Rehearsal as metaphor: the levels of change for inclusion

The task of creating an atmosphere of inclusion is herculean. Social pressures and acculturated biases that affect individuals across generational gaps render the situation highly challenging and complex. Studies have shown that resistance to social change is hard-won, incremental, and any actual change is rapidly outpaced by the ideas and morals of the groups pushing for that change. Contemplating the dilemma this presents could result in a failure of willpower, a desire to simply let the easier path of social inertia carry on with the way the world currently works. At least, this is what could happen for those people who partake of the domination of the privileged, those who have the controlling interest in the legislative and regulatory bodies that define the legal codes governing much of our lives. English poet Alexander Pope once wrote "To err is human; to forgive, divine" (1711). Perhaps we should instead rewrite this famous saying for our modern era, to say instead "To err is human, but that does not excuse inaction." For to not appreciate and ameliorate the circumstances we find ourselves in is tantamount to complicity in many of the great injustices that are still perpetuated today. How to address the issue, however? With what dimensions of prejudice and oppression should we first engage? I think it is helpful to use a metaphor here, and for music educators, perhaps none better than the rehearsal structures we often play with. In this case, the popular 'macro-micro-macro' paradigm may prove useful in giving a structure to think about in regards to pursuit of social change.

At the scale of society write large (the 'macro' dimension), the great forces of tradition restrict progress on issues of inclusion. The attitude of colonization, borne out of the era of imperialist powers where European empires fed the majority of the planet through the meat grinder of redrawn borders for exploitation of wealth, continues to tempt us to sit on our thrones of privilege. Our essential inability as humans to truly perceive the other can limit understanding through this mindset – after all, *I* have to make my decisions through *my* personal lens, as I have no other to observe through. In addition, it must be remembered that change on this scale is hard fought and lengthy. As Sensoy & DiAngelo (2017) remind us, speaking about the progress that *has* been made in our society: "The dominant group was forced to change due to pressures that took decades to build and sustain" (p 186). It would be tempting to conclude from the historical examples that progress is in fact an illusion. However, it is important to keep in mind that "socialization… doesn't make us bad people. It does, however, make us responsible for reeducating ourselves and working to change oppressive systems" (Sensory & DiAngelo 2017, p 185). Already, perhaps there is an inkling here of how change at this level might be affected.

Next, we come to a slightly more 'micro' level, the level of the community (a far more nebulous designation). This could be the city in which one lives, or perhaps the institutions we take part of in the course of day-to-day living. Here, the ability of the individual to enact direct change begins to rise. After all, it makes a difference when a more of the population shifts patterns of behaviour, and by definition, each individual is a higher percentage of their community's population than that of the society in which they live. Looking at small communities can provide good examples of this, such as Mitchell's (2019) work with a smaller community of staff and students at the Coffee House events she helped organize: "While inclusive of staff and clients… [it] is *exclusive* in the sense that… individuals from outside do not attend" (p 10). The students and staff in this place created a community where those who

were part of it were uninhibited by whatever impairment or difference they might possess. Mitchell wrote that "this ethos is instrumental in allowing performers to overcome anxiety and engage in the risk-taking of performance, while also contributing to a levelling of institutional relationship dynamics" (p 7). Although the larger society in which this community existed was unable to flex to mirror the accomplishments seen here, the community itself was able to redefine how to interact with the other.

Last, we arrive at the most 'micro' of arenas, the personal. Examining personal experience is fraught with peril, indeed, as Sensoy & DiAngelo (2017) noted, "the personal example is almost impossible to question and thus works to cut off, rather than expand, exploration" (p 188). It is true that one's personal beliefs can stand in the way of true progress, but beliefs are created through the interaction of the self with the world, and through the relationships formed as life is lived. The difficulty here does not lie in exerting some titanic force to shift the trajectory of a nation. "The issue" as Benedict (2021) writes, "is to come to better understandings of how we come to know the world and to celebrate and honor difference" (Benedict, forthcoming 2021). By forming relationships with other people, we continuously open the doorway to an ongoing process of socialization which inevitably impacts belief and action. Not all relationships will be positive, simply because of the way the world is. But the solution cannot be to throw up one's hands in inaction. Perhaps instead of fatalism, "The more constructive approach is to work to unravel these intersections to see how we may be upholding someone else's oppression" (Sensoy & DiAngelo 2017, p 191). The true enemy of oppressive thought modes is not a piece of legislation, and it cannot be the genuine solution! "…the solutions are not complex formulas… they are dependent upon the specific context and social position of the person undertaking them" (p 197). The open interchange of human experience, the allowing of 'the other' to become a part of 'the self' as you take an understanding of them into your being – this is where the magic happens! By opening space in the war of words 'dialogue' is often assumed to be, you permit yourself the latitude to perceive the other, not as something to be wary of, but simply who they are.

And so, much like the rehearsal mentioned in the beginning, we have to return at the end to the macro scale, to the larger question of how this is accomplished. I think it is clear. As in rehearsal, where the thousands of minute, imperceptible decisions made in and out of the practice room add up to the glorious act of music-making so many of us find dear, the thousand small human relationships have the potential to add up to the great tidal wave of social change which is unstoppable once sufficient force is acquired. Those tiny acts of musical decision-making are found in the innumerable choices we humans make in our daily lives through the relationships we cultivate with the others around us. If only we can hold to the goal of allowing the other to simply be fully human *with* us and for us to understand them as fully human, coequal with our selves, perhaps that macro stage of true change is not out of reach, after all.

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