

Appropriation, Appreciation, Inspiration and Censorship:

The challenges of making ethical choices

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Overarching abstract

Ketil Thorgersen

“Woke”, “cultural appropriation”, “cancel culture”, “critical race theory”, “intersectionality”, and “LGBTQI+” are just some words that would have been hard to find in a newspaper ten years ago, but today can be found fairly frequently. The words can be understood as a part of what some have described as a “culture war” between what they see as liberal and/or leftist globalism on the one hand and ultra right-wing/populist protectionism on the other. The term “culture war” reflects the lack of mutual understanding between, what can, from a GAL-TAN logic, be understood as two positions—who of course both claim the moral high ground.

There are signs of increasing polarization in the political and cultural debates even here. In the presentation, we will list some worrying observations from the Nordic countries of high relevance for the future of music education. After the latest election in Sweden, the government has decided to create a “Swedish cultural canon” to be taught in schools (Denmark has had one since 2006) after demands from Sverigedemokraterna with Nazi roots. The Swedish minister of higher education has also decided to look into cancel culture in the universities based on reports that the universities censor certain opinions. In the municipality Sölvesborg so-called “menstruation art” (“menskunst”) will no longer receive funding. At the same time, some film directors and museum directors that in order to get state or regional funding need to adapt their art so that it contains buzzwords from feminist, postcolonial or intersectional theory. In Norway, debates have run about artworks containing elements of colonialism and racism, and whether such works should be removed from public display. The play *Ways of seeing*, addressing xenophobia, was followed by tense debates. In the aftermath of the running of this play, the partner of a central politician from Fremskrittspartiet (The Progress party) committed crimes for which she was convicted of “attacks on democracy”. When Gwen Stefani was accused of cultural appropriation when she used Japanese background dancers, she answered by arguing that she was *inspired*

and that her show was *cultural appreciation* rather than *appropriation*. These are just a few examples of a sign of a beginning polarization.

So how should a music teacher know what is right? Should she avoid problematic repertoire that might be offending, should she confront children with problematic parts of culture or shield them and present a safe space for musical growth? Or can there be a middle ground here? Starting from a position where we wonder how teachers and scholars in music education can and should navigate in these problematic areas, we seek to invite dialogue and discussion by presenting theories and arguments that can function as sense-making tools in such a dialogue.

Racism, music education, and The Swamp of Jazz

Guro Gravem Johansen

In 2022, UNICEF Norway published a report stating that every third teenager with a minority background has experienced racism. For more than half of them, it happened at school, while teachers appeared passive (Bawan, 2022). Thus, questions of inequity and discrimination should be of greatest concern for education. To discuss these issues' relevance for music education, I will turn to the learning and teaching of jazz where two main points are presented.

Firstly: since the history of jazz is deeply intertwined with a history of brutal racism both on the North American and European continents (Back, 2002), learning this music in a contextualised way may provide opportunities for understanding how socio-historical conditions have shaped artistic expressions such as the development of a polyphonic, intertextual jazz aesthetic (Berliner, 1994; Ellington, 1931; Placksin, 1982). A contextualised engagement helps to avoid essentialising and stereotyping (McClary and Walser, 1994), where the risk of superficial appropriation is reduced.

Secondly: the position of jazz within institutionalised music education may be a symbolic lens to understand how hegemonic cultures operate when they position themselves as universal and thereby trivialise or invalidate experiences and perspectives by minority cultures (Ewell, 2021). Finally, this paper argues that experiences of inequity should be kept in focus, rather than talking about the degree and form of reactions to inequities. When the latter type of discussions (often framed as criticism of "cancel culture") are initiated, the agenda may be seen as invalidating the initial experience of inequity, and as such it may be seen as reproducing the oppressive hegemonic power.

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Researcher and policy activist? Discussing the role of researchers in societal challenges

Adriana Di Lorenzo Tillborg

The examples that we bring to this symposium come from current societal challenges. In academia, discussions on academic freedom, objectivity and responsibility are constantly reminding us, researchers, that our role in responding to such challenges is far from easy.

In my doctoral thesis, I explored the idea of a researcher who might also be a policy activist. This idea can serve as a starting point for discussing the role of researchers in societal challenges, both within and outside academia.

Policies can be used to restrict and to challenge. Policies can contribute to defining what or even who are considered as “problems to be solved” since they contribute to the construction of target groups. As researchers, we have a privileged position that can be used to contribute to problematize such problematizations and to shed light on the complexity of such issues. For instance, white researchers such as Juliet Hess, have used their voices, which still are regarded as “neutral”, to raise issues of racism and work for social change. In my case, being an immigrant in Sweden, I have a background that is different from the large majority, but as white and fluent in Swedish, I often appear “Swedish”. Furthermore, as a researcher, I have access to contexts where my voice can be heard and respected. I see such a privilege as a responsibility to keep including more voices. Policy activism can be a way towards conscious choices in the work for the democratization of music education. What I argue for is an approach where action and reflection are closely connected with an awareness that action can have the potential to power and disempower.

Crucial when engaging in issues of appropriation, racism and social exclusion is to remain ethically sensitive, to bring different perspectives to the discussions and to continuously reflect on our own positionings. This symposium is intended to be a contribution in this regard.

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Is playing the blues in Norway 2023 cultural appropriation?

Critical reflections with blues students at the University of South Eastern Norway (Notodden).

Anders Rønningen

In Notodden, the University of South Eastern Norway has for several years offered a university study on blues. The students have very differing backgrounds but have a common interest in developing skills and knowledge on blues. Most of them are already active blues musicians, and the study provides possibilities to develop further. One of the modules in the study is called "Blues and community", and helps the students reflect on how the genre is connected to its origin society and today's societies, and how the music is affected, and affects, the local community. A wanted learning outcome from this study module is to be able to reflect critically about music (blues), identity and society.

There are within the blues genre strong opinions on what makes up authenticity in the genre. Who "own" the blues? Is it possible for white middle class blues students following a university study to play real "authentic" blues? Further, some even claim that the very existence of the university study on blues is a kind of cultural appropriation

This paper will discuss matters of authenticity, ownership and cultural appropriation with the dialogues and reflections with and among the students and teachers in the USN blues study as a starting point.

The presenter is heading the "Blues and Community"-module, and has just released a book on cultural understanding in music ("Musikk og kulturforståelse").