Action, Criticism & Theory for Music Education

The refereed journal of the

Volume 10, No. 2
November 2011

David Elliott
Editor

Electronic Article

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Vincent C. Bates

ISSN 1545-4517

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Vincent C. Bates
Northwest Missouri State University

"How would you like to be called 'poor white trash'?" The orchestra teacher fired the question at my little brother, who, thinking he was being politically correct, had just used the word "negro." The rest of us (mostly siblings or cousins) in our small, rural high school orchestra (a few violins, cello, clarinet, two trumpets, two trombones, saxophone, horn, and sometimes a Sousaphone) tried to hide our amusement at our teacher's surprising outburst. She was obviously mistaken. True, we were white and poor (and proud of it). But, in our view, we weren't trash.

Introduction

"Poor white trash" is likely the most enduring and degrading in a long line of *stigmatypes*—"stigmatizing boundary terms that simultaneously denote and enact cultural and cognitive divides between in-groups and out-groups" (Wray 2006)—such as "redneck," "cracker," and "hillbilly." Some people apply these terms in reference to poor or working-class, usually rural (but not always), white Americans, conceived as strange, backwards, criminal, dangerous, lazy, inbred, diseased, dirty, malnourished, vulgar, promiscuous, ignorant, overly sentimental, and feeble-minded. There is also a tendency among upper and middle-class whites to view poor, rural whites as a genetic and cultural threat (Hartigan 2005). As Van Dempsey (2007) suggests, "Middle-class whites are actually the victims in the mythology of white trash; white trash has divided the race, and the other classes are just trying to survive the threats" (305). Matt Wray

Bates, Vincent C. 2011. Sustainable school music for poor, white, rural students. *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 10(2): 100–127. Online: http://act.maydaygroup.org/articles/Bates10_2.pdf

(2006) discusses the pairing of whiteness and trash in *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness*: "In conjoining such primal opposites into a single category, white trash names a kind of disturbing liminality: a monstrous, transgressive identity of mutually violating boundary terms, a dangerous threshold state of being neither one nor the other" (2).

Many poor, white, rural students in the United States are subjected to the "poor white trash" stigma. Twenty percent—more than 10 million public school children—attend rural schools. Of these, 40 percent live in poverty and 80 percent are non-Hispanic whites (Provosnik et al. 2007). But the stigma also affects rural, working class students, or rural whites whose household income is above the poverty line. As opposed to conceiving "poor-white-rural" people as a distinct group, it is more helpful, and accurate, to view "poor-white-rural" as a complex intersection of dimensions (Noblit 2007) between class, race, and/or geographical locations. In other words, the stigma that confounds white privilege with poverty and rurality extends well beyond a single demographic.

In this paper I explore, through the introspective lens of my own social-cultural-musical experiences in and out of rural schools, the potential oppression of poor, white, rural school music students in the United States. In the first section, I provide an overview of my family's home and school musical experiences, drawing attention to the clear distinction between the practices, aims, and musical outcomes of these two contexts. In the second section, I interrogate the "common sense" belief that traditional school music practices in the United States are "good for" children in the sense of fostering social mobility. My personal reflections and experiences as a teen-ager serve as an illustration in this regard. In the third and final section, I explore some ideas for how school music could be transformed in ways that might be more applicable, useful,

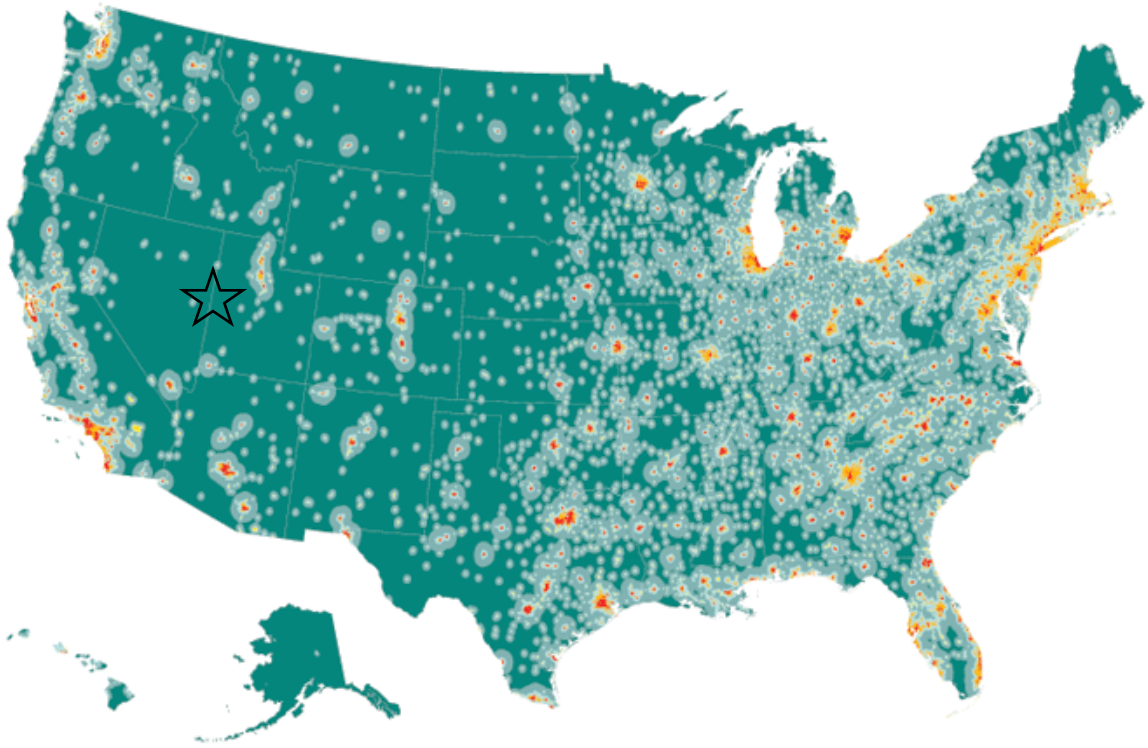
and fair to poor, white, rural students. Of course, poverty, whiteness, and rurality are diverse; I try not to view my own experiences as characteristic of all poor, rural whites—just an indication of what was true for me, and what might be similar for others.

Why use the term "poor"? This usage may be problematic for some readers, because "poor" often connotes deficiency. However, as mentioned in the opening vignette, we called ourselves "poor," and we were proud of it—we "owned" the term, so to speak. I think we understood that "poor" was limited in its scope to financial resources. At the same time, we also understood and valued our social, cultural, geographical, and environmental wealth (i.e., we lived in a large, caring family, and in a beautiful community with enduring traditions). The term, "poor," was a badge of honor and solidarity—we had to learn to work hard and stick together to "make ends meet," and we didn't generally seek help from others. So, I feel that to jettison the word would be to give up something important.

Our Family

This is a picture of me (bottom left) and my brothers and sisters—the first seven of us kids out of nine—in front of our home in Utah's West Desert, a scattered collection of farms in a desert valley below some of the highest mountains in the United States. Our ancestors settled in this area, and we considered it (and, in many ways, we still do) an ideal place to live. Our family was "poor" only in the sense that our annual income was well below the United States poverty level. In the picture, we are standing in front of our four-room house (kitchen, living room, and two bedrooms). An outhouse (a three-seater!) stood behind the house and served as our only formal toilet facility. A stream of pure, warm water ran by the house, and when it wasn't too cold out, we went swimming nearly every day. We got electricity when I was five years old, and

eventually, indoor plumbing. In the following image (Provasnik et al. 2007), deeper shades of green represent greater levels of rurality, and deeper shades of orange represent metropolitan areas in the United States. The star on the map marks the place where I grew up—along the border between Utah and Nevada, 100 miles from the nearest town and 30 miles from the nearest paved road.



We were a musically rich family. Dad played accordion; he and Grandpa had taken accordion lessons together in town when Dad was a teen-ager. Mom played guitar and piano; she grew up much closer to a town, had taken piano lessons as a child, and was also a licensed piano technician. At some point, she learned guitar on her own, and played guitar and sang much more than I remember her ever playing the piano. Naturally, all of us kids learned to play the same

instruments as our parents—not through formal lessons, but by imitation, tablature, "standard" notation (for piano), trial-and-error, and an occasional demonstration. For most of my childhood we had no TV, although on Saturday nights we would go to Grandma and Grandpa's (they had an electric generator before the power lines came through the valley) and watch *Lawrence Welk* and *Hee-Haw*. We listened almost exclusively to Country music, we sang hymns at church, and we played piano from the John Thompson piano series and other books of "standard" classical pieces. Mom would listen from the other room and occasionally shout instructions ("F sharp!"), or take a break from her daily work to give a quick demonstration.

School music in our two-room, K-8 schoolhouse included singing and learning to play the ukulele. The older grades played guitar and accordion. We had no music specialists; we were taught music by our regular classroom teachers. We prepared a variety of musical programs, which we sometimes performed in conjunction with a community *Hoot-N-Nanny*—a somewhat informal musical variety show. These evenings were attended by most of the community, not just the school children and their parents.

Because our school only went through eighth grade, when my oldest sister was ready for ninth grade we moved to a town in Nevada where Dad worked as the "produce man" in a grocery store and later as a farm hand. Although the schools in our new area were also considered rural, they were quite large in comparison to where we came from. In town, school music was then (in the 1970's) as it still remains in most of the United States—general music taught by a music specialist in elementary school, an option for band or choir sometime in late elementary or middle school, and (for the most part) an exclusive focus on large, "classical music" performance

ensembles in junior high and high school. All of my brothers and sisters and I participated in school band. Mom and Dad leased instruments for us—a significant expense for our family.

Six years later, we moved back to the West Desert, after a small high school was built there. The new high school included an attempt to mirror the standard ensemble programs of larger schools, leading to the formation of the aforementioned high school orchestra. In the preceding picture, from left to right, are my older brother on trombone, my cousin, myself, my older sister, and younger brother. We are playing an overture for a high school production of *Annie Get Your Gun* in which we also played leading roles (one of our teachers played the piano through the rest of the performance).

Overall, and in my view, these school music experiences were positive ones—playing in band and performing for the community. Still, I question whether they were as fulfilling in the long-term as they could have been, or as our outside-of-school experiences have been. To illustrate what I mean, the following table shows the disparity between musicing at home and musicing at school—particularly participation in band. For instance, I am the only one in my

family who still plays the band instrument I learned in school. Then, as now, piano and guitar are the instruments I play outside of school; horn playing is limited to a school context.

	Home	School	Currently
Sister #1	Guitar, Singing	Tenor Saxophone	Guitar, Mandolin, Violin, Harmonica, Singing
Sister #2	Piano, Guitar, Singing	Tenor Saxophone Choir	Piano, Guitar, Singing
Sister #3	Piano, Guitar, Singing	Trumpet (high school and college)	Music Teacher (2 years), Piano, Guitar, Singing,
Brother #1	Guitar	Trombone	Guitar
Myself	Piano, Accordion, Singing	Percussion, Horn (high school and college)	Career Music Teacher, Piano, Guitar, Horn, Singing, Accordion, etc.
Brother #2	Guitar, Singing	Trombone	Guitar, Song-writing, Singing
Brother #3	Guitar, Singing	Trumpet	Guitar, Singing
Brother #4	Piano, Guitar, Singing	Trombone	Piano, Guitar, Djembe, Ukulele, Singing
Brother #5	Piano, Guitar, Singing	Horn	Piano, Guitar, Singing

Of course, I'm not saying anything groundbreaking by pointing out the gulf between school music and outside-of-school musicing. Readers of *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* will be familiar with related insights:

> 'School music' thus makes a pragmatic musical difference for only a select (or self-selected) few—those with the 'talent' or interest needed to submit to such instruction—and, of these, usually only for the school years. For most students, then, 'school music' is directly at odds with 'real praxis' (of many kinds: e.g., pop, church, ethnic, dance music, etc.) that is usually an important feature of their out-of-school lives. The opportunity students have, then, of comparing the irrelevance of their 'school music' with their very active musical lives out of school promotes negative comparisons with 'real life' not usually faced by other subjects (except perhaps sex and health education). (Regeslki 2009, 72)

The table illustrates some of Regelski's points quite well—there are distinct differences in the practices and the aims of school and home musicing. High school music experiences were (and remain) centered on *rehearsals* led by a director in a specially designated rehearsal space, focused on efficient use of time in order to reach prescribed goals, and culminating in a public performance attended dutifully by family and friends. Following Thomas Turino (2008), school musicing was (and remains) mostly *presentational*—engaged in by one group of people in order to perform for another group of people—while home musicing tends to be more *participatory*. At home, much of our family musicing took place individually, whenever the desire to make music arose, and it usually involved playing through an entire song or series of songs. Home musicing wasn't especially efficient or achievement-focused. We played and sang for enjoyment—improving as a result of playing rather than playing just in order to improve. We did play together in preparation for a few performances at family reunions. However, "rehearsals" were at whatever time was convenient and they were also relatively brief.

Even though there were attempts to integrate school instruments within the family band, most of our home musicing involved outside-of-school instruments and songs. In other words, instruments, musical styles, "standard" notation, and formal performance traditions emphasized in school didn't transfer to family and home contexts. In the end, outside-of-school musics, musicings, and musical contexts seem to have had much more relevance then more formalized, school-based practices, not just for me and my siblings but, it could be (and has been) argued, for school music students generally. Yet, outside-of-school musicing still tends to be viewed with suspicion by the school music establishment as something "less than," necessitating arguments such as Turino's (2008) that "situations of participatory music making are not just informal or

amateur, that is, *lesser* versions of the 'real music' made by the pros but . . . , in fact, they are something else—a different form of art and activity entirely—and . . . they should be conceptualized and valued as such" (25). In the following section, I will explore the apparent hierarchy of musical engagements—school over outside-of-school, formal over informal, presentational over participatory, highbrow over lowbrow—as it is perpetuated in school music and, from my perspective, mistakenly linked to the promise of social mobility for poor and rural students.

Social Mobility?

In a relatively recent headline from MENC (Olson 2008), a Harris Poll is purported to have found a positive correspondence between formal music education and subsequent wealth and participation in higher education. "'These results are fantastic,' says Regina Corso, director of the Harris Poll/Harris Interactive. 'If we were trying to make them up we wouldn't have made them this good because no one would believe us.' " MENC Executive Director, Dr. John Mahlmann, shared his views about the study in the following transcript from an MENC (2007) promotional video:

> Well, it's important to include music with the other academic subjects, because it is equally important and studies like this confirm the value of music along with math and science and reading and all the other academic areas. No child wants to be left behind and they certainly don't want to be left behind by an important ingredient in their education like music. . . Well, in the survey many of the individuals especially those who had advanced education and who had substantial income, over a hundred and fifty thousand dollars all indicated that music was an important part of their careers and the skills they learned—problem solving, creative involvement, working with others—were all important ingredients to their job, to their success, and to their lives. . . .

What strikes me most about these sound bites is the celebratory tone, possibly stemming from excitement over a statistic that could be a useful advocacy tool. However, it could also be

that this particular statistic reinforces prior beliefs in a kind of cultural meritocracy—that the wealthy have attained their status due, in part, to "elevated cultural values" while a "culture of poverty" keeps the poor from financial success. Of course, the most glaring flaw in the poll, itself, is that "correlation does not imply causation"; it is just as likely that wealthy people come from wealthy families that are able to afford formal music instruction or attend schools with enhanced arts electives. Still, the belief persists that formal music education will somehow help children "rise above" their current position.

A similar discourse of salvation has been applied to rural children. Over a half-century ago, Charles Seeger (1957) pointed out that school music was instituted in the United States as a means for overcoming the "rude nonconformity of rural, backwoods and pioneer America" (285). Of course, it was the "great" music of metropolitan and upper classes that would save rural folk. Seeger continues:

> It is significant that the make-America-musical movement [was] composed . . . of members of the well-to-do classes, or candidates for these, and highly authoritarian in its operation . . . To this almost religious brotherhood, music was of only one kind: "good" music, which was to say, monuments of the European fine art or well-meant imitations of them. In this sense, music (meaning "good" music) was not a class good for a few, but a universal good for all mankind. (287).

The following excerpt from a 1937 text, *Music in Rural Education,* serves as period illustration of this cultural deficit view of rurality:

> Everyone believes that music contributes to finer living. And everyone agrees that children of rural communities deserve all the advantages which today are offered to children in city schools. . . . [M]usic can bring to the boys and girls of . . . [the one-room] school something beautiful and fine which nothing else can offer in quite the same way and in the same measure. . . ." (McConathy et. al., 5-7)

Efforts to provide formal music education (school music) to rural children wasn't necessarily intended to provide music where there was none, but to replace informal music

teaching and learning with formal training, a variety of tablature and solfege systems (e.g. shape notes) with "standard" notation, and folk and popular *musics* with Western Art *Music* (and, relatively more recently, jazz and "multicultural" music). Difference, in other words, was effectively conflated with deficiency and was used to identify and insulate a privileged class. In a discussion of cosmopolitanism, Thomas Popkewitz (2008) argues, that this concept "entails comparative installations that differentiate and divide those who are enlightened and civilized from those who do not have those qualities—the backward, the savage, and the barbarian . . ." (4). Put simply, the perceived deficiencies of poor and rural children weren't necessarily "a want" for music or culture; they already had both. The deficit was and still is believed to lie in Music and Culture—"great" music and "high" culture according to elite, cosmopolitan sensibilities and tastes. As Regelski (2006) argues:

> Music teaching . . . has exhibited little fundamental change. Its history in Westernized countries is associated with the efforts of cultural patrons, namely the socially elite patrons of the fine arts, to bring High Culture to the masses. In the late 19th century, virtually all educational institutions—museums of various kinds, theater associations, musical societies, and the like—were established on such egalitarian premises, only to eventually weed out the troublesome riffraff by making such hallowed halls expensive and thus prohibitive to all but the rich. As a consequence, with the rise of the idea(l) of universal and general education, the fine arts and literature, and the Culture assumed to go with them, were relegated to schools where they would be available to all, regardless of socioeconomic class, and where audiences could be properly 'trained' and developed. While the economic dimension of this hierarchy functions differently in countries that highly subsidize the arts, it is still typical that, for example, most people cannot afford to attend the opera—assuming they want to! Furthermore, *a socio-artistic gulf arises between urban centers where arts are at least readily available, and rural regions where they are often completely unavailable.* Thus, in many places, the school has become in effect the cultural/Cultural center of a community (even in some cities) and the 'front lines' of attempts to spread Culture to the masses. (4; italics added)

That Music and Culture are still "center stage" in American music education is readily apparent when we examine the NAfME (formerly MENC) website, with its enduring emphasis on large bands, orchestras, and choirs. Ample evidence of cultural elitism also exists in

American K-12 and university music curricula—nearly all of which focus (sometimes exclusively) on Western art music. One might argue that relatively recent trends towards multiculturalism and the inclusion of some genres of popular music constitute trends towards inclusivity and away from cultural elitism. However, this may not be an egalitarian development after all. Elite musical preferences have actually shifted (Gibbons 2004) to become much more *omnivorous*: much more open to a wide variety of musics, with emphases on the exotic, albeit with the notable exceptions of Country, heavy metal, and rap. Country music is popular amongst poor, white, rural populations; the marked derision and exclusion of Country music in the curriculum, along with the prominence of multicultural music and accompanying calls for musical diversity, could be viewed as a continuation of efforts to save the (supposed) economically, culturally, and geographically deprived.

In addition to cultural adjustments, "social mobility" for rural children usually means moving from the country to the city. "Since the United States is synonymous with 'progress,' and progress is culturally defined as ever more urban growth and development, rural youth see themselves as nonparticipants in the American experience, at least until they leave their homes and move to the city" (Theobald and Wood 2010). Students who are poor and rural, then, must not only suppress and replace cultural identities, but also are usually required to leave cherished people and places. When I was a teenager, I tended to believe all of this—that the accumulation of "high" culture (cosmopolitan culture) through formal music education, along with the necessary move to the city to attend college and build a career, would facilitate my own social mobility. Here are some excerpts from my journal between the ages of 15 and 17.

> August 17, 1983 . . . We really don't realize, living out here in the sticks, how much we are really missing in the way of fun and fashion. I guess that we have fun and fashion

> isn't everything. I still wish that I was middle class, living in the city instead of a poor country boy who has a 10 hour a day job that I don't even get paid for, just food anyway . . . Though when I sit back and look at myself and my life, I am quite rich in the things that last. I still want to be rich and famous someday. I'm going to be a famous musician. I hear you can do anything if you put your mind to it and really want it bad enough.
>
> December 19, 1984 . . . I'm getting better on the piano, I think. I wish I had a teacher. . . . I like Chopin. . . . I like Beethovan [sic], Bach, Mozart, and Brahms, too. I really don't have a favorite. I like music. . . We have so much beautiful music. . . . I believe that some of the great classical composers were inspired. My only hope [is] that someday I will write or be able to play well-inspired [music].
>
> February 10, 1985 . . . I should [be] learning more in music. . . . Mom & Dad have never been able to afford a teacher for me. I have pretty much had to teach myself. I would be doing much better if I'd have had a teacher. I will have to make up for lost learning when I get to college. Music is what I want to do and I will no matter how hard it is. . . . I love my music. I just hope that is enough to keep me going through all that I have to do.

Jumping ahead 25 years, I now live a middle-class life as a university professor at a small, rural university. I am married with four children, and we have a reasonable mortgage and own one car—a mini-van. However, can my apparent social mobility be attributed to a formal education in "great" music? This is exactly what I believed would happen. I professed a great love for music, *classical* music, within the context of a desire to become "middle class." However, when I originally wrote in my journal, I conspicuously avoided mentioning my complete collection of Statler Brothers recordings, a Jim Reeves tape nearly worn out from repeated listening, or my desire to play piano like Floyd Cramer (all three of whom are Country Music Hall of Fame inductees, by the way). I viewed classical music specifically, along with "high culture" in general (I even underwent a self-imposed "great" books reading program), and a move to the city, as my ticket out of the difficulty and stress typically experienced by the rural, hard-working poor.

On the one hand, I could argue that my current socio-economic status is, indeed, attributable to formal music education and an acquired appreciation for, understanding of, and degree of skill in classical music. After all, I did choose the career path of a music teacher, and I am now a professor of French horn and music education. On the other hand, if I had chosen to teach history, for example, my career path from public school teacher to teacher educator could have been similar. And my musical preferences haven't *really* shifted that much; even though I have developed an appreciation for classical and jazz music, a quick look at my most listened to Pandora stations show that my current musical preferences are still focused on my musical roots. Also, it would make the most sense to tie any degree of creativity, diligence, problem solving, or abilities in working collaboratively with others—qualities that are supposed to come from school music—to growing up in a large family and on a farm. Finally, any social mobility I have experienced is somewhat minimized by the ongoing feeling of "being out-of-place," a degree of shame felt for not doing "real work," and a persistent longing for a return to rural places and a simpler existence. (This brings to mind Beth Hatt's 2007 article, *Growing Up as Poor, White Trash*, where she writes, "I still struggle with meshing my working-class values of humility, family, and home with my lifestyle as a professor," 27)

If social mobility via school music is questionable at best, might there be more than "meets the eye" behind the desire to link music education and social mobility? Weber's concept of *status culture*, of which Paul DiMaggio (1982) gave the following concise description, might help answer the question:

> Weber noted that elite status groups—collectivities bound together by personal ties and a common sense of honor based upon and reinforced by shared conventions—generate or appropriate as their own specific distinctive cultural traits, tastes, and styles. This shared status culture aids group efforts to monopolize for the group as a whole scarce social, economic, and

> cultural resources by providing coherence to existing social networks and facilitating the development of comembership, respect, and affection out of which new networks are constructed. (189)

I suggest that formal music education (school music) has more to do with the preservation and perpetuation of social inequalities than the fostering of social mobility. Such an argument has already been made regarding schooling in general. In a recent collection of essays on social class and education, Jane Van Galen (2007) points out that "social mobility through schooling is very much the exception rather than the norm . . ." (7). In addition, Stanley Aronowitz (2004) suggests that the degree of social mobility is insignificant for the roughly one quarter of public school students who do eventually find white collar jobs. These students generally find themselves in lower level jobs and seldom in management. While some of us do, indeed, "filter up through the cracks" (Van Galen 2007), even that degree of social mobility is limited. For instance, my brothers and sisters currently work in the following occupations: quality control, accounting, teaching, auto-body repair, physical therapy, hair-styling, and home-making. Even though we are all better off *financially* than we were as children, these are hardly high-paying or management positions.

Through the promotion of Musical Culture via the continuing focus on Western Art Music, or even upon more omnivorous, diverse, "multicultural" tastes, music educators reinforce an arbitrary cultural distinction that attempts to justify social inequality and meritocracy. In the process, real problems facing poor and rural people (e.g. population decline, unemployment, environmental degradation, urbanization, food "deserts") are conveniently elided by attributing poverty to cultural deficiency (a lack of Culture or a "culture of poverty"—"poor white trash"). Also, rather than teaching problem solving, cooperation, and creativity, the typical school music

programs with which I am familiar, are usually touted for their propensity to develop *self-discipline*—the capacity to do unpleasant things for extended periods (like playing scales, or sitting quietly through long rehearsals, or washing dishes, or digging ditches). Additionally, standard school music practices, such as strict boss-management, recruiting and retention ("weeding out") strategies, "feeder" systems, "standards of excellence," a culture of competition, extrinsic motivation schemes, unquestioning obedience, and a focus on product uniformity seem to have more to do with the ongoing exploitation of the working classes than with the promotion of social mobility.

In these sorts of development-for-the-sake-of-development—the amassing and controlling of human resources without regard for any real, current, or long-term needs of people—students who are poor, white, and rural *are* "left behind." As I discussed in another article (Bates 2011), the conflation of cultural *difference* with cultural *deficiency* is generally accompanied in music education by social exigencies drawing unfair comparisons favoring metropolitan and affluent students over those who are poor or rural (e.g., comparative music "festivals"). In the words of Kincheloe and Steinberg, "dominant power works to 'prove' the incompetence of the poor" (2007, 15).

Some Suggestions

David Gruenewald (2003) writes that, "The irony of schooling everywhere is that it provides a questionable education for everyone; everywhere schooling functions as an engine of questionable progress" (1). Still, it doesn't necessarily have to be that way. I have faith that school music could be transformed to better meet the needs of poor, white, rural students—

offering transformative experiences based on more thorough considerations of the long-term outcomes of school music for *all* students. Yes, "music for all" has long been the mantra of the American music education profession. However, it is usually understood as *Music* (with a capital "M") for all, and only in the sense of transforming the "all" relative to elite, cosmopolitan sensibilities. In addition, little attention is given to the *long-term* impact of school music. Rather, a circularity of reasoning is employed wherein the comparative achievements of musical ensembles in individual schools, or at state and regional "honor" events, is put forth as evidence of effective school music programs, regardless of whether or not school music has actually done much good for the students in the long-term. This one-size-fits-all sort of development-for-the-sake-of-development marginalizes students, especially those whose cultural values lie outside of cosmopolitan, upper and middle class norms. I suggest an alternate grounding for practice in rural places, found in what Manfred Max-Neef (1992) has called *Human Scale Development*.

> Human needs, self-reliance and organic articulations are the pillars which support Human Scale Development. However, these pillars must be sustained on a solid foundation which is the creation of those conditions where people are the protagonists of their future. If people are to be the main actors in Human Scale Development both the diversity as well as the autonomy of the spaces in which they act must be respected. Attaining the transformation of an object-person into a subject-person in the process of development is, among other things, a problem of scale. There is no possibility for the active participation of people in gigantic systems which are hierarchically organized and where decisions flow from the top down to the bottom. (197-198)

In this conceptualization, human needs (see Bates 2009 for a discussion of human needs and music education), rather than economics, provide a framework for understanding social and cultural differences. Conceptualizing poverty, for example, in terms of needs fulfillment, rather than income, can help avoid the propensity to conflate economics with culture. The poor and rural can and do live musically rich lives! School music programs could be cut significantly and the poor and rural would continue to live musically rich lives. *Human Scale Music Education*

would recognize that already valued musics and musicings are most likely the best for continued fulfillment of human needs. In other words, it is essential to consider what poor, white, rural populations may already find meaningful musically and explore ways to facilitate the continuation and proliferation of these musical practices.

Additionally, Gruenewald (2003) proposes a *critical pedagogy of place* for rural students (especially considering that Paulo Friere's critical pedagogy was originally focused on the needs of *rural* Brazilian populations). Place-based education, with its emphasis on local solutions and environmental awareness is combined with a critical pedagogy that encourages and enables students to interrogate the contexts, along with multiple forms of oppression, in which they live. "Through reading the world (or the places in the world that one knows) as 'political texts,' teachers and students engage in reflection and action—or praxis—in order to understand, and, where necessary, to change the world" (5). Critical music pedagogies of rural places would involve students actively in local musical practices and traditions, deepen understandings of students' own musical backgrounds and cultures, and enable students to explore local concerns through a musical lens. Critical music pedagogies of place will likely also help students deepen their love and appreciation for rural places, people, and ideals. In the remainder of this paper, I will suggest some approaches that could be taken in rural schools among poor, white populations.

Although it is by no means the music of all poor, white, rural students, Country music figures prominently at the intersection of poverty, whiteness, and rurality in the United States. "Country music is our heritage," says legendary Country guitarist, Chet Atkins, "They oughta teach it in the schools" (Tichi 1998, 1). Ethnomusicologist, Aaron Fox (2004) points out:

> Country music, in the context of rural, working-class life, is the complicated poetry of complicated people, albeit people who think proudly of themselves as simple and profoundly 'ordinary.' It is situated at the very crux of a struggle for local meaning and the value of class-specific experience that of necessity endeavors to reappropriate the commodity form to the local life world, constituted in discourses of aesthetic cultivation and moments of sociable and musical 'feeling.' (318)

I propose school courses in or integrated approaches to *Country Music Appreciation* as a kind of critical pedagogy of place for poor, white, rural students. The idea takes a taken-for-granted and long standing tradition—that Music Appreciation means learning to like something *other than* Country or similarly less worthy music—and turns it on its head. This is in keeping with the spirit of Country music itself. Tex Sample (1996) writes:

> As the embodiment of working-class life it would be surprising if country music did not exude [a] politics of resistance. Once you begin to look at and listen to country music as an art of resistance, it seems to leap out at every point. It rejects cultivated charm, sophisticated wit, and highbrow refinement. (111)

Country Music Appreciation could provide spaces to recognize and resist the cosmopolitanism and cultural elitism of modern "factory models" of schooling. On a more individual level it might help students resist the lure of the city with its promises of a better life and, instead, nurture a love for rurality that might grow into a desire to stay and preserve local environments and traditions. Of course, discussions should reflect a comprehensive and fair hearing of Country music that, in addition to acknowledging, tolerating, and celebrating the cultural heritage of country folk, critically examines racism, sexism, and commercialism perpetuated in and by Country music. If approached uncritically, Country music may, in fact, have a tendency to reify and normalize oppression and inequality (Conrad 1988).

Recently, students in my *American Popular Music* course divided into groups based on their musical preferences. They were asked to choose a song that represented their group. More

than one of the Country groups chose Justin Moore's *Dirt Road Anthem* (written by Brian Dean Maher, Justin Moore, and Jeremy Stover). An informal YouTube video (not the commercial recording) by Moore includes these lyrics:

A lot of people called it prison when I was growin' up,
But these are my roots and this is what I love,
'Cause everybody knows me and I know them
And I believe that's the way we're supposed to live.
I wouldn't trade one single day in small town USA.

Give me a Saturday night, my baby by my side,
A little Hank Jr. and a six pack of lights,
Old dirt road and I'll be just fine.
Give me a Sunday morning that's full of grace,
A simple life and I'll be okay here in small town USA.

Around here people break their backs just to earn a buck.
We never get ahead but we have enough.
I watch people leave and then come right back;
I never wanted any part of that.
Now, I'm proud to say that I love this place—good ole small town USA.

Give me a Saturday night, my baby by my side,
David Allen Coe and a six pack of lights,
An old dirt road and I'll be just fine.
Give me a Sunday morning that's full of grace,
A simple life and I'll be okay, here in small town USA.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=86iz1Qqnu4I

This song resonates with the small town and rural students in my class. It "speaks" to me, too, even though I've never tried beer, been to the South, or listened much to David Allen Coe. Still, I remember "city kids" asking, "What do you do living out in country? It must be boring"; I know what it's like to live in a community where everyone knows everyone else personally; I feel nostalgia for the "simple life"; I go to church every Sunday morning and enjoy the sense of grace that comes through weekly communion; I feel a degree of pride having grown up, not in a small *town*, but out in the country where all the roads were dirt; and I have some

recollection, at least, of the reality and necessity of hard physical labor. These kinds of connections could and should be discussed at length. However, like other Country songs, this one also provides entry points for critical discussions about class, place, and race. Why is the physical labor of some worth so much less than the intellectual labor of others? Is that fair? Why is the word "simple" used to characterize a life-style that can actually be quite complex? Are there other ways of living that are equally viable and satisfying? Why do so many people leave rural places? Why do they come back?

In the hands of teachers who are familiar with and appreciative of rural cultures, these discussions can effectively avoid taking an anti-rural turn whereby rural students, especially the poor, are viewed as backwards or undisciplined. Appreciation for and revitalization of rural places and populations ought to be central to all discussions. Extant literature on rurality could be brought to bear. For example, specific approaches to rural revitalization are explored by Patrick J. Carr and Maria J. Kefalas in *Hollowing Out the Middle: The Rural Brain Drain and What it Means for America* (2009). In fact, their recommendations could easily touch on topics from multiple school subjects, calling for an integrated approach to Country Music Appreciation where, for example, discussions might occur in a social studies or language arts course as extensions to the actions undertaken in the music class (or even the other way around).

Still, I agree with David Elliott and other praxial theorists that school music ought to focus on the development of musicianship. "The aims of music education, and the primary goals of every music teaching-learning situation, are to enable students to achieve self-growth, self-knowledge, and musical enjoyment by educating their musicianship in balanced relation to musical challenges within selected musical practices" (Elliott 1995, 129). I am particularly

encouraged by the current proliferation in the United States of guitar education—a musical practice central to Country music and, thereby, especially applicable to poor, white, rural students. However, the guitar pedagogy typically used (reading "standard" notation and playing in guitar ensembles) doesn't match the pedagogical practices in Country music. In addition to the Justin Moore YouTube video mentioned previously, my YouTube search for *Small Town USA* yielded multiple covers by both men and women (younger and older) and a number of "how to" videos—some commercial, but mostly not. In fact, many Country songs typically have multiple "how to" videos on YouTube posted by amateur guitar players/singers. It is the non-commercial ones that interest me the most because they tend to offer instances of what could be called *pedagogy as pastime* or recreational teaching. In other words, amateur guitar players/singers appear to find meaning in teaching others how to play or sing popular songs, just as it is meaningful to move beyond consumer-listener-participant to a less mediated and arguably more active form of musicing—actually playing the songs heard on the radio.

One music teaching and learning practice in my family was to write down the lyrics to favorite, usually commercial songs, along with indications of which chords to play—a lead sheet of sorts. Mom has a large binder full of hand-written songs that she sings at family reunions, funerals, church meetings, Old Time Fiddlers get-togethers, and so forth. Here's an example: (audio clip). This is the kind of guitar participation I envision for small rural schools—learning to play preferred music from lead sheets and from live or recorded demonstrations. Eventually, students can figure out for themselves how to play their favorite songs and can even upload their own covers of favorite songs. Song-writing is another natural extension of a guitar curriculum and can give opportunities to explore issues unique to the students and where they live.

Finally, people still get together in rural America to make music outside of the ensembles typically encountered in schools. For example, local Opry shows (amateur Country band concerts/dances) are somewhat common throughout Northwestern Missouri. Recently, we went out to the Opry in Gentry, Missouri (population 170). There were about 100 people in attendance. A common practice at Opry performances is open-microphone time when anyone can come up and sing or play a song with the band. Steve Barber, of the Nortwest Opry here in Maryville, Missouri says, "We usually have any number of musicians on stage, anywhere from ten to fifteen and we all just enjoy the music and most of us aren't professional but we just enjoy what we're doing and everybody does the best they can . . ." (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UNYMmMeEFJI).

At the Gentry Opry, one of my good friends, formerly a student in one of my music appreciation courses, sang a couple of songs with the band, and his dad, who has been playing harmonica for about ten years, played a couple of songs as well. Everyone else either sat and listened or danced. It was a great evening that brought back a lot of memories for me at least.

This kind of musicing, small group performance and participation by instrumentalists and vocalists combined, could easily find application in small rural schools. Another friend of ours taught music for a couple of years in Jamesport, Missouri, where there are about 200 students in kindergarten through grade 12. He adapted his choir class into a Country and Rock combo class. I attended a performance at the annual high school awards banquet. I heard two students sing, backed up by guitar, bass, and drums. Another student sang and accompanied herself on piano along with the same band. They sang pop and Country songs. Parents sat up and paid attention

and peers listened respectfully. It made a lot of sense for the students to play their own music and the music of their community.

Parting Thoughts

The themes I've discussed in this article are, of course, my own perspectives—including a very personal perspective on my childhood and, now, as an educator teacher. I recognize that this is a limited perspective, and, aside from what others have shared, I can only intuit that others may have had similar experiences. Plus, things have changed quite a bit since I was younger. Even what I have observed generally is limited to the places where I have taught and interacted with other teachers and students. So, I don't intend that my suggestions be generalized to poor, white, rural students everywhere. In some regions of the United States, rural and white folks might not identify with Country music at all, for example. And, in some rural places, there are most likely individual students who don't care for Country music, even though they may live among many students who do. My intent has been simply to offer some ideas for what "music education," conceived inclusively, might mean in theory and practice. It is up to rural music teachers to take what they will and develop practices that, hopefully, will better serve the needs of the students they have been "called" to teach.

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About the Author

Vincent Bates is an Assistant Professor of Music at Northwest Missouri State University in Maryville, Missouri. Previously he taught K-12 music in Eureka, Utah. Vince writes more informally about music education at http://ruralmusiceducation.maydaygroup.org and http://vincebates.blogspot.com. Please send comments, questions, and suggestions by email: bates@nwmissouri.edu.