

6

Thwarting the Authority of Purpose: Epistemic Responsibility within Collaborations

CATHY BENEDICT

Introduction

What is the purpose of education? This is a question so pervasive it borders on the mundane. Worded this way, the question has no descriptor (music) preceding education; perhaps suggesting two separate questions detached from each other, neither one influencing the other. But, of course, this is indeed *the* question, sans modifier, that should guide our practice. I am not suggesting one shouldn't concern oneself with the purpose of an education in music. I am suggesting, however, that larger epistemological questions precede this egocentric focus. And although it may seem clear that the purpose of education should be at the center of the debate, too often *purpose* is linked to knowledge *gains*, where acquisition is an end so worthy as to squander the merits of any examination of means.

This chapter suggests, that although powerful, the topic or question of the musician–teacher collaboration is the wrong one with which to begin. It is wrong in that it denies the grappling with and pondering of one of the basic, fundamental existential questions. What does it mean to know, how do we come to know, and what is the purpose of knowing?

In the following, I advocate for the merits of epistemic responsibility in the context of a public educative context, arguing it to be an impactful and meaningful way to challenge the primacy of *purpose in any collaboration*, whether poet/language arts or musician–teacher. This does not obviate the necessity of content decisions or accountability, but it does propose engagements with teaching and learning where “our responsibility is not just a moral quality we happen to possess or have learnt through experience, but a way of approaching our communicative interactions, a stance towards credibility and credulity that is shared” (Origgi 2008, 36). The focus of this chapter, then, will be to ask questions and raise points that transcend the musician–teacher collaboration, which is merely one confluence of many that may, I will suggest, serve only to produce “incessant noise” (Arendt 2005, 262).

Personal Epistemology

Teachers invite people into their classes for multiple reasons; this is certainly not the purview of music classes. The children's book author, invited into the reading circle, might be there to talk about the process she goes through as she engages in her writing. Perhaps she is an author the children have grown up reading, and by her presence children are presented with a role model to whom they might aspire. Entrepreneurs, athletics, civil servants, all might be brought into the classroom to engage with the students. Each had a humble beginning, perhaps just as the students might; they've worked their way up through the system and now have arrived to share their wisdom. "Here is a famous/successful (fill in the blank) in my class, surely I can grow up and be just like her!" "If he can do it, so can I!" The provision of these models reflects both hope and a "why not try anything" attitude: wizardry, magic, anything is possible! However, as Freire (1994) points out "hope is an ontological need" and that hope, although "necessary . . . [is] not enough" (8). Thus, without a conscious awareness of one's personal epistemology, "try anything" as a pedagogical strategy and hope as a belief in the magical will probably not call us to attend to (for instance) whether support systems exist (including societal and ideological discourses) that make this wizardry happen. Indeed, providing these models without interrogating systems of oppression, including cultural capital and cultural codes, teachers "abdicate[e] their duty to teach" (Delpit 1995, 31). All of which either falls somewhere on the continuum of, at best, naïveté or, at worst, neo-progressive pedagogies that serve as a "mechanism of social control" (Giroux 1984, 31).

Epistemology resides both in the philosophical (the nature of knowing) and psychological (how one comes to know). When we consider the psychological development of personal epistemology and epistemological beliefs, Hofer and Pintrich (1997, 88) describe this as:

how individuals come to know, the theories and beliefs they hold about knowing, and the way such epistemological premises are a part of and an influence on the cognitive processes of thinking and reasoning.

Personal epistemology, then, not only influences the choices we make in our day-to-day decisions but also those decisions within the context of public education. Within the personal epistemology literature there is discussion as to whether there are "linkages . . . to other constructs in cognition and motivation" and even what "dimensions [personal epistemology] encompasses" (Hofer and Pintrich 1997, 89). Important for this chapter, then, are the questions of domain specificity of personal [musicianship] epistemology and "how such beliefs might connect to [musical] disciplinary beliefs" (*ibid.*). More to the point, however, is how coercively influential a "shared view of cognition and

knowing” might be when we consider responsibility and moral commitment to the purpose of the educative process (Hofer 2008, 17).

Authority

Authority is such a part of schooling that the concept often takes on the perception of *rightness*, of common sense. Authority as rightness is not, however, Arendt’s (1958) conceptualization in which common sense as action is made in relation with the world. Rather, commonsensical views of what is already *known* and therefore *right* construct authority and establish it as a pervasive marker of not just schooling, but, as we shall see, many collaborative practices as well. In these spaces content predicates and preempts engagement (and thinking), and thus the authority of what is already known prevents us from interrogating the complications of what is said to be known, which detracts alternative epistemic perspectives, and—in a vicious cycle—compresses what it means *to know*.

From primary music classrooms to higher education, faculties of music, language, and actions continually vie for, dismiss, and even ignore the complexities of epistemic authority, interrogating or reifying what (and who) counts. As such, the possibility of relativism threatens (Code 2006), and in these muddied educational waters certainty appears in the form of purpose. The notion of *purpose*, mercurial and continually shaped by ideological winds, has been argued and contested throughout the history of public schooling. Yet capricious (and vague) as purpose may be, it continues to provide safer and more secure ground than grappling with contentions and dynamic understandings that emerge from socioeconomic tensions; racial challenges; and personal, social, and cultural ways of knowing. For this context, then, bringing in role models to collaborate with the vague purpose of demonstrating to students how “musicians” do “it” provides a purposeful enough goal without really having to interrogate questions such as who benefits (the students, the teachers, the collaborators) and why.

This indicates that, as a form of action, teaching lies within the epistemological space of responsibility crafted as one in which both the balance of accountability and curricular goals are explicitly addressed with and not for students. Research suggests “the variety of contexts within which epistemic beliefs are held, employed, and articulated” (Gottlieb and Mandel Leadership Institute 2007, 6) are as important as research into models of epistemic development. Recognizing that multiple epistemological paradigms exist, including conditions (Kitcher 1990) and contexts that are cultural (Gottlieb and Mandel Leadership Institute 2007), communicative (Origi 2008), and place-based (Gruenewald 2003), the purpose of education must move from finality of content toward education *as* an epistemological responsibility. Nothing, then, would be sacrosanct or “known.” Givens such as “student-centered” and “inquiry-based” learning, “cooperative learning,” and collaborations must be examined and interrogated as slogans through which the “ambiguity of language [not only]

serves a political function—it obscures different and possible social interests” (Popkewitz 1980), again such as who stands to gain and to what end. And, in this case, whose epistemic rights?

To think through collaboration (and thus purpose) grounded in epistemology, I pose questions to assist *framing capacity*. The notion behind a *framing capacity* functions within the reasoning that “one must maximize as much as possible the multiplication of small narratives” (Lyotard and Thébaud 1996, 59). In music education, Higgins (2008) provides examples of how these multiple small narratives and ways of knowing are present in community music practices and how they are essential to their “productivity” and democratic nature. Tensions such as clashing unarticulated goals between teacher/collaborator/learner, what learning and knowing is or even looks like, or even space/time constraints mismatched and even at odds philosophically (epistemologically) could provide fertile ground for discussion and growth if framed as such. Veloso and Carvalho (2012) show how children construct quite complex ways of being creative, highlighting that imagination depends on playing with multiple accounts or viewpoints. Here, as in myriad other research, framing is a complex capacity for sense making and remaking, helping to re-evaluate what we might have previously considered to be normative and common sense: collaborations.

Collaborations

Collaborations between public education and professional musicians are the backbone of any self-respecting symphonic orchestra. The Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, Berliner Philharmoniker, the Chicago Symphony, and LA Phil (to name a few) all support education programs. One might posit that the LA Phil takes this one step further in its extensive El Sistema-inspired program, wherein the “LA Phil and its community partners provide free instruments, intensive music training, and academic support to students from underserved neighborhoods, empowering them to become **vital citizens, leaders, and agents of change**” (bold in text) (as of June 2017, www.laphil.com/education/yola).

Setting aside the LA Phil for one moment, orchestras such as those mentioned have multiple purposes for their education programs, but above all, their purpose is to bring Western classical music into the lives of children. The New York Philharmonic and their Philharmonic Teaching Artists, for instance:

use major orchestral repertoire to teach students, their teachers, and parents how to listen, perform and compose, preparing them to hear concerts in their own school and at the Philharmonic and establishing music as an essential element of the classroom and of the school community.

(as of June 2017, <http://nyphil.org/education/learning-communities/philharmonic-schools>)

The Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra “leverage(s) live music performance and instrumental coaching to supplement your students’ learning in an up close and personal environment” (as of June 2017, www.cincinnati-symphony.org/community-plus-learning/for-educators/musicians-in-schools). The embedded assumption as to what constitutes learning (and the purpose of learning) remains unclear. Whether this choice is deliberate is also unclear. One might interpret these mission statements as ways to build audiences, or perhaps more cynically conclude they have been mandated by funding sources to create education and outreach programs. What is clear in both these mission statements is 1) outside experts can accomplish something others cannot and 2) the purpose of an education in music is inextricably tied to a traditional classical model. Frustratingly, the purpose for both the orchestras and the public schools that welcome these projects remains vague, assumed, and rarely interrogated.

At the other end of the spectrum, whether a symphonic organization can *empower* anyone is an extreme example of purpose. Although not belittling or even dismissing purposes that encompass social change and justice, these extremes highlight differing (contrasting?) epistemological beliefs at work. Do, or should, all epistemological premises count equally? Is there a “natural” authority in differing epistemic perspectives? What are the epistemic rights and duties of students and teachers? Do pedagogical strategies such as collaborations and cooperative learning afford space for epistemic agency (Duarte 2001)?

These are not easy questions, nor should they be. However, to enter these questions we must first return to epistemology as it resides in philosophy and the nature of knowing.

Epistemological Premises

Collaborations are engagements that occur between. Between what may seem obvious—in this context, musician/learner, musician/student, musician/teacher. Agreeing in this moment that what constitutes a musician is someone with a certain set of skills that is invited in, what matters more here is what constitutes learner, student, and, indeed, teacher. Biesta (2010) asks us to consider the “subjects of teaching.” He is, in this context, referring to students and how we might “call” them. He presents three ways of referencing: learner, student, and finally, speaker. The learner is constructed as someone who lacks, and thus in need of someone who knows, who has arrived. Using Rancière’s pedagogical goal (purpose) of liberty and emancipation, Biesta underscores the importance of “taking the authority of educator out of the picture so that education dissolves into learning” (2010, 544). Thus, the one “who can” prevents and stands in the way of the appearance of a space in which all would be able to speak without fear or constraints of not knowing. For Biesta, then, “emancipatory education can therefore be characterized as education that starts from the

assumption that all students can speak—or to be more precise: that all students can *already* speak” (2010, 549).

According to Biesta, it isn't just that all epistemological premises count equally. His purpose is liberation from transactions: the student as the consumer of knowledge created outside herself, the musician or organization as the provider of this knowledge, and what is learned as a commodity (2004, 58). This then implies that in the case of collaborations, everyone involved, including the students, must grapple with the discursive practices that both shape and act against epistemic responsibilities. Which would mean that discussions as to what (and ways of) learning(s) and knowing(s) may be gained (or thwarted) when someone from the outside comes into a space that has been attended to by both the teacher and students. Conversations that focused on epistemological concerns (whether named epistemological or not) would necessarily move beyond the simple purpose of the collaboration to grappling with the importance of how one comes to “know” something and what knowing might mean in the moment of the collaboration, as well as once the collaboration has concluded. These conversations are easier to facilitate than one might think. Simply making a slight switch in one's language by asking what one “thinks” one knows rather than a definitive stance as to what is known opens up the space for mutual perspectives, and, indeed, theories, to be interrogated.

In the seminal piece, “Division of Cognitive Labor,” Kitcher (1990, 7) addressing the sciences and scientific growth, asks the following:

Does the sophisticated work in [the] history of science not reveal to us that there are numerous cases in which equally reasonable people may disagree about the merits of rival theories, perhaps because they have different ideas about the significance of different problems or about the appropriate criteria for solving those problems?

Kitcher is speaking to how members of the scientific community, as singular researchers, do not or cannot possibly study all areas of science (thus the division of labor). This diversity of epistemological beliefs and pursuits is constructive as cognitive diversity prevents “uniformity of opinion” (ibid 9), which leads toward a blindness of possibilities that occur when differing ways of thinking clash and diverge in new directions. On the other hand, Muldoon examines “an economic approach to the division of cognitive labor” (2013, 118) and warns that although diversity is integral to opening new spaces of knowing, unfortunately, particular reward systems (dictated by discursive formations) often prescribe what epistemic projects count and are deemed important, even worthy. Perhaps one way to place the “rival theories” argument in the context of collaborations is the epistemic project of what counts as literacy. The classroom music teacher may believe that one is not musically literate unless one can read and write Western classical notation. The collaborator, on the other hand, has

an epistemological stance that has been constructed by her experiences in free improvisation. She has come to understand that notation is only one way of “knowing” and, more often than not, a Western-centric way of knowing. Perhaps, being “literate” for her has more to do with a collaboration based on deep listening and responding in the moment. These epistemological differences are precisely the moments that offer new ways of considering and constructing heretofore unimagined possibilities for musical literacy. Yet without recognizing the economic discourse and questioning the “who stands to gain, what, and why rewards system,” potentially rich and rewarding discussion as to what is literacy in the twenty-first century goes by, and little is done to challenge or interrogate discursive formations that reward a status quo intent on reproducing free market behaviors.

Social Epistemology

Earlier in this chapter the issue of domain specificity of personal epistemology was raised and “how such beliefs might connect to disciplinary beliefs” (Hofer and Pintrich 1997, 89). Although personal epistemology plays a large role in curricular and pedagogical decisions, the point I would now like to explore are those ways personal epistemology is constructed by disciplinary beliefs. Take, for example, the music teacher who believes literacy is connected to note reading and writing. It is most likely that this teacher was raised in the Western classical tradition where repertoire dictates musical decisions, including processes of development and evaluatory criteria. The collaborator, on the other hand, whose personal epistemological beliefs are grounded in her experiences of free improvisation, is not anchored in a discipline defined by singular practices. Her disciplinary beliefs are more likely grounded in broader philosophical views that understand education to be something other than a series of transactions (Biesta 2004).

Psychological models suggest we come to know by engaging with others, by communicating with others. Broncano (2008, 11) expounds on this by differentiating between instrumental knowledge (how to, for instance) and knowledge dependent on “explicit epistemic intentions of transmitting and *sharing* knowledge” (*italics added*). The former suggests that construction of shared trust for musicians (and by extension music educators) steeped in the Western classical tradition is very much shaped by the musical experiences that come to be valued and replicated through skill development and repertoire. The “normativity” of this creates, as Broncano writes, “epistemic rights and duties to the participants” (*ibid* 11). Therefore, one cannot be a classical musician, or in the case of our classroom teacher, even a musician, without taking on the obligation to reproduce paradigmatic knowings grounded in the Western classical tradition. In the context of uninterrogated collaborations, rights and duties might result in the reification of particular musics and ways of coming

to know how to produce those musics. The latter, on the other hand, suggests a level of shared trust must be involved in embracing and welcoming that which we cannot control or predict. This has little to do with possessing knowledge and everything to do with seeing “learning as a reaction to a disturbance, as an attempt to reorganize or reintegrate as a result of disintegration” (Biesta 2004, 62). And, indeed, it is possible, of course, to challenge the authority of normativity. “Musicians,” teachers, students, all collaborators, are epistemic agents; all have the ethical duty to “think what [they] are doing” (Arendt 1958, 5). Unfortunately, too often the rewards, and even punishments (in the discursive guise of accountability), go far in prohibiting and disavowing collaborations that fuel chaotic learning environments in which epistemological “rights” might be reimagined, indeed, improvised.

Final Thoughts

For Arendt, common sense is made in relation with the world. Not the world of music, but the world writ large. Returning to the premise that epistemic responsibility transcends purpose, the pedagogical implications raised by Arendt’s thinking in this context are manifold. Indeed, Arendt believes we distinguish ourselves, our distinctness, through speech and action in the plurality (disturbances) of all others. However, Arendt also understood the necessity of thinking alone as the condition under which subjectivity and judgment are made possible. She also warned how easy it is to dismiss the necessary conditions for this space. Collaborations may not be the optimal space for students to contemplate and think alone. Indeed, Duarte suggests these kinds of collaborative models may be “creating conditions of ‘nonthinking’” (2001, 202). If we consider the problematic “rights and duties” discussed earlier as reifying a paradigm of replication, then the uncontested authority of collaborations may thwart that which leads students toward independence and emancipation. As Biesta reminds us, “all students can *already* speak” (2010, 549). Rather than simply “learning from each other,” recognizing each other as epistemic agents might move us (musicians, teachers, students) to “negotiate[ing] epistemic standards through conversation” (Origgi 2008, 35). These conversations are dependent on a “space of appearance” (Arendt 1958, 200) where we are seen and heard by others. Clearly this is a fragile space, one that is dependent on being willing to forgo epistemological certainty and confront a constructed social epistemology.

It might not always be practical to image collaborations transcending stated or even the unstated purpose of product as tangible proof. Performance of any kind is product; it does not, however, need to be a commodity used in exchange for imagined social capital. The educative space is not contested turf for the emergence of winners and losers. It is a space of responsibility where we are present to all, continually reorganizing what it means to know. Epistemic

responsibility moves in multiple directions, not linear, not sequentially. The questions to whom and to what we are responsible force recognition of authority in all its discursive guises. We do well to consider Arendt's "incessant noise" (2005, 262) as that which covers to what we should be attending before embracing collaboration as normative. Epistemological possibilities abound; responsibility resides in our refusal to reinscribe authority.

References

- Arendt, Hannah. 1958. *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Arendt, Hannah. 2005. *The Promise of Politics*. New York: Schocken.
- Biesta, Gert. 2004. "Against Learning. Reclaiming a Language for Education in an Age of Learning." *Nordisk Pedagogik*, 23, 54–66.
- Biesta, Gert. 2010. "Learner, Student, Speaker: Why It Matters How We Call Those We Teach." *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 42 (5–6), 540–52.
- Broncano, Fernando. 2008. "Trusting Others: The Epistemological Authority of Testimony." *THEORIA. Revista de Teoría, Historia y Fundamentos de la Ciencia*, 23 (1), 11–22.
- Code, Lorraine. 2006. *Ecological Thinking: The Politics of Epistemic Location*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Delpit, Lisa. 1995. *Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom*. New York: The New Press.
- Duarte, Eduardo M. 2001. "The Eclipse of Thinking: An Arendtian Critique of Cooperative Learning." In *Hannah Arendt and Education, Renewing Our Common World*, edited by Mordechai Gordon, 201–24. Oxford: Westview Press.
- Freire, Paulo. 1994. *Pedagogy of Hope*. Translated by Robert R. Barr. New York: Continuum.
- Giroux, Henry A. 1984. *Ideology, Culture, and the Process of Schooling*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Gottlieb, Eli, and Mandel Leadership Institute. 2007. "Learning How to Believe: Epistemic Development in Cultural Context." *The Journal of the Learning Sciences*, 16 (1), 5–35.
- Gruenewald, David. 2003. "Foundations of Place: A Multidisciplinary Framework for Place-Conscious Education." *American Educational Research Journal*, 40 (3), 619–54.
- Higgins, Lee. 2008. "The Creative Music Workshop: Event, Facilitation, Gift." *International Journal of Music Education*, 26 (4), 326–38.
- Hofer, Barbara K. 2008. "Personal Epistemology and Culture." In *Knowing, Knowledge and Beliefs: Epistemological Studies Across Diverse Cultures*, edited by Myint Swe Khine, 3–22. Netherlands: Springer.
- Hofer, Barbara K., and Paul R. Pintrich. 1997. "The Development of Epistemological Theories: Beliefs About Knowledge and Knowing and Their Relation to Learning." *Review of Educational Research*, 67 (1), 88–140.
- Kitcher, Phillip. 1990. "The Division of Cognitive Labor." *The Journal of Philosophy*, 87 (1), 5–22.
- Lyotard, Jean Francois, and Jean-Loup Thébaud. 1996. *Just Gaming*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Muldoon, Ryan. 2013. "Diversity and the Division of Cognitive Labor." *Philosophy Compass*, 8 (2), 117–25.
- Origg, Gloria. 2008. "Trust, Authority and Epistemic Responsibility." *Theoria*, 23 (61), 35–44.
- Popkewitz, Thomas. 1980. "Global Education as a Slogan System." *Curriculum Inquiry*, 10 (3), 303–16.
- Veloso, Ana Luísa, and Sara Carvalho. 2012. "Musical Composition as a Way of Learning: Emotion and the Situated Self." In *Musical Creativity: Insights from Music Education Research*, edited by Oscar Odena, 73–91. Surrey: Ashgate.