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The Road Goes Ever On: Estelle Jorgensen's
Legacy in Music Education

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Ch. 11 - Becoming a Story: Searching for Music Educations

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Section III – Becoming Other Than

Chapter 11

Becoming a Story: Searching for Music Educations

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Abstract

This short philosophical chapter borrows and diverges from Estelle Jorgensen’s *In Search of Music Education*. It aims to address the pertinent and defiant questions asked over two decades ago, while re-position them in light of current challenges. Following Jorgensen’s style—carefully and tactically—this chapter draws a line of flight between philosophical and policy-oriented ways of thinking, underlining some ways in which the two meet and how pertinent these encounters can be to music educators today. The chapter makes use and highlights the potential of craftly constructed epistemological familiarity and how it can engender practice. Specifically, it reminds and exemplifies to the reader how a ‘wondering disposition’ about one’s work and field, remain central to any critical practice. Specially so, in times where democratic challenges strongly challenge our social and educational environments.

Introduction

Charles Taylor¹ claims that in order to have “a sense of who we are, we have to have a notion of how we have become.” Estelle Jorgensen, her work and actions, are part of American Music Education collective becoming. As such, she has impacted the becoming of this collective, recognized as a force and seen as a narrative line, touching

the epistemic condition of a field’s social life.

It is unsurprising then that we gather in this volume, metaphorically, to explore Jorgensen’s work in light of current challenges. Her scholarship has a quiet zealotry that invites one in, building on the accepted and acceptable, while pushing ideas/action forward, carefully, softly,

tactically. Jorgensen has been a paladin for music education, acting both as guardian and as careful challenger. She, herself, embodies(ed) the challenger within the profession, as a woman, an immigrant, philosopher, and editor. As a writer, she presents a clear image of guardianship, advocating clearly, supporting and sustaining established values, while also, when necessary, nudging her milieu into risk-taking.

In this short essay, I look at Jorgensen's earlier book-length stories, *In Search of Music Education*.² I do so for personal reasons but also by way of unearthing ways in which this 20+ year-old publication speaks to the realities of the field today. Jorgensen's work has been impactful, I would argue, because it carries with it something that is familial. She has and continues to rely on stories, shaping her writing to feel as something somehow recognizable. The stories and narratives to which they allude, from which the text emerges—and this first book sets the tone—provide a level of comfort that has allowed many in the profession to enter it, deliberate over it, and in some cases take the message onward, making it formational to their own identities. If epistemological familiarity engenders practice, then there is always time and reason to think again about the meanings of established work. Here then, is my invitation and offering.

In the Company of Others

Less than decade after the publishing of *In Search of Music Education*, I, as brand new scholar, found myself in wonderful company. By way of a generous invitation from Randall Allsup, then chair of the Philosophy SRIG, I sat on a panel with him, Julia Koza, and Estelle Jorgensen. This was my first real interaction with these scholars. The room was packed, the dialogue was exciting, and I nervously but happily struggled to find my bearings and my argument. Throughout, however, an early claim/challenge from Jorgensen's book played over in my head. The field and its workers, she had said, were "uncomfortable with the ambiguities, discontinuities, and dialectics encountered in the practice of music education."³ I thought to be in good company.

In Search of Music Education was the first book I read after arriving in the United States. As a master student attempting to understand music education in a new environ, it became a touchstone. The book's both/and approach, its story-like narrative, and its dialogical aims reminded me of the work of Paulo Freire (whom I was re-reading, now in English, after knowing the original back home in Brazil) and allowed me to form a bridging space, a story upon which to build and add my own. The year *In Search of Music Education* was published was also the year I immigrated to the States. In ten years, I had experienced my share of ambiguities and discontinuities within the field and was fully committed to contribute to a dialectic practice that would

inform it. The story that propelled Jorgensen's book was also my own.

For those who need reminding, Jorgensen sets the terms of the book, broadly, in the first pages of the preface, arguing that "since music entered the public education [environment]. . . music education has often been thought of narrowly and unsatisfactorily."⁴ The challenge remains today, granted perhaps less strenuously. In one hand, we still have an over-reliance on structured music delivery, where "interest has centered particularly on the needs and interests of teachers of bands, choirs, and general music"; for if music is to be compulsory "many believe" (a typical rhetoric construction for Jorgensen) "its objectives and methods should be at the heart of music education."⁵ On the other hand, the *problem* is also that "music educators typically value solutions to their questions more than the questions themselves."⁶

Jorgensen's answer to this challenge is to invite her reader to see the complexity of their/her field of action. The first chapter offers, almost side-by-side, visions of socialized spaces and practices, showing (without telling) how they (might) construct outcomes that are shaped by their own parameters. The structures of schooling, enculturation, or education are all structuring; as Bourdieu⁷ would argue. They "lead" one down a very particular garden path. Jorgensen, however, tries to avoid that same trap. After 30 pages of pros-and-cons, one does not have a clear sense of what is best/preferred/desirable; her

didactic disposition is not to tell but to suggest. What emerges for the reader is an encounter with wondering: where do I fit in? Have I avoided something other than what is familiar? Are the practices I follow, and at times proselytize, my own? What would it take to be/act differently?

Dialectics

Then, as now, I find myself drawn to the final chapter of *In Search of Music Education*. In "a dialectic view" Jorgensen offers a way into ambiguity, having spent time attempting to disrupt what is comfortable, by showing not only how the familial can be restrictive, but most significantly, how the familial is often built by under-explored and unexplained contradictory positions. She now, and finally, sets up to provide access to concepts, to competing frames that can provide the building blocks of thinking and practice that may go elsewhere.

Today, twenty years into this common story, I see my scholarly trajectory embedded in this final chapter, and I see the distance between it and me. I suppose this is inevitable. I suppose it is necessary. I find myself estranged to concerns about "musical form and context,"⁸ to discussions about "great or little musical traditions,"⁹ or to the quandaries of a profession "caught between the claims of the past and those of the present and future."¹⁰ I remain deeply engaged however, with the quandaries expressed by "continuity and interaction"¹¹ and the manner in which political

economies embedded in power, government, governance, and professional formation still mark notions of “making and receiving” music and music education.¹²

Jorgensen uses Deweyan and Freirian frames to speak of continuity and interaction, as well as to making and receiving music. Her concern is ultimately with empowerment—the last page of the book articulates this aim, so that teachers can “make their own decisions rather than remain as technicians who follow the directives and suggestions of others.”¹³ Implicit in her approach is the notion that empowerment is constructed, not found or bestowed. This is clear as she argues that “no actor or activity is necessarily at the center of the music educational process,”¹⁴ anticipating discussions about participatory culture in music education. Is this an epistemology of practice? An argument for a *practical* epistemology? A rationale for epistemology *and* practice as indissoluble in the lifeworld of educators?

Today, while I cling to the latter, what also shines through in this both/and approach is a platonic categorization of place, not an ontological and spatial right to be both. The paternal recognition that all of us can be “valued” by playing our own defined but distinct roles, even if passively, given that “making and receiving are essential elements of the musical experience,”¹⁵ feels wildly insufficient today. It seems closer to a politics of equality than one of equity; one that acknowledges value in limitations, rather than able to highlight the productive power

of inhabiting multiple/distinct roles at multiple/distinct times. In this Jorgensen is captive of challenges that also befall Freire. A dialectic of inductive reasoning can lead to realizations that are “freeing” while also remaining trapped within ideological constraint.

Discussing continuity and interaction Jorgensen is convincing as she imagines an educational environment that is comprehensively seen and understood. Using just a couple of pages, she highlights the significance of relevance as a departure point for curricular discussion. Then she establishes interaction as a policy aim that can be established by contextualized curricular experiences and ends by linking these parameters as sufficient not just in the education of youth but also in life-long learning and what she calls “geriatric music education.”¹⁶

By establishing making and receiving within a need for arts education that “involves personal action and responsiveness” Jorgensen hopes to diminish the dualistic representation of the two terms, while highlighting how they can be co-dependent. She is conservative when suggesting that “music educators must consider weighing in the claims of making and receiving in a technologically oriented world that promises new ways of music making, but at the same time threatens to silence it.”¹⁷ But she also invites “co-optation” of technology and its use that would be framed by a commitment to a “broad view” which would ultimately

require “reshaping the music education profession.”¹⁸

Jorgensen is a cautious revolutionary who plays the long odds. What we hear is something like: prepare and engage with change, but be wary of disruption. What she sees as central is a reasoned and sensible professionalization of the profession, where music teachers can engage in considered decision-making. In her own words, the music educator who can lead us through complex times is one equipped “to cultivate a wide understanding of the meaning of education and the role of music as a cultural phenomenon” while being able to “handle the dialectics they face in their classrooms, studios, and all the other places they teach.”¹⁹ This, it seems, remains critical, although, sadly, also largely unrealized. And thinking of unattended admonitions has a way of turning one inward.

Intersections and Pathways

Knowing Estelle in person as well as through her writing, I would say that my dialectics are more Aristotelian, my politics more aggressive, and my pedagogy probably more impatient, which is to say, I still benefit from reading her work and hearing her critique. My work on policy presents a post-positivistic view of social-political action that allows one to re-claim the space of the individual—and collectives developed by them—as one of frame-making and problem-grappling. This is a different way to express the “dialectic” or

“both/and” approach that Jorgensen presents. But it is connected to it. It is a way to re-consider how, in the midst of today’s complexity, acknowledging and improving how we integrate lots of data *and* intuition as a way to function in everyday life and in professional environs, remains a key challenge.

What strikes me, as I re-enter *In Search of Music Education*, are the many intersections to the policy work I have been developing in the last decade. Recently, I have been thinking about deliberative policy and this has led me back to the work on the “network society,”²⁰ “reflexive modernization,”²¹ and “democratic policy making,”²² all of which emerged in the late nineties; the same time Jorgensen was writing her book. This work fascinates me because it places policy as a fallible, complex, and subjective enterprise.

Dryzek has argued that “some of the more pressing problems of today require us to make ‘hard’ decisions with only ‘soft’ evidence; and that is nothing new.”²³ This is not to say that policy is haphazard (although our current presidential politics clearly show the extent to which that is actually possible), nor that careful data-point analysis is not helpful, but rather to acknowledge that we have unwarrantedly privileged what political scientist and economist, Charles Manski has called “incredible certitude.”²⁴ The challenge relates to Jorgensen’s epistemic stance, I believe, and is situated both in general and scholastic perception. The scientific community, Manski argues, “rewards those

who produce strong and novel findings” while the public, “impatient for solutions to its pressing concerns, rewards those who offer simple analyses leading to unequivocal policy recommendations.” These incentives, he goes on “make it tempting for researchers to maintain assumptions far stronger than they can persuasively defend, in order to draw strong conclusions.”²⁵

Critical policy literature is filled with reasons why this is significant. For instance, Schon and Rein clearly articulate how problem solving, particularly of “intractable” policy controversies, required “a much better understanding of how various parties framed the situation.”²⁶ In the *Argumentative Turn in Policy Analysis and Planning*, Fischer and Forrester,²⁷ and in all the work of Stephen Ball,²⁸ the importance of the discursive dimension within policy analysis and decision-making was fully established. Extensive research on planning theory demonstrates “how planners in concrete situations of conflict relied on interactive and deliberative processes . . . and developing joint responsibility.”²⁹

Estelle’s work was one among others that put me on the path to engage with networked environments and democratic policy engagements. It is interesting to think then, that while not addressing any of the above, *In Search of Music Education* shares this lifeworld, this dispositional milieu. Indeed, almost at the end of the book Jorgensen uncharacteristically shares with us that “If music teachers are apathetic and

dependent on the leadership and instructional methods of others, it is because of how they have been prepared as teachers and what has been expected on them throughout their careers.”³⁰ She is clearly concerned with structuring structures that form the profession,³¹ the policies, the managerial engagements that are *producing* unempowered teachers. Her solution is a dialectical awareness, a broadening in world view.

In my recent writing,³² I can see these principles at work as I argue that a *policy disposition* can help develop in music teachers a *framing capacity*. The idea of a frame, or framing, can be linked to the work of sociologist Erving Goffman, who in 1974 defined framing as a “schemata of interpretation” always present as people attempt “to locate, perceive, identify, and label.”³³ Befitting of his time, Goffman’s work looked at framing as an event, a moment in time; not unlike Jorgensen. His intent was to reveal how we are apt at structuring things in particular ways, naming them, or more simplistically, placing them in a box. While acknowledging this heritage—mediated by Jorgensen’s mid-point of availing oneself of oppositional representation as a way for decision-making—I suggest that framing can be pedagogically developed to be less static and more attuned to the speed realities of the 21st century. Indeed, today, framing must be predicated on adaptation and consequently on a disposition toward constantly re-evaluating, or re-framing. Thus, framing capacity might be better defined and more useful today, not as

“schemata of interpretation” but rather as “schemata for interpretation”: a creative disposition rather than a perceptual sorting skill.

In concrete terms this means that teachers can and must be engaged in policy thinking and practice, at least a re-imagined version of the notion of policy.³⁴ Policy is not simply about problem solving but about *problem grappling*. Policy then, aims to convene opinion, establish debate and directives, understand how to possibly enact proposed ideas, and follow up on the outcomes of implementation. I agree with Jorgensen, still, that educational and organizational parameters continue to limit music teachers’ capacities. But my direction is otherwise. The pathway to which I have committed, the one that emerges from an intersection with Jorgensen, is the question of policy and how it should be dear to educators, as policy is directly related to inquiry and change. Understood in these terms, policy is also familiar to the most significant ideas in teaching—another space where I hear the echoes of Jorgensen: firstly, that inquiry must lead argumentation and action, and secondly, that opportunities for change must be constantly considered, given the constant shift of the cultural, social, ideological, technological, psychological, and personal conditions upon which learning takes place.

Debts Owed

To any educator or scholar texts have a way of becoming unavoidably personal. And so this writing flirts at the edges of deference, homage, critique, and self-reflection. I, as others, have felt and at times struggled with Jorgensen’s gravitational pull: moving in other directions, oppositionally at times, but mostly relationally. I, as others concerned with how moral and philosophical issues emerge, are used, manipulated, and experienced, return to impactful texts, indelibly trailing in the discursive space others helped to construct.

My sense is that *In Search of Music Education* might not be as widely read today as it once was, but it should be. In a way, what I believe Jorgensen does here is to find ways to bring to our attention the famous dictum: *nothing is as practicable as a well-understood epistemology*. Her philosophy aims to pragmatically guide us into deliberation (first), interpretation (hopefully), and better practice (always). Like Dewey, Estelle strikes me as fervently—albeit always calmly—connected to the notion that “meaning . . . is primarily a property of behavior.” We begin and become in action, albeit carefully pondered in both/and fashion. Music educators have often misunderstood this as mere pragmatic simplicity. Jorgensen’s philosophy remains, as a helpful pathway to the remainder, to a more critical sense of who we are and its dependence on a clear sense of who we might become.

Notes

- 1 Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism and "the Politics of Recognition"* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 47.
- 2 Estelle R. Jorgensen, *In Search of Music Education* (Urbana-Champaign, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1997).
- 3 Ibid., x.
- 4 Ibid., ix.
- 5 Ibid., x.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Pierre Bourdieu, *In Other Words: Essays toward a Reflexive Sociology* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990).
- 8 Jorgensen, 72.
- 9 Ibid., 75.
- 10 Ibid., 77.
- 11 Ibid., 81.
- 12 Ibid., 83.
- 13 Ibid., 93.
- 14 Ibid., 94.
- 15 Ibid., 83.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Ibid., 86.
- 18 Ibid., 92.
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996).
- 21 Ulrich Beck, *World Risk Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999).
- 22 Pamela Stone, *Policy Paradox: The Art of Political Decision Making* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997).
- 23 David Dryzek, *Deliberative Democracy and Beyond* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 45.
- 24 Charles Manski, *Public policy in an uncertain world: Analysis and decisions* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).
- 25 Ibid., 109.

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- 26 Daniel Schon and Martin Rein, *Frame Reflection: Toward the Resolution of Intractable Policy Controversies* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 56.
- 27 Frank Fischer and John Forrester, eds., *The Argumentative Turn in Policy Analysis and Planning* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993).
- 28 Stephen Ball, *Education Policy and Social Class* (London: Routledge, 2006); Stephen Ball “Big Policies/Small World: An Introduction to International Perspective in education Policy,” *Comparative Education* 34, no. 2 (1998): 119-130.
- 29 Archon Fung and Erik Olin Wright, “Deepening Democracy: Innovations in Empowered Participatory Governance,” *Politics and Society* 29, no. 1 (2001): 6 [5-41].
- 30 Jorgensen, 92.
- 31 Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1977).
- 32 Patrick Schmidt, “Why Policy Matters: Developing a Policy Vocabulary in Music Education,” in *Policy and the Political Life of Music Education: Standpoints for Understanding and Action*, Patrick Schmidt and Richard Colwell, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017); and “Creativity as a Complex Practice: Developing a Framing Capacity in Higher Music Education,” in *Developing Creativities in Higher Music Education: International Perspectives and Practices*, Pamela Burnard, ed. (London: Routledge, 2013), 23-36.
- 33 Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), 21.
- 34 Patrick Schmidt, *Policy as Practice: A Guide to Music Educators* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

About the Author

Patrick Schmidt is Chair of Music Education at Western University. Schmidt’s innovative work on policy is recognized internationally with publications in journals such as *International Journal of Music Education*, *Theory into Practice*, *Arts Education Policy Review*, and *Research in Music Education*. Schmidt has led several consulting and evaluative projects including for the National YoungArts Foundation and the New World Symphony, US and the Ministry of Culture, Chile. Schmidt co-edited the *Oxford Handbook of Music Education and Social Justice* and *Policy and the Political Life of Music Education* both released by Oxford in 2015 and 2017. His latest book, *Policy as Practice: A Guide for Music Educators* was released in 2019.

Project Links

This chapter comes from a book titled *The Road Goes Ever On: Estelle Jorgensen's Legacy in Music Education*. The philosophical essays contained within focus on themes that have intrigued Estelle Jorgensen whose forty years of scholarship have strongly influenced music education research and practice: the transformation of music education in public schools; feminist and LGBTQ voices; mentoring; the unfinished search for new ways of seeing, hearing, and doing; multiple and intersecting musical identities; the tension between tradition and change; and activist practice in music education.

The complete book can be found at the following link: <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/jorgensen/>