


# Chasing legitimacy: the US National Music Standards viewed through a critical theorist framework

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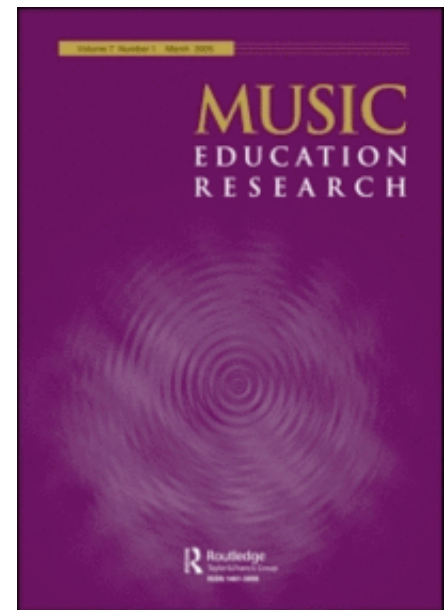
**DOI:** 10.1080/14613800600570686

**Publication Frequency:** 4 issues per year

**Published in:**  **Music Education Research**, Volume 8, Issue 1 March 2006 , pages 3 - 16

## Abstract

This study examines the US National Music Standards from two perspectives. The study situates the status of music education as a marginalized society and postulates that the standards are a byproduct of larger forces and powerful assumptions. In order to better understand how these forces might have influenced the development and adoption of the Music Standards document, the first perspective is an examination of the Music Standards through a theoretical framework provided by the critical theorists Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux, and Michael Apple. The second perspective compares the National Music Standards to the National Mathematics, Language Arts, Science, and History Standards in order to examine the ways in which those National Standards reflect a paradigm shift in the educational climate. While this study focused solely on the US National Music Standards document, the underlying critical theory framework provides a lens for examining the status of music education throughout the world. Freire wrote that slogans and propaganda cannot take the place of critical intervention. Consequently, while documents may seem to alter the status quo and provide basic legitimacy, in the long run, sloganeering has little to do with critical intervention and transformation, and much to do with reification.



## Introduction

In 1892, the United States Music Teachers National Association Department of School Music passed what seems to have been the first resolution framed by a professional school-music body regarding the aims of school music:

- 1st—sight singing ... should be taught, in the primary grades and made the basis of all work in music;
- 2nd—good quality of tone should be taught in all exercises and songs;
- 3rd—correct intonation and blended voices in part singing should be developed.
- 4th—musical taste cultivated by the use of the best music in all grades;
- 5th—that emotional or expressive singing should be secured.

(Birge, 1928, pp. 234-235)

In 1974, The United States National Council of State Supervisors of Music published *The School Music Program: Description and Standards* (with a second edition published in 1986). It described music program standards, and, in the second edition it was stated that, 'The identification of standards and achievement levels demonstrated that the music education profession considered its work to be consequential, that it could measure music learning, and that it was committed to remaining relevant to American society' (Mark, 1995, p. 38).

In 1994 the United States National Music Standards were published and appeared eerily reminiscent not only of the 1892 aims, but also of the standards set out in the second edition of *The School Music Program: Description and Standards*.<sup>1</sup> With the addition of improvisation, composition, and the relationship between the arts, other disciplines, history and culture, it appears that over the past 113 years little has changed, or been questioned, with regard to the goals and purposes of a music education program.

While this study focuses solely on the US National Music Standards,<sup>2</sup> the underlying critical theory framework provides a lens for examining the status of music education throughout the world. Freire wrote that slogans and propaganda cannot take the place of critical intervention (1970/1993, p. 49). Documents may seem to alter the status quo and provide the shadow of legitimacy, but in the long run, sloganeering has little to do with critical intervention and transformation, and much to do with reifying the ways in which particular modes and pedagogies of knowing and doing are continually perpetuated without examination of their multiple meanings.

## Statement of the problem

The search for curricular legitimacy and the quest for distinction as a 'basic'<sup>3</sup> discipline (such as that of mathematics and language arts) and the accompanying privileged status that cloaks these disciplines, has been a dominant drive for the field of music education. When the original proposal for *Goals 2000 : Educate America Act* (1994) did not reference the inclusion of music standards, it sent a powerful message of exclusion throughout the music education community. Reacting to what was believed to be an 'untenable position ... if there were standards in the other basic disciplines, but no standards in music' (Lehman, 1995, p. 6), music educators spearheaded efforts that eventually led to the development and implementation of the *National Standards for Arts Education* (Consortium of National Arts Education Associations, 1994).

A comparison of the music standards with the other discipline standards indicates that, while all five sets of documents address the *Goals 2000* mandate of delineating what students must 'know and be able to do' (p. 4), the National Mathematics, Language Arts, Science, and History Standards address assumptions and philosophies underlying the process of learning. While the 'basic' disciplines claim they do not prescribe specific methods of teaching, they do address the educative process as one that provides for problem-solving strategies, new conceptions of literacy, the importance of communicating ideas and the justification of thinking. Pedagogy rather than methodology is, in fact, implied.

The nine standards for music are presented as behavioral objectives, which consequently adhere more literally to what students must 'know and be able to do to demonstrate that [they] are proficient in the skills and knowledge framed by content standards' (*Goals 2000*, p. 4). A closer examination of the Music Standards illustrates these points:

Students (will) sing; perform on instruments; improvise melodies; compose and arrange music; read and notate music; listen to, analyze and describe music; evaluate music and music performances; understand relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts; and understand music in relation to history and culture. (Consortium of National Arts Education Associations, 1994)<sup>4</sup>

Eisner points out that, 'When objectives are stated behaviorally, it is possible to have specific

empirical referents to observe; thus, one is in a position to know without ambiguity whether the behavior objective has been reached' (1985a, p. 110). When viewed through this behaviorist lens, the Music Standards appear to provide precise steps, teacher accountability, and evidence to the fact that learning music is measurable and, as a result, a necessary 'basic' discipline.

However, the argument posited in this study is that, by copying what was once considered the 'basic' model (defined by an emphasis on transmission of content by a teacher and the acquisition of skills), the Music Standards can be interpreted as actually serving to maintain the status quo and the 'untenable position' Lehman (1995, p. 6) and the other authors of the Music Standards had hoped to rectify.

## Critical theory

In order to better examine those forces that influenced the seven authors of the National Music Standards, this study combines elements and concepts of critical theory using Apple, Giroux, and Freire to create a framework or lens through which to examine such constructs as: prescribed and consensual behavior, high-status knowledge, and cultural replication. Although these forces cannot be observed directly, incorporating the views of these critical theorists in order to examine the indicators of these constructs and their eventual predominance in the Music Standards, provides a way of stepping back from those confines and parameters of music educational research that are conventionally practiced.

Reflecting on the National Mathematics Standards, Romberg (1992) wrote, 'Relating any message about schooling to the patterns of differential economic political and cultural power is not common in our field', but they are, in fact, critical issues for all educators interested in 'changing the current system' (p. 432). In addition, relating these same issues of power and control has also not been a common discussion in the field of music education, yet a framework provided by critical theory emphasizes the importance of these issues.

This study provides a critical theory framework for examining the National Music Standards as a byproduct of larger, outside forces often taken for granted and not closely examined. Giroux suggests that for Freire, answers to the following question provide a starting point for the oppressed to understand and transform the world around them. The question is: 'What are the objective forces that shape our consciousness and character in the interest of the oppressor?' (1981, p. 134). A view of these forces, and how they affect the discipline of music education through the perspective of these critical theorists, might provide the foundation for answering this question.

The use of critical theory as a framework in this study accomplishes two objectives. Critical theorists are used to provide a framework, or school of thought, on the hidden and taken-for-granted structures within society and education (Giroux, 1983, p. 8); and a process for an examination of the National Standards. Embedded in a critical theorist framework is the question, 'How does the process of education function to reproduce and sustain the dominant status quo?' For this study, such a framework provides a critical way of examining *what is* and then by extension *what could be* for music education, and as a '... constitutive feature of the struggle for self-emancipation and social change' (Giroux, 1983, p. 8).

Perhaps, in order for music education to ensure their presence, the decision was made that the Music Standards would focus on what students should know and be able to do (Hope, 1994). While the 'intended consequences' (Sarason, 1982) of the Music Standards are thus clearly stated, as pointed out in the following quote, obtaining high-status distinction and becoming a discipline that secures attention and resources, is a less than an obvious process.

One must only consider what gets labeled as high status knowledge in the schools and universities and, thus, provide legitimacy to certain forms of knowledge and social practices. Currently, the fine arts, the social science disciplines, and classical languages are not considered as legitimate as those bodies of knowledge found in the natural sciences or those methods of inquiry associated with the areas of business and management. These

decisions are arbitrary and are based on certain values and questions of power and control, not to mention a certain view of the nature of society and the future. (Giroux, 1988, p. 5)

In light of Giroux's conjecture, the reasons for music not being regarded as high-status knowledge might have to do with deep assumptions that permeate society, and that influence how knowledge and skills are legitimized. These powerful assumptions, as Apple (1990) reminds us, are more than just vague ideas 'that reside at an abstract level somewhere at "the roof of our brain"'. Rather (these assumptions) refer to the organized assemblage of meanings and practices, the central, effective and dominant system of meanings, values and actions which are *lived*' (Apple, p. 5). Giroux's conjecture and Apple's observation imply that, for music, those reasons for not being considered a basic, or high-status knowledge, can be traced to structural and cultural relationships that exist not only between general education and music education, but the larger relationships that exist in the context of education and society that are lived daily and taken for granted.

Taking this view, it might be informative to explore and examine the possibility that the Music Standards are a manifestation of an oppressed society. While music education is not oppressed in the ways of Freire's culture of the 'disinherited masses in Latin America' (1970/1993, p. 12), it has in fact manifested several characteristics of an oppressed society and, as such, music educators have behaved in a prescribed behavior that has 'follow(ed) the guidelines of the oppressor' (p. 29). Obviously in this study, the oppressor cannot be considered the landowners of Freire's study. Rather, the oppressor refers to the hegemony found in society, and therefore schools, that dictates what and whose knowledge is most worth having. Traditionally, this hegemony had been reflected in the curricula of the core disciplines utilizing a modern, accountable and measurable, skill-based, ends-means, Tylerian model.

However, that oppressor, or hegemony, has adapted and assimilated to the needs and desires of a 21st-century society forcing a paradigm shift to occur away from the traditional notion that to be considered a 'basic' meant curricula of set facts and figures, as well as the certainty of 'truths', and a sequential path to knowledge transmitted by the teacher.

## Hegemony

Gramsci is often considered one of the first to link educational systems and hegemonic structures (Entwistle, 1979). Gramsci broadened Marx's notion to exclude the necessity of 'physical coercion' as a defining act in hegemonic relationships; it was by moral and intellectual persuasion rather than control by an outside power force. The notion of consent and acquiescence is integral to hegemony. Freire refers to this consensual element as prescription.

One of the basic elements of the relationship between oppressor and oppressed is prescription. Every prescription represents the imposition of one individual's choice upon another, transforming the consciousness of the person prescribed to into one that conforms with the prescriber's consciousness. Thus, the behavior of the oppressed is a prescribed behavior, following as it does the guidelines of the oppressor. (Freire, 1970/1993, p. 29)

Critical theory provides a way of addressing whether music educators repeated the same steps and adopted an attitude of 'adhesion' to the oppressor (p. 27) in seeking to attain the status of the other disciplines. In the other disciplines, for whom the inclusion in *Goals 2000* was never an issue, it could be hypothesized that music educators found their 'model of "manhood"' (p. 28).

This study suggests that the Music Standards are a manifestation of an oppressed society and as such are worded in a manner that is representative of what was once the rhetoric of the basic disciplines. As documented by Freire, striving to

be like those in power is behavior reflective of oppressed societies.

But almost always, during the initial stage of the struggle, the oppressed, instead of striving for liberation, tend themselves to become oppressors, or 'sub-oppressor'. The very structure of their thought has been conditioned by the contradictions of the concrete existential situation by which they were shaped. (Freire, **1970/1993**, p. 27).

It is because this consensual element is grounded in the hegemonic structure that Freire, Giroux, and Apple believe relationships and social dynamics remain static until the oppressed reflect critically on the larger forces that contribute to oppressed/oppressor relationships. Breaking out from oppression comes when people 'first critically recognize its causes. Only after doing so may they engage in transforming actions so that they can create a new situation, one which makes possible the pursuit of a fuller humanity' (Freire, **1970/1993**, p. 29).

## Methodology

The design of the study is qualitative in nature. In order to compare and contrast the five sets of National Standards documents, content analysis was used to uncover codes that 'yield[ed] inferences' (Miles & Huberman, **1994**, p. 20). The content analysis was grounded in the context provided by the critical theorist framework, as well as the context provided by an examination of current philosophical and pedagogical research.

Once this was complete, a reorientation of the existing National Music Standards was written based on the analysis and a review of the current pedagogical and philosophical research.<sup>5</sup> This reorientation was then sent to the seven original members of the writing task force of the National Music Standards.

There was one in-depth, face-to-face interview lasting at least 1 hour with each of the participants. I traveled to each of the participants and the interviews were audio taped, and transcribed. A written transcript was provided for each of the participants as a member check (Guba & Lincoln, **1981**) to verify the accuracy of the transcribed interview and to determine if the meaning of the informant was indeed the meaning that was intended.

The interview protocol developed for the study included questions that were developed in order to elicit responses that addressed not only the reorientation but also the reasons for suggesting the reorientation that I had sent to them prior to the interview, and whether they felt there was a need for a reorientation at this point in time. Despite the focus on the reorientation, most participants responded to the introductory sentence by sharing their reflections, insights, and perspectives on the writing process, the development, and historical context of the National Music Standards.

## Findings and discussion

The comments offered by the seven task members included insights into the process and development of the National Music Standards, the form and content of the document, and reactions to the reorientation of the standards. The following subheadings denote categories that arose from the analysis of the interviews.

### Critical consciousness and disorder

There was the notion, by those who developed the music standards, that politically what needed to be included in the standards were those things that would be accepted and not induce controversy. Three task members specifically articulated this.<sup>6</sup>

John Mahlmann (the MENC Executive Director) worked very hard to convince people that we had very much to gain by adopting one set of standards and a lot to lose by working against each other and having controversy

among us. (Miller, January 8, 2002)

The reason notation was listed among them is that we probably would have been crucified if it wasn't ... We went back and forth and made the political decision that we had better include it just to be safe. (Jennings, December 1, 2001)

... we agreed to reinforce our view, not to talk about methodology and not to push any particular philosophy, or approach, or anything that was partisan or controversial. (Coleman, December 6, 2001)

It seems controversy and disorder were to be avoided. This fear and the untenable position of not being included in the standards movement, coupled with the perceived need to stay away from anything politically sensitive, by avoiding upheaval, rendered a cultural inability to engage in critical consciousness. Freire recognized this fear when he wrote 'Critical consciousness is anarchy—or may lead to disorder' (Freire, **1970/1993**, p. 17). Apple also recognized this when discussing the work of Lather (**1991**), 'Her words provide a stinging critique to those who fear that by challenging the status of our accepted notions of science and knowing, we lose the foundations for saying anything' (p. xi).

The result is not surprising, asserts Apple. 'The fact that conflict and disorder are extraordinarily important to prevent the reification of institutional patterns of interactions is, thus, once again ignored' (Apple, **1990**, p. 115). Conflict, while problematic in other disciplines, provided growth and change. However, worrying about how the public would perceive music educators and music education if factions had indeed arisen did not encourage or engender an environment in which questions were encouraged to address more systemic issues of reification of institutional patterns within the music education community

## The significance and consequence of the National Standards

Among the seven authors, there was also an overwhelming belief that the existence of these standards had provided more for the music education community than anything previous to this document. As Coleman (December 6, 2001) stated, 'it's hard to think of another event in music education that has had similar impact of that kind. It has permeated and has done nothing but good, because teachers are happy because we have this. It may not be perfect, but we have it. It says what we do and legitimizes us' (Perry, February 25, 2002). Critical theory provides a way of situating the standards in a broader political spectrum. It also provides a way of examining the taken for granted success of the standards.

Critical theory can also be used to probe the commonsense perception of the standards and that they have 'done nothing but good' (Perry, February 25, 2002). *Good* in this case pertains to ideas such as, acceptance, legitimacy, inclusion, clarifying and codifying practice—all interpreted as desirable endpoints. *Good* in this case becomes what Freire might consider propaganda, which he views as an 'arm of domination' (1970/1993, p. 50).

One of the goals of the music education community was one of acceptance and 'basic' status. However, a broader goal, reflected in the language of the other standards documents, suggests an educational philosophy steeped in transformation. Doll suggests that, if transformation is the goal, then a closer investigation of one's assumptions is imperative. 'To create transformative transactions—where we change as do the transactions—it is imperative we question the assumptions and prejudgments we hold so dear, particularly those supporting our own historical situations' (**1992**, p. 136). The members of the task force and leaders of the music education community believed that the consensus process and the document brought nothing but good, but Freire reminds us that one of the characteristics of the oppressed is the 'existential duality of the oppressed, who are at the same time themselves and the oppressor whose image they have internalized' (Freire, **1970/1993**, p. 43). In this case, it was difficult for the task force members to escape the bounds of the duality of internalizing the roll of the oppressor and yet desiring to act in support of the field. Being unable to recognize this duality

and denial of 'how our commonsense ways of looking at the world are permeated with meanings that sustain our disempowerment' (Lather, 1991, p. 59) did not allow for music educators to move to a level of critical consciousness so as to examine their status in the broader political context.

## The standards need to be measurable

The content standards had to be written in such a way that they would be measurable; in one form or another, each task force member echoed this sentiment. When measurability is linked only to student behavior, teachers are better able to control the learning environment simply by teaching to the desired endpoint. As a goal, however, teaching to the endpoint—intended, or not—creates powerful consequences.

To control students is to force them to accommodate to a preestablished curriculum. It is to tell them not only what they have to learn but how they have to learn it and what will happen to them if they don't—or what they will get if they do. (Kohn, 1993, p. 149)

When the endpoint is teaching to and fulfilling the standards in order to present a united front, secure funding and jobs, there is a definite reward structure embedded in the process. Examined in this light, not teaching to the standards seems almost deviant. Popham (2001) suggests that such behavior is not abnormal.

Let's not sneer too quickly at teachers who fail to teach what isn't tested. This is an altogether human response to a reward structure that focuses exclusively on a single criterion (whether that criterion is well founded or not). If people find themselves in a context where the rewards come from X, and there are no rewards for Y, which do you think will typically be promoted? Teachers are no more or less susceptible to such reward/punishment structures than anyone else. (p. 19)

Thus, in this case, not only are student behaviors controlled by the content standards, the behaviors of music educators are controlled as well. By teaching to the content standards, music educators appear to provide a united front in demonstrating that learning music is measurable, therefore worthwhile. Going against the standards, on the other hand, may provide less observable evidence that music is worthy of study and therefore—in the public's eye—unworthy of inclusion in the curriculum.

Writing the standards in terms of behavioral outcomes appears to have also been influenced by a National Assessment of Educational Progress that was to take place in 1997. The authors were aware of this and attempted to coordinate the standards to match what they perceived this assessment procedure to be: 'they had to be measurable, because part of this was then going to direct what was going to happen with the NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress)' (Fredrickson, January 27, 2001). 'There was an emphasis on measurable statements, sure. We knew that the third national assessment in music was coming up ... There was a conscious level that we were going into the assessment' (Baker, November 28, 2001). This kind of high stakes testing mentality, driven by an executive summary model, helped to define a document in which outcomes could be measured. Continuing that line of argument, to be included in the national standards movement—which meant to receive support, inclusion and most probably funding—the standards needed to be worded in such a way that demonstrated that outcomes in music education could be measured. The assumption of this kind of measurement led to the employment of standards oriented towards behavioral objectives. In order to do well on the test the teacher has to teach to the content standard. Consequently, a self-perpetuating cycle of non-growth, non-transformative behavior by teacher and student can be perpetuated.

Requiring teachers to compose ultra-specific objectives and implement step-by-step lesson plans is an effective way to 'manage' teaching toward a simplistic end point: a change in a learner's behavior. The goal is not

knowledge, nor growth, nor enjoyment, but the achievement of reductionistic objectives. (Elliott, 1995, p. 245)

Again, while the content standards were not meant to be the curriculum, the document does define what an education in music is. The aim in the other discipline documents is less focused on training and observable behaviors of the students—separate from the pedagogical process—and more focused on a vision of teaching and learning that addresses and assesses the broader questions of the 'why' and 'how,' and the 'how not' of teaching. The aim of music education is in fact implied in the national standards and fulfilled by the content standards, as well as the ensuing publications of the performance assessments, and the accompanying strategies for teaching. It is an aim that separates teaching from the process of learning. In the following quote Elliott is not speaking directly of the music standards but the implication fits.

The underlying assumption is that educational ends and means are separate and that knowing is different from doing. In this view, teaching is a matter of 'interpreting' a prepackaged script and then delivering the product [the standards] to consumers (students) as efficiently as possible. (Elliott, p. 245)

The underlying assumptions in the wording of the other discipline content standards suggest a teaching/learning process that is not separated from asking 'why and how to teach what is taught.' For instance, the first content standard in the language arts standards addresses reading, but embeds reading in a broader context.

Students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works. (National Council of Teachers of English, 1996, p. 3)

And while this standard could be distilled down to a paper and pencil test, the wording suggests a broader definition of what it means to know and do, and consequently a broader conception of pedagogy and assessment strategies.

The task force members did want to get away from assessing music as just product. However, conceptual approaches (Perry) and broader elements of music (Miller) were considered and not used, nor were attitudes and valuing (Davies, Baker). These outcomes were not 'observable, much less measurable, nor could they be tangibly defined; a challenge that has, of course, been the bane of aesthetics educators for decades' (Davies).

It is difficult to measure those kinds of outcomes yet the bottom line seems to be that outcomes had to be observable, and testable in order for the content standards to count as knowledge, or as 'knowing and being able to do.' Measurability exists symbiotically and feeds the specificity of music education. Most of the members dealt with the word *measurable* with regard to whether or not the content standards could be tested. Yet, Jennings (December 1, 2001) pointed out that *teachable* was still the governing goal.

You are using the word measurable to mean testable. Testable in the objective sense rather than the reflective sense. I am trying to remember whether that was an issue. They had to some degree be doable. They had to be teachable, rather than, for example, 'everyone will love music.'

*Teachable, doable* and *testable* appear intertwined in this case. And what remains most important is whether the content standard had been taught.



Interestingly, there is a consistent flow between this ends/means aim of music education, the unintended curriculum, and pedagogical stance that is embedded in the national standards. This aim of music education—one of transmission—does not reflect the educative endeavor in the other discipline standards. Bowman writes of the endeavor of music education and how this shapes not only relationships with the teaching/learning process, but curriculum development.

What kind of endeavor we understand music education to be—and more specifically, of what kind of interactions it should consist—has profound importance for the way music educators teach. It is also crucial to how we structure curriculum, to the kinds of experiences in which we expect students to engage, to the ways we evaluate student progress, and to how we orient and conduct our professional research. (Bowman, 2002, p. 63)

In the current national music standards, the drive for measurability seems to have the unintended outcome of becoming the aim, endeavor, method, and content of music education. It is not a transformative endeavor, but rather one that limits music education and music educators.

### **Specificity, methodology, pedagogy and politics**

During the interviews, Jennings addressed the 'need for specificity being great' in music education and that 'we require a tremendous amount of specificity. It just is the way we are, especially when we focus on the specific aspects of our arts, such as playing and singing'. Using Aristotle's terms, Bowman refers to the specifics of music education as *techne*. 'Techne ... is more akin to what we sometimes call 'method,' a kind of knowledge that, though practical, can be detached from the person whose knowledge it is and transferred or taught to others' (2002, p. 69). Method can also be traced to a positivistic modernist paradigm in which management techniques and methods were the way to obtain objective knowledge about reality (Regelski, 1998, p. 3). Definitions of method include words such as systematic procedures, systematic plans and orderly definitions. Methods can also 'become taken-for-granted recipes and prescriptions used without regard for results' (Regelski, 1998, p. 2).

The task force members wanted to stay neutral when they chose to stay away from prescribing specific methods. However, a focus on observable behaviors dictates a method derived from the positivistic model. Apple points out the consequences of this:

The focus on method has not been without its consequences. At the same time that process/product rationality grew, the fact that education is through and through a political enterprise withered. The questions we asked tended to divorce ourselves from the way the economic and cultural apparatus of a society operated. A 'neutral' method meant our own neutrality, or so it seemed. The fact that the methods we employed had their roots in industry's attempt to control labor and increase productivity, in the popular eugenics movement, and in particular class and status group interests, was made invisible by the stunning lack of historical insight in the field. At the same time, we seemed to assume that the development of this supposedly neutral method would eliminate the need to deal with the issue of whose knowledge should be or already was preserved and transmitted in schools. (Apple, 1995, p. 11)

Pedagogy, on the other hand, is more elusive in its definition. Lather, in *Getting Smart: Feminist Research and Pedagogy within the Postmodern*, describes why she chose the word pedagogy instead of teaching for her book title. She cites Lusted's definition of the word *pedagogy* as '... the transformation of consciousness that takes place in the intersection of three agencies—the teacher, the learner and the knowledge they together produce' (1991, p. 15). This definition resonates with the way the word has been used throughout this study. Pedagogy is implicit, if not explicit, in the other standards documents. While acknowledging

that fulfilling their standards is a two-way street between teacher and learner, these documents, from other fields, describe the educative process in various ways. 'In the vision of science education portrayed by the Standards, effective teachers of science create an environment in which they and students work together as active learners' (National Research Council, **1996**, p. 28). The documents provide for problem-solving strategies. 'Solving problems is not only a goal of learning mathematics but also a major means of doing so' (National Council for Teachers of Mathematics, **2000**, p. 52). They indicate the importance of communicating ideas and justifying thinking. Many include a definition of process and pedagogy as formulating questions to focus inquiry or analysis: 'Rather than simply checking whether students have memorized certain items of information new assessments probe for students understanding, reasoning, and use of that knowledge—the skills that are developed through inquiry' (National Research Council, **1996**, p. 6).

## Music methods

When music educators speak of methods of teaching music, they are often speaking of sequential and prescribed programs and in most of this study's interviews, the terms *methodology*, *means* and *approach* were used to specify methods.

... we very deliberately avoided saying much about the means. The reason of course is that as soon as you get into the means, then you have got arguments between Orff people and Kodály people and all the different methodologies. (Coleman, December 6, 2001)

Unfortunately, Orff and Kodály have both become—in many cases—methods of teaching music. Regelski refers to a strict adherence to methods as “methodolatry”—an almost religious or cult-like attachment to particular “techniques”, “methods” or “materials” of teaching' (Regelski, **1998**, p. 2). He describes how these uniform methodological practices meet 'the standard criteria of a social institution:

- taken for granted paradigms that generate equally taken-for-granted practices and values;
- legitimation procedures that advocate the institution's existence when actual results fall short of claimed values;
- proselytizing machinery for attracting, then initiating new conscripts; a historicity of approved practices that are passed on as 'good' and accepted unthinkingly by conscripts as received wisdom; and
- experts who function as 'managers' of the institutional knowledge base, guardians and defenders of the status quo, and gatekeepers for controlling admission. (p. 5)

Connections can be drawn between the music standards and Regelski's examination of the standard criteria of social institutions, and the use of critical theory that provides the framework for this study. These standards, which were met with little or no substantive challenge, and were essentially taken for granted, provided 'legitimation procedures that advocate the institution's existence'. The content and achievement standards, and the subsequent supporting documents published by Music Educators National Conference, combined with a singular focus on a united front of teaching to the standards has become 'proselytizing machinery for attracting, then initiating new conscripts'. This focus also supports a 'historicity of approved practices that are passed on as “good” and accepted unthinkingly by conscripts as received wisdom'. And finally, the leaders of the standards movement and all advocates of the standards become in essence 'experts who function as “managers” of the institutional knowledge base, guardians and defenders of the status quo, and gatekeepers for controlling admission' (Regelski, **1998**, p. 5).

## Conclusion

In this study, the current philosophical climate refers to the theoretical as it plays out in the documents, rather than how education is operationalized at the state, district, or even classroom level. Within these documents, it is interesting to note that, where once the philosophical realm of essentialism defined the study of the arts as a frill, it is in essence an essentialist philosophy (represented by a command of essential facts and skills; Tanner & Tanner, 1980, p. 104) that has been co-opted into the National Music Standards document. Whereas, within the other documents, there is a move toward a more progressive vision of education, one in which perennial truths, a set group of skills, or set content, no longer govern the basic discipline standards documents. The hegemony of the high-status disciplines essentially interpreted, adapted, and assimilated the essentialist vision of the 'cultivation of intellect' (p. 104) to now mean cultivating problem-solving skills and application of knowledge.

However, because of a time lag between when this study was conceived and its completion, it is interesting to note that the educational pendulum has swung back toward a basics movement. This movement is best reflected in the call for higher standards most profoundly represented in a 2002 law signed into effect by President Bush entitled, *No Child Left Behind*. In this current light, the music standards could be interpreted as prescient. However, this does not adequately address the discrepancies found between the music standards and the other discipline standards documents.

The greatest weakness in this study lay in the juxtaposition of critical theory as a framework for analysis yet not as a framework for the interviews. Freire's premise for transformation lies in the notion that without critical awareness the oppressed cannot hope to transform the situation in which they exist. Freire articulates the process of what must happen in order for a pedagogy of the oppressed to emerge.

... a pedagogy which must be forged *with*, not *for*, the oppressed (whether individuals or peoples) in the incessant struggle to regain their humanity. This pedagogy makes oppression and its causes objects of reflection by the oppressed, and from that reflection will come their necessary engagement in the struggle for the liberation. And in the struggle this pedagogy will be made an remade. (1970/1993, p. 30)

Lather also writes extensively of the interview process and the need for interviews to be based on the process of reciprocity, which 'implies give and take, a mutual negotiation of meaning and power' (1991, p. 57). She echoes Freire's belief that without this sense of give and take interviewees become subservient to the change process, which contradicts the major premise of this study. Lather writes, 'Respondents become objects—targets of research—rather than active subjects empowered to understand and change their situations' (p. 59)

Unfortunately, this give and take was not present in the interviews. While in two interview sessions, the researcher was able to engage the task force members in discussions as to what the critical framework of this study was suggesting, it was not an articulated part of the interview protocol, and hence, not systematically asked of all interviewees.

Had this happened, the interview would then have become a dialogue focused on the reciprocity. As it stands, this study is simply the basis and a beginning for another exchange, one in which all might '... become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow' (Freire, 1970/1993, p. 61). Without this exchange, the study becomes another piece of propaganda, rather than a way in which to involve each of us in a dialogue that examines the standards document as an extension of our status, thus underscoring Freire's point, 'Attempting to liberate the oppressed without their reflective participation in the act of liberation is to treat them as objects' (p. 47).

## Notes on contributor

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## Notes

1. The genesis of the national standards movement is best traced back to *A Nation at Risk* (1983) and *Goals 2000: Educate America Act* (1994). *A Nation at Risk* was in part a backlash from the curriculum of the 1960s and 1970s, as well as reaction to the oft-cited concern that 'the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people' (1983, p. 1). *Goals 2000: Educate America Act* grew out of a bipartisan approach for education reform. Initially begun with the first Bush administration, it was eventually enacted in 1994 during the term of President Clinton, among other things calling for 'A new standard for an educated citizenry is required, one suitable for the next century. Our people must be as knowledgeable, as well-trained, as competent, and as inventive as those in any other nation' (as cited in National Council for History Standards, 1996, p. v).
2. The music standards were one of four art forms—dance, visual art, music, and theatre—to be published in a larger document, National Standards for Arts Education. While the format of the presentation of the standards is similar, each art form stands alone (Consortium of National Arts Education Associations, 1994).
3. What would be termed a 'Core' subject in the UK (Editor).
4. Further articulation of the National Music Standards can be found at:  
<http://www.menc.org/publication/books/standards.htm>
5. The constraints of this paper do not allow for inclusion of the reorientation. A copy of this can be examined by emailing, [ck9@nyu.edu](mailto:ck9@nyu.edu).
6. To preserve anonymity, the task force members of the National Music Standards quoted here are identified by pseudonyms.

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