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Reconfiguring music education for future-making: *how?*

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ABSTRACT

Global and societal changes present profound challenges and complexities for the future of music education practice and research. In these times of rapid change, four members of the MER editorial board reflect on the need to challenge normalising discourses of music education and encourage new understandings and/or territories within the field. In this viewpoint paper, we proffer four provocations on the themes of music(s) and social justice, climate change and sustainability, peace and democracy and enduring impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and ask how music education can play a central role in future-making. The paper concludes with an invitation to consider special issue proposals that advance similar or new themes.

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Introduction

Determining what really matters to becoming (and sustaining ourselves as) music education researchers and practitioners in the twenty-first century is inspiring but increasingly complex. The value of music education is at the core of ever-changing societies. The role music education specifically plays in the lives of children and young people – if they are to become positive, engaged, active, global citizens – has become even more relevant in the face of the complex societal challenges of global health crises, climate change, disruptive geopolitical events, and rising inequalities. Caught between a future of environmental and social instability on the one hand, and technological and technocratic determinism on the other, the relationship between music and education is profoundly challenged. The imperative for rethinking and repositioning of social justice in music education – an ongoing dynamic process – is rooted in reconfiguring what matters, challenging normalising discourses, and creating alternative ideas that can challenge and advance music education research and practices.

It was timely that, as members of the Editorial Board of this journal *Music Education Research* (MER), a volunteer sub-group met online earlier in 2022 to develop ideas that might inspire re-imagining music education given the significance of COVID-19. One of the outcomes of this meeting was to take stock of how MER positions itself as a journal along with the insights from RiME (Research in Music Education) conferences which started in 1999, now some 23 years ago. In this meeting, we identified a number of urgent and ongoing concerns: What if we invited contributors to think differently about what might potentially lead to new and generative reconfigurations

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within/across our field? *How* would we collectively reflect on the timely imperative to expose and challenge normalising discourses of music education research?

How can we, as a journal, encourage new understandings and open up new territories of/for/through music education to challenge normalising discourses that are re-inscribed over and over again through policy, curriculum frameworks, and research practices?

From the start, this piece of writing originated as a 'position' paper to consider the questions: Where are we now? Where are we going? How are we advancing as a community of researchers and educators as a profession in the field of music education? How are we grappling with and moving away from hegemonic framings? How are we opening up new and leaky possibilities and inviting fresh and timely enactments and critical engagement that radically shift and realise new and timely debates in music education research and practices?

What follows are just four of several themes that inspire and enable a critical engagement with the structures of policy and curriculum with which music education research can unsettle and reconfigure. What follows is an invitation, as MER's past and future contributors/readership, to push ourselves to be, think and do beyond what we consider knowable and comfortable through an assemblage of four themed provocations.

Provocations set #1: re-thinking whose musics? Whose educations? Whose knowledges? Whose practices?

The rethinking and repositioning of social justice agendas in music education – an ongoing dynamic process – is rooted in a discursive performativity which creates more disadvantage than advantage through dominant written, spoken and musical discourses. Determining what really matters concerning whose musics should be included (and excluded), which knowledge matters, and what counts as knowledge, remain hotly debated issues. All this is to say that the changing material conditions of society are also rapidly changing the terms by which we define music and music education. What if we took stock and set the stage for exposing and changing the locale of this condition?

Music teaching and teacher knowledges in music – in the broadest sense, the practice which makes use of the professional knowledge and skills of teachers for teaching music in multiple learning contexts, including both formal and informal settings – although recognised as a specialised discipline, continues to face ontological and epistemological crises. What counts as teacher knowledges in music, to acknowledge what kinds of musical knowledges are held, and why these knowledges are important in the particular contexts in which teachers teach, are imperatives to unpack. Why? These issues are significant in terms of the key role that dominant cultures (and the exclusion of subcultures) play in teacher knowledges and the resonance gap and gulfs between student interest and the school music curriculum. Music education remains a field which is still shaped by institutionalised hegemonic systems, cultural and professional capitals, values perpetuated by established networks, and who-you-know privilege. These problematics have become intensified and more visible in this recent context of a global pandemic.

In most schools, for young people to have access to instruments, to participate and/or be included through voices being heard in curriculum and pedagogy means to have access to pre-existent structures and support systems in models of music education that promote the idea of musical knowledge as fixed. Reprioritising and redistributing resources in school budgets has been continually redeployed away from resourcing music education with the global pandemic. *How* can we move from an understanding of *music as object* to understanding music as something other – and much more – than just the (re)creation of (the precious) object with narrowly delineated musical roles of composer, performer and listener. *How* can the simple acts of making and experiencing musics, such as hip hop, EDM, grime, drill, house and so on (which are presently barely covered, if at all, in school curricula) be featured rather than excluded. *How* can we re-imagine music education as 'musics education'; as a multiplicity of diverse and inclusive practices and more plural and

intercultural forms of participation. *How* can we collectively determine what really matters in musics education, we also look to rethink whose knowledges and whose musics need including in order to address the inequalities manifest at every level; from finding jobs in professional ensembles to securing commissions to record studio session gigs. *How* can we engage more effectively with discourses of postcolonialism and decoloniality through intercultural research and analyse, where relationality of race, power and privilege intersect with and puzzle out the intertextual layering of histories and identities? *How* can social inequalities not be endemic in both education and industry sectors?

In responding to institutional systems that contribute to a legacy of professional capital, established networks and racialised privilege, *how* can music(s) be reshaped and reimagined as global and local cultures, knowledges and practices through education?

Provocations set #2: (re-)configuring music education as future-making for sustainability

Climate change is the central world-wide crisis of our time (<https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/reports>). It poses major challenges to humanity and requires social reorientation on an unprecedented scale. At present, it is the youth in particular who are engaging, embodying and articulating the urgency of these challenges through protests (<https://fridaysforfuture.org>). At the same time, young people in particular are showing, in visionary designs for the future, how reorientations of society could make a climate-neutral and resource-saving life possible in a world of tomorrow. In these visions of future-making it becomes apparent that climate change can only be achieved in close connection to transformations in all parts of the individual and social life: in politics, economy, industry, commerce, trade, transport, housing, work, agriculture, education, culture. *How* can music education significantly contribute to shape these processes of transformation? *How* can music education research explore the possibilities arising from deconstructing the vexed relationship between 'education' and 'the future', questioning the linear model of outcomes-based education to recover the humanist democratic and ethical dimensions of future-making on a finite Planet.

History points to the great potential of the arts in general and music in particular with the context of social change. Music can point to crises and social imbalances. Music can serve as a mouthpiece for protest and resistance. Music can invite us to reflect on and co-author new perspectives on possibilities for action and alternative lifestyles. Music is deeply connected to place, memory, experience and affective states, all of which enable us to see how learning and the imagination develop, dwell and 'make our path' in the world. And music can offer the possibility of artistic engagement, opening up new ways to revitalise our teaching and respond to critical issues of our time, such as climate and environmental protection (<https://musik-klima.de>). *How* can music education not be a mere addition in the sense of 'value adding'? Rather, can music education become central to reconfiguring the ethical, political, moral, aesthetic and scientific dimensions of human enquiry across diverse musics, diverse peoples, diverse cultures, in collaboration with other fields? What if rebalancing our relationship with the Earth is simpler than we realise?

Current demands for the arts to take greater responsibility for social issues underline the need for a reorientation of the role of the arts in the society of the future. At the same time, with initiatives such as *Fridays for Future* (<https://fridaysforfuture.org>), young people are already calling for educational spaces to be opened up to the pressing issues of the future. *How* can music education show all pupils their artistic and social possibilities for action and support them in actively assuming social responsibility? *How* can music education offer pupils the opportunity to pursue their own concerns and actively shape educational processes through learner-centred, participatory approaches? *How* can artistic-aesthetic-scientific approaches and paths be offered in, and as a feature of music education, so that musico-artistic-aesthetic engagement with climate change contributes to and enacts social change? *How* can we address climate change as a core task of music education practices alongside diversity, digitalisation and democracy?

Provocations set #3: revaluing music education in the promotion of peace and cultural diplomacy

There is no human activity more destructive and contrary to the fundamental values of common musical expression than war. Despite unprecedented efforts to promote world peace via establishment of institutions for international law in the twentieth century, the twenty-first century has already seen excessive incidences of war, terrorism, and genocide. The prospective limits to freedom of expression, including in the sphere of social media, are frequently tested when individuals and groups issue provocative and misleading claims that provoke escalation and even violent responses. With an increasingly polarised populace – exacerbated by the ‘echo chambers’ of social media – few who hold opposing views remain able to engage in civil and constructive debate with the potential to generate empathy and attain consensus. In democratic nations, this phenomenon has led to ‘culture wars’, while in authoritarian states the consequences are more dire, with a climate of censorship and oppression.

As we prepare this document, violence, and the threat of more violence, persists in many parts of the world. However, we should not limit our concerns to state violence, for structural violence is ultimately at the root of many conflicts. Social structures that exacerbate inequalities and fail to offer genuine opportunities for attainment of quality of life among the socially disadvantaged frequently lead to desperation and crime. Our students should be guided toward an empathetic understanding of world history that recognises how the long-term impacts of colonialism and systemic enslavement persist in the form of global inequalities and unequal access to justice and opportunity.

Despite such challenges, every region of the world has produced important forms of music, and music participation is a uniquely (in-)valuable tool for development of mutual respect and reconciliation. This remains true even in a globalized world in which diverse music genre preferences and identities do not perfectly match with assumed demographic origins. *How* can music education research and practice advance and promote both the great diversity of musical heritage and practices worldwide and the power of music to profoundly impact human lives and go beyond the current limitations of the human-centred view?

In the twenty-first century, music education has sometimes been, either implicitly or explicitly, used to promote unhealthy forms of nationalism, with ‘patriotism’ as an instructional objective, while educators have shied away from teaching music associated with marginalised or stigmatised groups. Research unquestionably shows that while music is sometimes misused to instil destructive ideologies, music participation can also aid in the promotion of peace and mutual understanding between groups with a history of hostility. *How* can musicians, educators and leaders in/of/through music institutions, dismantle the dichotomies and binary oppositions that have maintained the power relations and inequalities separating some from ‘others’, and resist ethnocentrism and jingoism, striving to maintain respect and cooperation across borders of all kinds? *How* can educators actively remind their students of the admirable features in the culture and heritage (including music) of the ‘enemy’? *How* can, consistent with democratic values, educators be allowed the freedom to promote diplomacy and reconciliation as alternatives to war? *How* can we encourage the type of critical thinking and creative expression that exposes propaganda and conspiracy theories, creating bridges among different communities in the discursive performativity of a more just and peaceful world? *How* can music educators adopt a wider array of musical practices and aim for (re)presentation of more diverse forms of cultural heritage, using approaches that are deliberately inclusive and purposively embedded within the movement to a peaceful world?

Provocations set #4: reinstating music education: enduring impacts of COVID-19 pandemic

On 11th March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared a global pandemic due to the spread of COVID-19. Consequently, many countries instituted severe restrictions by closing

non-essential businesses and schools. A few days after the WHO declaration, video clips of Italians socially distanced on their balconies trended on social and mainstream media because they united in singing and playing music. Throughout the pandemic, it became clear that music and the arts could provide solace and comfort during times of crisis.

Of course, this is nothing new. For many decades, numerous interdisciplinary studies in music, music education, music therapy, music medicine *inter alia*, have highlighted the power of music listening and performing in affecting the brain and nervous system and in managing the negative effects of physical and mental health problems. As music educators, we know first-hand how meaningful, ethical music-making in schools and communities can foster social inclusion, health, and wellbeing. However, with the onset of the pandemic and related restrictions, music teaching and learning in schools, communities and peripatetic settings pivoted to emergency remote online teaching. As has been documented in a special issue of this journal on the 'digital turn', this pivot brought challenges and opportunities for teachers, students, parents, and communities. In particular, social/educational disadvantage and digital poverty locked many students out of education and school music for several months. Meanwhile, teachers grappled with the limitations of digital technologies and learned of latency issues in trying to engage learners in synchronous music-making. *How* can a radical pivot do more than just reveal existing and newly (co-)authored pedagogies of exclusion in teaching, learning and assessment at secondary and tertiary levels, but rather be significant to policy makers?

At the start of the pandemic, several organisations and individual artists provided free streaming of performances via social media. At the same time, scheduled concerts and live performances were being cancelled. Musicians and industry professionals involved in supporting live performances were suddenly out of work. While some thought the effects of the pandemic might have been transient, it was unthinkable that the industry would still struggle two years later. Many musicians were self-employed and not eligible to access government schemes, like the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS) in the UK. The 'This is Music' report (<https://www.ukmusic.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/This-is-Music-2021-v2.pdf>) revealed that in 2021 thousands of musicians, crew, and other employees had resigned from the music industry to find alternative sources of income. During this period, school/amateur choirs, orchestras, and bands were forced to rehearse online during the pandemic and while benefits and opportunities to new modes of learning had been documented pre-pandemic, in-person presence and social connection was missed by many. *How* can the social impact of collaborative music-making, which is widely documented, and at the same time, the consumption of music vis-à-vis listening to music from streaming services which increased by 15% (ibid), serve at the core of enactments of learning processes, and as a site for pluralist dialogue between practice and inquiry for future-making? *How* can we co-author new ways to invoke educational institutions, industries and diverse communities, to connect and work collaboratively for students who have not encountered active music-making opportunities in their years of schooling? *How* can we reimagine our understanding and practice of music(s) education?

Non-clusions with invitation/call

The starting point for this piece was in asking what role music education plays in a changing world and changing societies. Connected to that we reflected on how music education – its theories, researchers and practices – can impact and change discourses of inclusion/exclusion, participation/alienation, justice/injustice amongst others. Activism, social justice, and artistic citizenship have come to the fore as themes to be debated, to be realised and mobilised in music education.

Many questions we raise are not new in the discourse. Some answers are already well developed. However, all of these (*How*) questions are productive sites of reflection to think more broadly about what it means to know the world and critique who asks the questions. How are the boundaries around problems drawn and defined? In what ways are dialogues across musics and related

disciplines facilitated? What languages and tools are being used? And what is the relationship between knowers and the known which emerges as a result in terms of change making and future making?

So, *how* can we respond to these calls? What role should this journal play? In which directions should it move so as to not confine but rather encourage new and innovative ways of producing new knowledges and making visible high-quality research, with impact on knowledge-making practices? *How* can it illustrate and inspire change and future-making while representing the current state of debates in music(s) education?

We conclude with an invitation to contribute – via Special Issue proposals, (video) blogs, view-point papers – to advancing these themes we noted above and many more. As a community, let us open up to: (i) re-making music(s) education (in and through research), (ii) addressing impactfully why music education matters, and (iii) co-authoring new possibilities that lead to change. Let us reconfigure music education for future-making!

We look forward to hearing from you.

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Members of the MER Editorial Board

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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Pamela Burnard is professor of arts, creativities and educations, in the Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge (www.educ.cam.ac.uk/people/staff/Burnard/). She is an international expert in contemporary musics and creativities research and practice. She is a transdisciplinary teacher-educator-artist-academic-researcher-consultant who has published widely 20 books and over 100 articles which advance the theory and practice of multiple creativities across education sectors including early years, primary, secondary, further and higher education, through to creative and cultural industries. She is co-editor of the journal *Thinking Skills and Creativity*. Pamela's most recently published books include *Doing Rebellious Research in and Beyond the Academy* (2022, Brill-i-Sense), *Why Science and Arts Creativities Matter: (Re-)configuring STEAM for Future-Making Education* (Brill-i-Sense, 2020) and *Sculpting New Creativities* (Routledge, 2021). Her current research-council-funded projects include 'Choices, Chances and Transitions around Creative Further and Higher Education and CUMIN (Contemporary Urban Musics Inclusion Network)'. She is a Fellow of both the Royal Society of Arts (RSA) and Chartered College of Teaching, UK.

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Gwen Moore is director of teaching and learning and senior lecturer in music education at Mary Immaculate College, Limerick. Gwen provides strategic leadership in the development of teaching, learning, assessment and feedback at institutional level. She teaches on the MA in Music Education and supervises postgraduate research students. Gwen serves on several international editorial boards including: *International Journal of Music Education*, *Music Education Research*, *Journal of Popular Music Education*, *Frontiers in Education (Teacher Education)* and *Irish Educational*

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