

Gender Issues in Music Education at the Pan-Canadian Symposium

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People often feel uncomfortable talking about gender as an educational issue. Commonly, we hear that discussing gender issues is negative and unnecessary because we all have equal rights in Canada. When feminist viewpoints are represented, the commonplace criticism seems to be that those who bring up such issues are angry, that gender issues represent an anti-male bias, or that feminist discussion of gender excludes men. Sometimes, such responses mask homophobia or misogyny. While the feelings represented by such thoughts are legitimate, the criticisms are not: we can recognize the emotions without accepting the premise. The criticisms belie a lack of knowledge of both gender issues and feminist perspectives. Those of us called upon to present the "Gender Issue" story often notice we are talking to the same people who have heard the story before (often from the same presenter), and have not bothered to read the research. It may be they have read an article and cite one of the sources the feminist author mentions in it, but neglect to cite the author herself-- a citation of a citation, rather than doing the honest work oneself. They may criticize feminist libratory projects in music education by citing the work of feminist musicologists and ignoring the work of feminist music educators. These examples are just poor scholarship, and poor scholarship makes me cranky.¹

¹ Due to these frequent experiences and my crankiness, what I presented at the Pan Canadian Symposium on Music Education, May 2005 was a dramatic (or maybe comic, as in 'laugh to keep from crying') improvisation, wherein I drew attention to examples of gender issues chosen from the previous presentations at the Symposium. The characters I improvised were Miss Education and Extreme Miss Education. The appellation was a pun on a theme of mis-education that arose across the Symposium sessions. The Extreme designation referred to extreme sports as a metaphor, that is, taking athletic skill and strength to the edge of what is possible, to make the impossible or inconceivable capable of being achieved. This sketch was feasible because the Gender Issues topic was scheduled

Lamb, R. (2007). Gender issues in music education at the Pan-Canadian Symposium. In K. Veblen & C. Beynon (Eds. with S. Horsley, U. DeAlwiss, & A. Heywood), *From sea to sea: Perspectives on music education in Canada*. Retrieved from <http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/musiceducationE-books/1/>

Some fundamental ideas need to be acknowledged in order to establish a common knowledge baseⁱ for this paper, and to ensure that it can bring about greater understanding to the benefit of students and teachers. If we do not develop a mutual vocabulary of concepts, within a commitment to equity, then there can be no hope of positive change or improvement. The following seven statements function as the common knowledge base of gender for the purposes of this paper:

Gender is not a substitute word for sex.

Gender is not binary.

We all teach gender.

We all perform gender.

Gender is a process.

Gender is the hidden curriculum and the other curriculum.

If it quacks like a duck, if it walks like a duck, it probably is a duck.

The field of music education demonstrates each of these statements in one way or another; thus, the remainder of this essay explores each of these ideas.

for the morning of the last day of the meetings. The immediate response during the improvisation, and the ensuing discussion, indicates this improvised, comedic approach was effective.

However, it is not possible to repeat that performance in a paper. I will not try.

In this essay I provide ideas similar to the dramatic improvisation, but written in a more academic style. If you are interested in the Miss Education character you might read the column, "Mis-Education: A column where equity matters," which appear periodically in the *Canadian Music Educators Journal* (see columns in the Volume 47, No. 1, September 2005 and Volume 47, No. 3, February 2006 issues).

Gender is not a substitute word for sex. Gender is not binary.

Common speech substitutes 'gender' as the polite word for biological sex, i.e., male or female. In scholarship, sex has been defined as biology and gender as socialization. Now, both of these definitions are not so clear. We have seen evidence of a connection and complication of biology by socialization. We have seen that biology is not as binary as human beings have defined it. There are people born female who are more themselves once they transition to a male body and males who are more themselves in a female body. There are those in both the animal and human domains who have components of male *and* female. Different sexual orientations exist in both animal and human worlds, and so do different gender orientations. In the end, neither gender nor sex is as obvious as the first impression might suggest. Gender complicates sex and provides opportunity for many diverse expressions of femaleness, maleness, femininity, masculinity, androgyny and so on. We need to keep in mind a diversity of genders rather than thinking of gender as a binary construction of male and female. We need to be mindful and aware.

We all teach gender. We all perform gender.

We all teach and perform gender. We cannot avoid it. So much of our western society is based upon gender constructs. Remember the days of the boys' entrance and the girls' entrance to the elementary school? Remember when physical education was sex-segregated? Remember when women could not be priests? Remember when only literate white men who owned property could vote? Remember when women were persons in terms of pains and responsibilities but not in terms of rights and privileges? Remember when boys did not sing in choirs and girls did not play drum kit?

If we do not talk about gender, then we behave in an ‘allopathic’ way. Lee Bartel made this reference in referring to the allopathic model of health care that is western medicine. As we integrated discussion of musicians’ and teachers’ health into the symposium, we grew in awareness that health issues are gendered. The health problems that men experience are different from those that women experience. The stress problems common among musicians are not identified as the problems of an athlete (gendered male and physical) but of an overly emotional and expressive musician (gendered female and mental or imaginary). And within this group of musicians and teachers, the kinds of stress experienced differs by gender identity.

Throughout our symposium we cited certain problems we face in music education, yet rarely did we acknowledge the issues of gender. For example, one presenter of case studies reported, “I didn't expect gender issues to emerge, but they do.” We should not be surprised that gender emerges when we allow it the space to do so, when we are not looking for it. This is because gender is a central construct in human societies, whether we want it to be so or not. Another example was the problem of musicians and teachers expecting perfectionism from themselves and from students. Perfectionism appears to be a trait that can encourage high standards and accomplishments, if implemented in a healthy way. On the negative side it can lead to being never quite good enough, or dictatorial leadership, or unquestioning worship of talent and virtuosity. This extreme perfectionism is gendered as the best good girl in the neighborhood. We discussed the lineage of who studied with whom and how we musicians follow these lineages. Imagine if we thought about the genders, class, and “race” of those master teachers.

When we examine gender as performance, we can see that feminism contributes an emancipatory project that is self-reflective and self-critical. In these ways, feminism offers the

opportunity to open up possibilities for all people. Ignoring gender (or race or class or ethnicity or religion or language or ability) does not eliminate the influence of these challenging topics in our educational practices. We need to be mindful and aware.

Gender is a process. Gender is the hidden curriculum and the other curriculum.

Gender as a process is the result of teaching and performing gender. Gender is not the product. In this way, gender is similar to curriculum, where curriculum is process rather than a document or policy. We discussed many curricula: hidden curriculum; political curriculum; the 'other' curriculum; and multiple curricula. We can examine the intended and implemented curriculum. Gender is part of the hidden curriculum. Students in music classes learn what is acceptable behavior and appearance for girls and boys.

Lori-Anne Dolloff asked participants to describe their best learning experience and their best teaching experience. What is the intersection of the two? What are the options? What does the teacher intend? Why does the teacher do it? Where and how does the teacher learn to do it? What are the possibilities for growth and change? These are questions she asks her students who are studying to become music teachers. We can use these same questions to uncover the role of gender in the "lore of practice." If we bring gender, 'race,' class, ability and religion into the realm of teacher education courses we can then examine the impact of these differences in teacher practices.

Andrea Rose talked about the importance of equitable access to render distance transparent when implementing distance-education programs. Eric Favaro spoke about policies, citing policy as a response to an issue, with statistics and records to support the policy. Equity and access policies in public institutions come about in response to a perceived issue or need.

Gender is one of those issues. We have policies concerning equity in schools that we need to implement with enthusiasm so that all of the students have equitable opportunities within the schools. We intend fairness and equity, but do our practices actually implement fairness and equity in our curricula? Best practices mean we value all aspects of importance to human beings, including genders. We need to be mindful and aware.

If it quacks like a duck, if it walks like a duck, it probably is a duck.

“If it quacks like a duck, if it walks like a duck, it probably is a duck:” so began David Elliott’s paper. “If it quacks like a duck, if it walks like a duck, it is probably gender:” so began my symposium improvisation. So ends this essay. The point being, once more, that gender is always already present in our music education theories and practices. Betty Hanley noted in her talk that musicians tend to be apolitical. Elliott mentioned "significant shifts in social fabric" that bring philosophers to reflect on meanings and practices. The civil rights movements (including feminist movement) is one of those significant shifts in the social fabric. Politics is about who has power and who does not. Changes in social fabric are about those who have been lacking power, seeking access to power. It is no wonder that apolitical musicians become uncomfortable with discussions of gender, feminism and other equity issues. Yet, to contrast that apolitical quality with a peculiarly Canadian intellectual dynamism, Elliott says that Canadians play a crucial role in music education leadership because the Canadian scholars wrestle with complex issues. Here we put the emphasis on philosophies rather than a philosophy. This results in reasoned ideas for others to use-- or not-- so long as we first read the research and know the issues. This is informed, quality scholarship. This is why I do not prescribe solutions to gender and other inequities in schools. There is no recipe. The solutions to gender and equity issues arise

from the diversity of student needs and learning styles, teacher strengths and abilities, context, medium, engagement, mutual respect, many voices, open minds and attitude, community. We need to be mindful and aware.

Recommended Readings

Lamb, R. (2005). Mis-Education: A column where equity matters. *Canadian Music Educators Journal*, 47(19).

Lamb, R., Dolloff, L., & Wieland Howe, S. (2002). Feminism, feminist research and gender research in music education: A selective review. In R. Colwell & C. Richardson (Eds.), *The new handbook of research on music teaching and learning* (pp. 648-674). New York: Oxford University Press.

Lamb, R. (2000). Feminist influences in music education. *Orbit*, 31(1), 38-39. [A version of this essay adapted for web-based presentations is available through ACT, listed below.]

Lamb, R. (1995). Equity in music education. *Ontario Music Educators Association Recorder*, 37(2).

Lamb, R. (1994). Feminism as critique in philosophy of music education. *Philosophy of Music Education Review*, 2(2), 59-74.

Suggested Websites

Gender Research in Music Education (GRIME)

<http://post.queensu.ca/~grime/>

All issues

Gender Education Music Society (GEMS)

Lamb, R. (2007). Gender issues in music education at the Pan-Canadian Symposium. In K. Veblen & C. Beynon (Eds. with S. Horsley, U. DeAlwiss, & A. Heywood), *From sea to sea: Perspectives on music education in Canada*. Retrieved from <http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/musiceducationE-books/1/>

<http://www.queensu.ca/music/links/gems/index.htm>

All issues

ACT: Action, Criticism & Theory for Music Education

<http://www.siue.edu/MUSIC/ACTPAPERS/>

Vol. 5 No. 1, January 2006, Gender, “Aesthetics” and Music

Vol. 4 No. 3, September 2005, Race, Music and Music Education

Vol. 3 No. 1, May 2004, Symposium Musical Identities

ⁱ The handbook chapter listed in Recommended Reading is the best place to start for fundamental knowledge of feminism, feminist research and gender research in music education. The knowledge base referred to here in this essay was compiled from what the participants brought to the Pan Canadian Symposium.