Lost, and What Has Been Gained?

Two Vignettes

VIGNETTE 1

It's the 1970s, and a fifth-form class of students (Year 11) are studying music for School Certificate (in current terms, equivalent to NCEA L1). The course is assessed at an end-of-year, national, written examination. Students will be asked to complete several tasks, including taking aural dictation of melody and rhythm, some recognition of fundamental

Western harmony, and recalling facts about the features of many “set works.” These set pieces are prescribed nationally and taken from the Western canon, including works by Bach, Handel, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms, Schubert, Stravinsky, Britten and Penderecki. The students develop a kaleidoscopic view of Western Art Music history from this selection. It is taken for granted that the students can read music to quite a sophisticated level, enabling them to analyze scores, recognize music features and describe them, demonstrating an understanding of how the style of the music is realized. The pedagogical approach is one where whole-class teaching is the norm; students grab scores off the shelves, sit at their desks, learn by reading and listening and then undertake “academic” tasks to develop the prescribed music knowledge and skills. What might now seem unusual is that no music is composed or performed in the curriculum. Any actual music-making happens outside the classroom.

VIGNETTE 2

It’s 2024, and a typical Y11 music class is about to get under way. The students wander in, say hi to the teacher, and get started on various independent tasks. The course is centered around the development of students’ knowledge and skills in four key areas: performing (either in a group or solo), creating compositions, getting to know two pieces of music and developing aural skills through a variety of live activities such as call and response or transcribing a favorite song. In today’s class, the students work independently on tasks, and the teacher will eventually assess them. One group of students is in a practice room working on their song for a *Rockquest* competition. The creation of the song and its performance can provide the students with credits towards their high school qualification. None of this group can read music, but the course recognizes the skills they do have and provides the space for them to develop their creative musicking. Another student is practicing a Beethoven piano sonata for their performance, and the rest of the class is either composing songs or working on creating aural transcripts of songs they like and arranging them. Most of this work is undertaken on computers with headsets using music software such as GarageBand or Logic. The teacher’s work involves moving around the music suite, checking students’ progress and offering feedback and advice. Later in the year, the class will come together to study the two “set works” the teacher will choose for them.

Finding the Balance between Amateurism and Specialization

The contrast between the two vignettes represents a paradigm shift where “a curriculum of cultural transmission centred on classical traditions” has largely given way “to alternative conceptions focused on popular music and

student rights of ownership in regards to curriculum content” (McPhail, 2016b, p. 8). While some things can be regarded as gains, e.g., student engagement and a broader and more representative curriculum of musicking, other aspects of the shift are of concern, such as the fragmentation of the curriculum, overassessment and a localized curriculum possibly leading to restricted epistemic access for students (McPhail, 2019, 2023; Wenden, 2018).

Overall, however, I argue that the shift can be regarded as moving toward a positive realization of amateurism as defined by Regelski (2007) that could well prepare students who wish to become professionals as well as those who engage with music for the love of it. Regelski (2007) argues that “all musicking in schools—indeed, music teaching of all kinds—ought to be based from the very first on the ideal of modelling and promoting amateurism” (p. 35). He notes several features of amateurism that can be utilized in more formal educational contexts, the key amongst them being the amateurs’ focus on learning by listening and their existing inclination toward independence. However, Regelski argues that the first task is to remove the stigma associated with amateuring. This stigma is not strong in New Zealand, which is quite different from the North American context, where ensembles dominate school curricula. Given the changes described above, it should be evident in the New Zealand context that students’ interests often provide the starting place for musical development. The openness of the curriculum and the assessment system means that students’ amateuring interests can be recognized and developed. For example, a budding guitar player can have lessons at school and earn credits toward their qualifications by playing and composing songs alone or with others. There are also high-profile local and national events such as *Rockquest*, *Pasifika Beatz*, a national *Chamber Music Contest* and the *Play It Strange National Secondary School Songwriting Competition*, which all support and raise the profile of amateuring and “doing-for-the-love-of-doing” (Booth, 1999, p. 13). Such events and other school performances generated from student interest meet the criteria for Regelski’s amateuring in developing independence through musicking in small ensembles. Such “real-world” events provide a context in which school music can be less isolated, and real-world models develop “an amateur’s awareness of excellence (good-ness) that is the source of admiration and serves as the aural goal for improvement” (Regelski, 2007, p. 33). Moreover, “pedagogy and curriculum for amateuring, then, will teach students to listen carefully to their playing” (p. 33) as they journey toward independent musicianship. In addition to these benefits, the New Zealand Curriculum, with its focus on individuals and smaller ensembles and its non-specification of styles and genres, is perfect for harnessing independent learning and the high levels of motivation associated with amateuring.

The New Player: Technology

Since Regelski’s paper was published in 2007, technology has given rise to a whole new platform for musical amateuring, sometimes called “bedroom production,” which greatly affects the curriculum content in many schools (Emo,

2023). We know that amateurizing using Digital Audio Workstations (DAW) is highly developed, that “amateurs” interact and share sophisticated knowledge via the World Wide Web (Walzer, 2016) and that this new dimension of musicking is finding its place in the school (Emo, 2023; Pierard & Lines, 2022). For example, where once students had to sit and undertake rhythmic and melodic dictations in artificial exam conditions, the new NCEA Standard that encapsulates aural development (<https://ncea.education.govt.nz/arts/music/1/1?view=standard>) is providing teachers with the impetus to integrate aural skills into “real-world” activities such as improvisation and transcription (Ferguson, 2024b). The possibility of focusing on digital production processes is also developing, allowing students to investigate and understand timbral choices and digital alterations of sound, taking a deep dive into the concept of timbre in a digital context (Ferguson, 2024a). Emo’s (2023) recent research argues that in New Zealand secondary schools, there is an “infusion of digital technology in music making” (p. ii).

Access to Powerful Knowledge and Powerful Thinking

Whatever the official philosophical and political motivations might be, the reality in New Zealand secondary school music classrooms is that at present students have a great deal of control over what they study and how they study it. As long ago as 2010, I found that teachers sought a balance between acknowledging the needs and interests of students and providing access to powerful knowledge (McPhail, 2013). More recently, Emo (2023) notes that “music teachers strive to incorporate a pluralistic approach to what music genres are included, challenging the dichotomy between Western Art Music (WAM) and popular/contemporary or electronic music” (p. ii). But has this swing toward meeting the perceived needs of the student worked entirely in their favor? As Winch dryly notes, “much that is of interest to the pupils is not necessarily in their interests and much that is in their interests is not necessarily interesting to them” (Winch, 2017, p. 37). Bereiter (2002) also asks the fundamental question: “how do we make contact between students’ interests and the big ideas that form the intellectual life of a civilization? How do we teach things that lead somewhere?” (p. 339).

To return to Dewey’s advice, I suggest that the answer to the challenges for music education in secondary school lies not in an either-or scenario but in trying to bridge the gaps between what students are interested in and what they may become interested in if they experience it. Dewey (1938/97) observes, “it goes without saying that the organized subject-matter of the adult world and the specialist cannot be the starting point ... nevertheless, it represents the goal toward which education should continuously move” (p. 83). This acknowledges that education should be concerned not only with experiences and passions but also with understandings that deepen experience. Elsewhere (McPhail, 2023), I have used the term “thingification” to refer to the naming of concepts as a critical feature of learning in the classroom, no

matter what the content (e.g., Western or non-Western music²). Ideally, in music education, concepts are first encountered in practice, and then moments of “thingification” occur—the naming of the corresponding disciplinary or subject concepts from the students’ point of view, the recognition of the connection between the experience and the name, which then makes naming possible. Thingification is fundamental to realizing the interrelationship between practical knowledge (e.g., I can play this chord) and conceptual knowledge (e.g., this a G chord, the dominant chord in C major); “through naming things, we make them visible and audible, and we begin to have some power over them. We can describe and discuss ideas, phenomena, and activities more readily and more fluently” (McPhail, 2023, p. 123). Moreover, thingification is a mechanism for scaffolding the development of abstract thinking. When “cool sounding chords” can be thingified as a particular chord progression or modulation, a cognitive and linguistic move from concrete meanings to context-independent language has been made; a move from concrete to abstract thinking, which is a developmental step recognized by Vygotsky (1986) as one of the key purposes of education:

scientific concepts,³ with their hierarchical system of interrelation, seem to be the medium within which awareness and mastery of this process first develop, to be transferred later to other concepts and other areas of thought. Reflective consciousness comes to the child through the portals of scientific concepts.

(p. 171)

Karpov (2003), drawing on Vygotsky, describes the significance of this process: “students’ spontaneous concepts become structured and conscious [and] as a result, students’ thinking becomes much more independent of their personal experience ... and [they] develop the ability to operate at the level of formal-logical thought” (p. 66). Moreover, Christie and Derewianka (2010) argue that this move from concrete to abstract thinking “is fundamental to the very nature of educational processes in the higher levels of schooling—the construal of experience into specialized domains and the reasoning about experience in abstract, logically developed terms” (p. 25). Powerful knowledge as a curricular principle refers to conceptual systems of meaning, not to lists of contents. The challenge is for teachers to find concepts and content that bridge music genres to provide a rich underpinning for the ways students want to realize their musicianship (see McPhail, 2023, Chapter 6).

Concluding Thoughts: A Possible Curriculum Scenario

In a Delhi study, a colleague and I explored the views of several music education experts worldwide about what they considered an ideal curriculum (McNeill & McPhail, 2020; McPhail & McNeill, 2019, 2021b). In the final round of the study, we presented four scenarios for consideration, and the

experts commented on their pros and cons. Scenario D was the most popular, and I provide a slightly revised version here (McPhail & McNeill, 2021b):

Students embark on a four-year specialized classroom music curriculum. The first two years comprise a comprehensive and sequential introduction to the key generative concepts of several musical languages and the history of their development, e.g. jazz, Indonesian gamelan, hip-hop and Western classical. Students learn an instrument (including a DAW) or voice “outside” the classroom system in government-funded lessons available at school. In the classroom curriculum, teachers choose examples of musicking for study from a national set of examples agreed to be high-quality and creative exemplars of various genres and styles. Students listen, analyze, perform, compose and arrange music informed by these exemplars, which may sometimes include student-chosen examples that the student justifies according to some criteria. The exposure and analytic understandings developed begin to equip students with facility in “the languages of music”: how musics work and the effects musics can have within and across various socio-cultural and political contexts. Large ensembles run outside of school time, and the curriculum comprises mostly medium- to small-sized ensembles. In the second two years, students develop their musical identity by choosing areas of specialization in which they perform and/or improvise and/or compose and/or arrange, and research and analyze music in styles they are most connected to and interested in. Formal assessment occurs only in the final year through several culmination projects.

The scenario certainly exhibits some aspects of Regelski’s ideals for amateurism. For example, the curriculum is “open” and acknowledges a breadth of available music “specializations”; students could study anything from Western classical playing to Māori waiata (songs) to developing fluency in composing via digital audio workstations. The aim is to cultivate the curriculum as “good time” because it acknowledges students’ pre-existing interests, integrates and expects listening as the basis of music learning and cultivates musicking in small ensembles to encourage and foster independence. Small groups can be “laboratories” for composing, arranging and conducting.

However, the scenario also attempts a syncretic approach, minimizing the potential dialectic between amateurism and specialization. In the scenario, specialized conceptual knowledge is not forgotten, and the “generative concepts of several musical languages” are highlighted in the first two years of study. Generative concepts refer here to the theoretical dimensions of music that generate yet more music. For example, students would be introduced to the Western tonal system, learn to compose via chord progressions and develop a practical understanding of how harmony works in popular music. The course has a strong conceptual underpinning, but always with “sound before symbol” (Trotter, 1914). In such a scenario, any existing passion or commitment

students may bring to the music classroom is harnessed rather than rejected, and music education can build on and expand students' music experiences, music knowledge and musical encounters with sound.

The music curriculum experienced by students in the 2020s in New Zealand is certainly more closely related to amateuring in its most positive sense than to the academic curriculum of the past or to a "semiprofessional" curriculum defined by Kratus (2019) in the North American context. Nevertheless, I have argued that we need to keep epistemic options open for students, as this is arguably one of the key purposes of schooling: to provide access to knowledge that is not available in students' everyday lives. While many educators would argue that Google provides access to knowledge, social realists argue that an expert teacher is still required so that students can experience access guided by someone who already knows the terrain of the journey. The role of the teacher is much greater than that of facilitator, in that they can provide learning encounters in which students deepen their experiences through conceptualization, entering the world of abstract thought. We can aim for Dewey's middle ground where students are encouraged and provided with the opportunity to develop their musicianship in procedural ways and access to theoretical knowledge to enhance their expertise in musicking for the "good life."

Notes

- 1 Music in core/general music classes were conceptualized as development in music appreciation which comprised singing and from around the 1920s onwards listening to gramophone recordings (Symes, 2004).
- 2 See McPhail (2025) regarding the sensitivity required when studying non-Western music and associated concepts in the classroom.
- 3 By scientific in this context, Vygotsky is referring to the concepts of epistemically structured knowledge found in all the disciplines not only the hard sciences.

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