Struggling with good intentions: Music education research in a “post” world

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Abstract
In this Perspectives article, the author grapples with the personal challenges of attempting to do ethical and high-quality research in the post world of the maturing 21st century. Among the challenges addressed are matters of purported relevance of research, equity research conducted by nonmembers of equity-seeking groups, the impact of rankings and metrics, peer review, and the relationship between good intentions and symbolic violence.

Keywords
expertise, higher education, music education, research, social justice

Producing excellent research involves a struggle.

— Estelle Jorgensen

In a Facebook post in spring 2021, Research Studies in Music Education (RSME) editor Julie Ballantyne noted that RSME had climbed to Number 3 on the SCImago Journal Rankings page for music (behind only IEEE Signal Processing Magazine and Psychology of Music). This is an impressive accomplishment—one that speaks to a whole host of factors, such as the decisions of authors to submit to RSME rather than another journal, the journal curating an editorial board that reflects a “progressive” rather than “conservative” orientation, editorial decisions that match manuscripts with appropriate reviewers, and so on. Good reputations are not built by accident. At the same time, I cannot help but notice the criteria by which these rankings (and others like them) are determined, and how they help to create a self-reinforcing kind of “knowledge hegemony.” I have never claimed to be a philosopher or an historian, but I do have interests in philosophy and history. If journal rankings represent the best research, does my research published in music journals not at the top of such lists (such as those that specialize in philosophical topics, like Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education or Philosophy of Music Education Review) not count as good research?
When it comes to “good” music education research, I would like to believe that my ideas about it are wholly my own. And yet, when I re-read Estelle Jorgensen’s body of work on the topic (e.g., Jorgensen, 2008, 2009a, 2009b), I am reminded that I eagerly devoured her every word when it was first published—most of it at a time that coincided with my doctoral studies, when I was wrestling with the issue of what it meant to do good (let alone excellent) research in music education. Read in 2021, Jorgensen’s perspicacity remains on full display. And yet, there are some things, such as the disruptive influence of social media and “algorithms” (not to mention a pandemic) that Jorgensen and others could not anticipate. To claim change as inevitable may be aphoristic, but I would argue that events of the past five or so years have had an unprecedented impact on the practice of research (let alone everything else in daily life).

I am grateful that RSME has revived the “Perspectives” feature. Lately, I have been struggling with the ideal of research in the context of my own privilege and intentions. I suspect (or at least hope) I am not the only one. I was originally going to name this piece “Music Education in a Post-Pandemic World.” A Google search, however, revealed countless articles and blog posts with similar titles. Upon further reflection, I realized that a good part of what I have been grappling with in research isn’t the result of just one thing: it’s a combination of many things (e.g., post-modernism, post-structuralism, post-humanism, post-colonialism, post-internet, post-race, post-gay, post-truth, and post-pandemic). My hope is that this article can catalyze conversations between scholars fluent in navigating our post-post-post world and those of us struggling to keep up.

In what follows, I begin by sharing my “crisis of confidence” about the research and publishing enterprise arising from growing calls to decolonize and indigenize the university. I then make an epistemological move, suggesting that long-standing theory-practice (or research-practice) dichotomies may be a root cause of my struggles, because claims to “relevance” are, at heart, part and parcel of the Whiteness problem. Next, I argue that the institutional reward and punish system, predicated upon a latent “science” hegemony, serves to further militate against equity-seeking efforts (such as decolonizing and indigenizing). In other words, with a few notable (though perhaps growing) exceptions, the system seems to reward those who stick to the positivist playbook. I then problematize the motives and actions of those who dare to conduct equity-related research. Revisiting the problem of epistemology, I throw a wrench into the conversation by questioning the entire research enterprise: what is the point of research when the value of truth has disappeared? I conclude with some introspective observations on my own research intentions and activities within the context of (a) inexorable publish or perish machinations that reward quantity over quality, and (b) my place of privilege relative to “good intentions.”

We’re not in Kansas anymore

Recent initiatives aimed at decolonizing and indigenizing—generally speaking, but especially with respect to higher education—have arguably raised awareness in unprecedented ways about our too-often unquestioned acceptance of structural relations in the world. Given that I, like many readers of this journal, work in tertiary (higher) education, my awareness of decolonizing and indigenizing mostly reflects academic and educational contexts. I took an excellent “decolonizing education” course during my PhD studies in the early 2000s where I was exposed to the work of Fanon, Bhabha, Said, Spivak, Smith, and many other foundational names in what has become the field of decolonial studies. Regrettably, while the experience had a profound impact on me, the idea of decolonizing (and decoloniality) had not yet become normalized and I regarded what I learned at the time as just another knowledge area rather than
something to be lived (see Tuck & Yang, 2012). What has changed of late for me is my growing awareness of my own complicity. For example, every time I publish, I do so knowing I have participated in systems of oppression (see Kallio, 2020). Not only do I enact and sustain my privilege as an able-bodied, settler, straight, White, middle-aged, middle-class male, but I help to perpetuate the publish or perish machinations of higher education that many argue are at the heart of the colonial project.

In addition to my own growing awareness of decolonizing and indigenizing the university, I have found myself participating in several conversations—both research-related and otherwise—with a focus on equity issues. Such conversations are hardly new, of course, but, at least as I have experienced life of late, these conversations have taken on a greater energy, presence, and momentum. I am usually a passive participant in these conversations, as I am reluctant to speak. First, I have become quite sensitive to “voice.” If I speak, I take up space and become part of the problem that the conservation is seeking to address. Second, I live in constant fear that the words that come out of my mouth will be offensive, racist, insensitive, or otherwise oppressive. At the same time, I simultaneously fear that by not saying anything I appear arrogantly aloof (i.e., privileged), as if I am not interested in participating in the conversation. These experiences, in combination with the growing chorus to decolonize and indigenize, have caused me to question everything I do these days (which I regard positively) but have also left me feeling paralyzed when it comes to research and scholarship.

I didn’t always feel this way about publishing. There was a time (not so long ago, really) when I felt I was part of a noble enterprise—one that existed to serve “the profession” by generating knowledge with the potential to help “improve” practice. In my conceit, I believed that, having spent quite a number of years in the classroom, I was bringing to my research a kind of authenticity missing from a lot of extant research. I had “been there, done that.” Unlike many other music education researchers, I thought, I was offering something grounded in “experience.” That my experience was almost entirely located in White, middle-class settings that lacked awareness of anything or anyone beyond their White, patriarchal, heteronormative, middle-class existence seemed to have escaped my notice. To my mind, practice was practice. Ergo, my research had street cred because I understood the “realities” of the (White) classroom.

“[In my experience]”

My struggles with research and scholarship in the 21st century continue to take many forms. A long-standing one is the old saw of theory versus practice—as if any practice could ever be atheoretical or that “doing theory” isn’t also a practice. The ongoing belief, seemingly disproportionately popular among school music teachers, that theory is removed from the reality of the classroom (and therefore not relevant because, after all, music is just music) raises many questions, not the least of which being how teachers come to hold such beliefs. What does this say about the process of music teacher education, for example? Are music teacher educators genuinely teaching in, with, and through theory but graduates refuse to embrace theoretical thinking? Or do many music teacher educators enact (through the hidden curriculum, perhaps) an ongoing view that teacher preparation (and perhaps graduate education) is primarily a matter of atheoretical “competencies”?

My own (hardly original) “theory” about music teachers refusing to acknowledge theory is that it allows patriarchy, Whiteness, and the colonial project to continue under the veil of universalism. The atheoretical “view from nowhere” (or “view from everywhere”) gives the impression that knowledge is foundational and absolute. Theory is not needed because reality is not constituted by perspective but is self-evident and common-sense. To acknowledge theory is to
accept a provisional and relativistic stance that might be used to challenge privilege. Theory thus represents a threat that must be minimized by regarding it as subservient to practice—that is, experience. And as most “experience” is male and White, practices laden with relations of power can continue to appear innocent and apolitical. It’s just music, after all.\(^\text{10}\)

It is not as though the idea of an alleged theory-practice dichotomy is new. No doubt many a music education faculty member has railed against the supposed disconnect between theory and practice over the years. Alas, if only more people would read Jorgensen’s (2005) interrogation of theory and practice (and the response pieces by Randall E. Allsup and W. Anne Stokes in the same journal issue), which she articulates in terms of dichotomy, polarity, fusion, and dialectic.\(^\text{11}\) It could be, of course, that the dichotomizing of theory and practice is simply a conflation of “theory” and “research,” and the claimed disconnect between theory and practice is better understood as a general antipathy toward research due to its perceived irrelevance.\(^\text{12}\)

One of the problems with relevance, however, is that it is relative. There is an unfortunate circularity to the relevance argument. For example, if music education research (and theorizing) aims to be relevant to “practitioners” (i.e., school music teachers) who just happen to be predominantly White (as they are in most English-speaking countries), then research that does not reflect the lived experiences of practitioners or does not conform to their existing view of the world will be viewed as irrelevant. Hence, even research questions that are seemingly benign, such as those so eloquently posed by Jorgensen (2008), can help to reinforce hegemonic perceptions of relevance. Research into the “nature and value of music” (Reimer, 2003, p. ix) that can appear so common-sense (doesn’t music have a nature and value? Don’t we all love music?) unwittingly helps to sustain views among music teachers that posit music as a universal, as if everyone does it and understands it the same way. “Music teaching and learning” thus inevitably become oriented around cognition. Despite the efforts of Lev Vygotsky, music teaching and learning become thought of as biological (i.e., universal) rather than sociological phenomena. The upshot is that “in my experience” becomes a two-headed monster. Because music teachers supposedly already know what music to teach and how to teach it, it renders “theory” (i.e., research) unimportant or irrelevant, especially if it doesn’t support what they already believe. At the same time, it marginalizes experiences outside the dominant paradigm so that, for example, equity research (e.g., Benedict, 2021; Bradley, 2007; Hess, 2018b; Rosabal-Coto, 2019; Spruce et al., 2015; Talbot, 2018) is, by definition, irrelevant because it does not relate to the White “realities of the classroom.”

What’s your score?

One of the most impactful utterances I encountered during my doctoral studies came from an English professor, who, during a workshop on grant application writing, said, “Why would you want to publish in a journal you don’t read?” I have thought about this often over the years. On one hand, the idea of regularly reading specific journals has, I suspect, become an anachronism. In the digital age, print copies are becoming dinosaurs, and I suspect many scholars (myself included) tend to read articles, usually in digital form, not journals. Who has time to regularly read one journal, let alone multiple journals? On the other hand, what the English professor was trying to get us to understand was that publishing for publishing’s sake is to miss the point of publishing, which is not to add lines to one’s CV, but to participate in an ongoing scholarly conversation. To publish in a journal that one doesn’t read might arguably “contribute to knowledge” in some generic sense, but it raises questions about the coherence and purpose of one’s work.
An operating assumption behind the existence of journals is that they exist for specific “interpretive communities” (Fish, 1980). If they didn’t, the world would only need one journal. The veritable explosion of academic journals in the past 20 to 30 years presumably speaks to matters of demand and inexorable specialization. Niche journals, in other words, serve specialized interpretive communities. Hence, the creation of journals such as *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* or *International Journal of Community Music* speaks to a perceived need for journals serving needs presumably not adequately met in existing, less-specialized journals. This does not mean that all academics in music education should restrict their activities to narrow specializations. Ours is a relatively small field, and some of us enjoy participating in multiple conversations. All in all, this sounds like a relatively positive development.

If it were only that simple. The social Darwinism of the neoliberal machine helps to ensure the privileging of some knowledge (i.e., some journals) over others. Like other “innocent” algorithms with material effects, the crude measurements of Google Scholar citation counts and ResearchGate scores, in combination with faculty evaluation systems that defer to the simplicity of such measures, unwittingly fuel a system where academics are rewarded and punished not so much by what they publish, but where they publish. I experienced this firsthand when I co-published, with my speech pathologist sister, a study of a sing-along program for people with aphasia and their caregivers (Mantie-Kozlowski, et al., 2018). This one study (published in *Aphasiology*) boosted my ResearchGate score more than multiple other published music education articles put together. This experience helped me to better understand why peers on ResearchGate with a relatively small or similar record of publications compared with mine have scores that are far higher. If you want a high score, you must publish in the right journals (which tend to be *medical* rather than *social* in orientation). Journal reputation (or “eminence”) is not a recent phenomenon (Hamann & Lucas, 1998; Standley, 1984; Yarbrough, 2016), but what seems different today is the bluntness and disproportionate power of metrics (see, for example, Hancock, 2015). Whereas a journal like *Philosophy of Music Education Review* may be considered *niche*, it is difficult to imagine how anyone who has read the journal could not see it as a high-level publication (despite only currently ranking as #106/156 on the SCImago Journal Rankings page for music). For those who value Google Scholar citation counts and ResearchGate scores and are unfamiliar with the journal’s rigor, however, *Philosophy of Music Education Review* is unlikely to be regarded in a positive light.

One of the issues raised by rankings exercises is that they tend to devalue the perceived importance of equity research. I am not suggesting that equity research in music education is not (or cannot be) published in journals with the potential to boost citations and impact scores, but rather that the journals with the biggest scoring “impact” (e.g., *Psychology of Music*) tend to reflect a medical or “science” (i.e., positivist) orientation. It is not impossible for equity research to appear in so-called high-impact journals, but (a) “hard science” journals (synonymous, it seems, with high impact) tend to reflect disciplinary concerns predicated on a kind of universalism at odds with the particularity that lies at the heart of equity work, and (b) processes of social reproduction, whereby editorial boards (i.e., reviewers) consist of researchers and scholars that reflect and sustain the values of the hard science journals, help to ensure that research and scholarship on equity matters rarely make it into the pages of such journals. The bottom line is that placing one’s research agenda eggs in an equity work basket would seem to be a sure-fire way to ensure one’s “scores” are lower than those who research such things as measuring emotional experience in music or how piano players self-regulate. Then again, at the time of writing, the two most read/downloaded articles on RSME’s website were Juliet Hess’s (2019) “Singing our own song: Navigating identity politics through activism in music” and Alexis Kallio’s (2020) “Decolonizing music education research and the (im)possibility of
methodological responsibility”—both of which explicitly deal with equity-related matters. Perhaps things are beginning to change.

**Can you say that?**

But then there is the issue of anyone not from an equity-seeking group publishing on equity topics. Anyone who has listened to Ta-Nehisi Coates so eloquently explain the problems of Whiteness and entitlement (e.g., “on words that don’t belong to everyone” [Random House, 2017]) hopefully appreciates how the presumption of White scholars being allowed to research and write on anyone and everything—as if, under the guise of academic freedom and good intentions, nothing should be off-limits to them—is part and parcel of the very problems that equity researchers seek to address. Not that the motives of equity researchers not from equity-seeking groups aren’t well-intentioned, but perhaps not all areas of research do belong to everyone. This certainly seems to be the view of the self-appointed guardians of social justice morality, who mobilize social media to excoriate the motives and/or legitimacy of anyone not from an equity-seeking group who dares publish on equity topics.¹⁶ Not that we scholars should put stock in social media comments—and as academics we do have to be held accountable for the work we publish—but is there not just a little hypocrisy in people passing judgment based on assumptions about an author’s positionality before even reading their work? Is not the logical extension of the argument that only women can discuss gender equality, only non-White authors can discuss race-based equality, only 2SLGBTQI+ authors can discuss sexuality, only disabled authors can discuss disability, and so on?

A counterargument to the “only the equity-seeking can research equity” position is that the interests and concerns of equity-seeking groups are ultimately better served by generating as much published scholarship as possible, regardless of who is doing the publishing.¹⁷ Many disciplines are currently grappling with this dilemma. (Two examples in music education of very thoughtful problematization are Hess (2018a) and Kallio (2021).) If disciplines are historical constructions—that is, they come into being when enough coherent knowledge is recognized and legitimized—then it is to the advantage of equity-seeking groups to have as much published scholarship as possible on a topic to play into the power-knowledge game (even if non-members of equity-seeking groups happen to benefit along the way).¹⁸ To wit: if, for example, White music education researchers don’t publish on race-based equity and there aren’t enough non-White researchers in music education to generate critical mass, race-based concerns will never warrant the academic legitimacy of such things as citation counts and impact scores, let alone the dedicated university courses, programs, departments, and so on that are necessary for disrupting structural inequalities. To leave the burden of legitimizing knowledge in the equity sphere (race-based and beyond) strictly to members of equity-seeking groups is, according to this logic, to abdicate ethical responsibility and doom equity goals to failure. But maybe music education has already achieved critical mass on equity matters and such research can be left solely to those from equity-seeking groups? (If true, this has escaped my notice.)¹⁹

Then there is the awkward issue of self-assessed competence in peer review. In my own case, I have been doing more than 20 reviews per year of late.²⁰ None of us is an expert on everything. Editors do their best to send manuscripts to reviewers with the perceived ability to make an informed appraisal. From time to time, however, I receive manuscripts that I feel exceed my ability to offer a professional review. In such cases, I send the editor an apologetic note, usually with one or two suggestions of reviewers I feel would be better suited to the task. Recently, though, I have been receiving an increasing number of manuscripts dealing with equity research and scholarship. It is one thing to feel unable to review a manuscript due to
insufficient methodological knowledge, but it is quite another when placed in the position of passing judgment on matters of equity. Do I have any business reviewing such manuscripts? On one hand, I have always tried to be a supporter of equity-seeking groups. If anything, I suspect I may be overly biased in adjudicating in favor of a manuscript dealing with equity-related matters. On the other hand, what happens when I think a manuscript—say one dealing with anti-Black racism, for example—isn’t good enough? Do I become part of the White gatekeeping mechanism preventing such scholarship from being published? How can I be sure that my judgment isn’t colored by racial bias? How can my conception of good research not be defined by my Whiteness? On what grounds can I possibly reject an equity-research manuscript without sustaining injustice?

Does research even matter anymore?

Then there is the question of whether there is even a point to the research we do. Setting aside the uncomfortable matter of who is actually reading any of the research and scholarship published these days, and the unfortunate situation where school teachers so often disregard research as irrelevant because the only thing that matters is their direct experience, we are now living in a post-internet world where everyone is empowered to express their opinion and a post-Trump world where everyone is free to disregard anything with which one disagrees as “fake news.” Patrick Schmidt (2021) discusses this (among many other things) in terms of vocality—“utterance as participation”—where the “speech of the many feels performative and thus potentially empowering but is easily deprived of its power” (pp. 30, 33; emphasis in original).

It has been more than 50 years since the publication of Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann’s (1966) *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. One is left to wonder about the reality in which we now live. I have long-embraced the anti-foundationalists’ sentiments behind social constructionism, but anti-foundationalism, as I understand it, does not mean abandoning a fundamental commitment to the idea that, whatever kind of knowledge and reality game this is to be, everyone has to agree that the game needs rules for it to qualify as a game. We can argue over what game to play and what the rules should be (and how they should be interpreted), but without a commitment to the principle of shared rules we are left with nothing but “might makes right.”22 Putting a twist on the words of Thrasymachus in *Plato’s Republic*, we might say today it is not only justice, but truth and reality that are in the interest of the stronger. Perhaps they always have been.

Two points bear noting. First, there is a fundamental difference between attempting to sway perceptions and opinions through strategic rhetorical strategies that abide by the basic game of truth and the wholesale abandoning of civil discourse by refusing to accept as real all things with which one disagrees by describing them as fake.23 Second, the credibility of authority has been undermined to the point where all opinions are considered equal and there is no longer a conceptual distinction between opinion and fact—a condition Schmidt describes as the “banalization” of truth (personal communication, August 9, 2021).24 As a result, there is no base source of knowledge or reality to which any disagreeing parties can appeal for arbitration. To avoid truth being reduced to power or the epistemological infinite regress problem of “it’s turtles all the way down,” there must come a point where we agree that some things constitute facts, truth, and reality and some things do not. Otherwise, there is simply no point to research or expertise.

When teaching epistemology in graduate classes I used to illustrate with the example of believing in spiritual entities versus believing in ghosts. Why is one acceptable to most people
and the other unacceptable to most people? Using Michel Foucault (1988), it was relatively
easy to describe how the dividing line between reason and unreason often reduces to common
acceptance. But herein lies the rub: acceptance of anything that does not conform to what one
already believes depends on acknowledging what Vygotsky called the “more knowledgeable
other” Vygotsky (1978). In the good old days, peer-reviewed research used to constitute a form
of the more knowledgeable other. Today, however, knowledge has been “democratized” and all
opinions are to be equal. Old-style expertise (i.e., that of more knowledgeable others) is consid-
ered undemocratic and elitist (if not also “White”). In an odd and unfortunate twist, decolo-
nial/indigenizing calls for epistemological pluralism empower the argument: there are many
ways of knowing; you have yours and I have mine.

I am a huge fan of epistemological pluralism, especially with respect to cross-cultural differ-
ence. But I am troubled by the idea—one fueled by the demons of liberalism, egalitarianism,
and meritocracy—of a pluralism reduced to the unit of the individual. Those who peddle in
oppression find in individualism the perfect tool for erasing difference and the possibility for col-
lective action. And although the populism of individualism has the sheen of empowerment,
history (including very recent history) provides multiple examples of how it inevitably gives rise
to demagoguery. In a world ruled by discoverability and spreadability and influencers—one
where Facebook “likes” can, quite literally, be bought and sold on the open market—truth is not
a function of science, but a function of the megaphone.

Lest I be misunderstood, I am not suggesting that research is a capital “T” truth game.
Research, in the social sciences especially, is a game of opinion like other games of opinion. The
difference, for me at least, is that academic research and scholarship should distinguish them-
selves from other forms of opinion by their commitment to the idea of a more knowledgeable
other. This does not mean reification or unquestioned acceptance of opinion, as critique and
skepticism are central to good research and scholarship, but a commitment to a pursuit guided
by dialogue over monologue, evidence over assertion, and an ego-less desire to contribute to
knowledge. We all have egos, of course, and I am in no way suggesting that research is or can
be value-free. The choice to study this rather than that is a political decision, in effect if not also
in intent. I do wonder, however, what happens to research when the line between inquiry and
advocacy become blurred. When the outcome has been decided before the study has launched,
and the quest for understanding is reduced to proselytizing one’s cause, what really distin-
guishes research from the actions of the former US president? We could claim our altruistic
good intentions, but so can those on the radical right (“you have your values and I have mine”).

**Good intentions?**

Pressures faced by faculty today are enormous. The neoliberal university’s demand for produc-
tivity—determined almost exclusively on the basis of quantity rather than quality—leads to a
situation where scholars and researchers, especially those “pre-tenure,” feel they have no
choice but to “pump it out” (i.e., publish or perish). The brutality of the current tenure up-or-
out system gives rise to at least two problems, however. First, there is a cost to pumping it out—
one born not only by those having to work unrelentingly to publish article after article, but also
by those who review all the submissions, whose uncompensated labor continues to prop up the
entire enterprise. Maybe what is needed is some sort of accounting system whereby faculty
members must document their peer-reviewing work, demonstrating that, from year 5 onward
(for example), they must complete at least two reviews for every one published article or book
chapter—that is, if you have 10 publications, you need to complete 20 peer reviews. Second,
the ratio of reading to writing goes askew when one is focused on pumping it out. Any time I
spend writing (or peer-reviewing) is time that I am not reading. Not that reading is a guarantee of high-quality work, but a lack of reading is almost certain to lower the overall quality.

The road to hell is paved with good intentions, they say. Indeed, more lives have likely been lost due to good intentions than nefarious ones. This is, I suspect, because intentions speak to motive rather than effect. Some instances of colonization, for example, were rationalized as “civilizing” those pejoratively described as “savages.” Based on an unwavering belief in the Christian faith, colonists and missionaries were “saving” Indigenous peoples. Never mind that being saved very often had material effects of genocide; what mattered were the good intentions.

I wrote this Perspectives article because I sensed I could not be the only person in music education struggling to do research and scholarship in our post-post-post world. What used to seem—to me, at least—so straightforward (i.e., do good research to improve music education) is now anything but. Is it acceptable to use my privilege and position to work toward equity-seeking goals in my research and scholarship if this simultaneously increases my privilege and position through professional advancement? Is this a form of appropriation? Or is it better for me to ignore equity-related goals so that any potential professional advancement I may enjoy does not accrue from the experiences of others? Is the ultimate act of resistance for every able-bodied straight White male with tenure to stop publishing to create additional space for others? (Or would the shapeshifter of oppression simply find other ways to sustain inequalities, negating such efforts?)

Perhaps I should stop publishing. But here is the problem: I—like many others in academia, I suspect—really enjoy research and scholarship. I don’t do it because I have to (the requirements of my annual activity report notwithstanding), but because I want to. I really do not want to stop. Given everything that has transpired in our post-post-post world, however, I am filled with doubts. I really do not know what the idea of research excellence means anymore. I cannot shake the uneasy feeling that every word I write is potentially a form of symbolic violence (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). I also worry about over-publishing—or more precisely, publishing trivial work. I do not want to waste people’s time (editors, reviewers, readers) with work I have not labored over and thought long and hard about. Moving forward, I want to try to publish less, but publish better (assuming this is even possible), a task I believe will require me to listen more and speak less. Which reminds me: there are a few good books I have been meaning to read . . .

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Notes
1. Jorgensen (2009b, p. 418).
2. Note the category “music,” not “music education.”
3. I recognize there are “researchers” who conceive of a hard boundary between research and scholarship. From their perspective, doing history or philosophy simply does not count as research (because analyzing printed text doesn’t qualify as doing research but analyzing an interview transcript does?). That Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education does not currently appear on the SCImago Journal Rankings certainly raises questions.
4. Many universities (and other institutions, organizations, and businesses concerned with their “image”) have engaged in what many commentators call “virtue signaling,” “performative wokeness,” and “the politics of self-congratulation”—that is, they attempt to cultivate what they perceive as a desired public image as part of a phenomenon Derrick Bell (1980) has described as “interest convergence.” Juliet Hess provided an incisive critique of this at the 2021 International Symposium on the Sociology of Music Education in her paper, “The Surge Toward ‘Diversity’: Interest Convergence and Performative ‘Wokeness’ in Music Institutions.”

5. The idea of complicity is not new. On White complicity, see Barbara Applebaum (2010).

6. The daily news reminds me that there are places, such as some states in the United States, with their efforts to make the teaching of critical race theory illegal, or countries with right-leaning, authoritarian governments, which differ radically from what I experience in Toronto.

7. I am not claiming to be victimized, but I am haunted by the words of Robin DiAngelo (2018) in White Fragility: “By positioning themselves as the victim of antiracist efforts, [white people] cannot be the beneficiaries of whiteness” (p. 109).

8. That old William James line about picking up rocks in a field comes to mind.

9. With literary flair, Donna Haraway (1988) describes this phenomenon as the “conquering gaze from nowhere” (p. 581).

10. I should add that feminists have drawn attention to how theorizing has often been based predominantly if not exclusively on male experience—the most obvious example in education arguably being Gilligan’s (1982) response to Lawrence Kohlberg’s stages of moral development.

11. Jorgensen’s (2005) article is a superb follow-up to her earlier fine work on theory and practice (Jorgensen, 2001).

12. I still remember being enraptured by David Myers’s keynote at the Research in Music Education Conference in 2007 (subsequently published in Music Education Research Myers, 2008), where he criticized the field of music education research, speaking of “limited visions of relevance” and “meanings of relevance” (p. 4). One of my favorite lines of Myers is, “Too much research in music education continues to test the theory that teaching people something using a reasonably defensible method generally results in learning” (p. 8).

13. It is not all positive, however. One of the unfortunate effects of specialized journals is that it allows existing nonspecialized journals to justify their rejection of topics not deemed “suitable” for their journal’s aims and purposes, thus leading, in some cases, to marginalization. The Journal of Research in Music Education, for example, has not published many philosophical articles since the introduction of alternative journals (Yarbrough, 2016). Another unfortunate effect is that specialization risks the echo-chamber effect, whereby journals end up affirming rather than informing.

14. It should be noted that the “eminence” literature in music education to date has focused almost exclusively on American journals (which are, unsurprisingly, reported as being the most eminent).

15. RSME excepted, of course. I put impact in scare quotes because I often feel there is, in education at least, an inverse relationship between impact scores and actual impact on scholarly thought. According to Google Scholar, for example, Bennett Reimer has been cited more than 6,000 times. I suspect, however, that his ResearchGate score would not be overly high because he published very little in the right journals. I am also reminded of Philip Alperson, whom I recall telling a conference audience that one way to boost citations is to say something outrageous or controversial. Citation counts don’t mention why you are being cited.

16. One of my personal favorite rhetorical techniques is where people reply to shared posts with the preface, “I haven’t read it yet, but in my opinion . . .” Apparently people have enough time to post on social media, but not enough to read the things they are posting about. Then again, at least these responders are willing to admit not to have read the offending piece in question before pontificating at length.

17. Michel Foucault’s (1990; Foucault et al., 1980) power-knowledge thesis provides one way of thinking about this.

18. It is important to note that knowledge generation is not a zero-sum game. Unlike “scarce resource” situations, where one person’s gain is another person’s loss, a White scholar publishing on a
race-based equity topic does not “take away a spot” from a non-White scholar (although in conference submission situations this may hold true, as conference speaking slots are a scarce resource).

19. This is not to overlook the incredible work done by equity researchers in music education. My point is simply that equity research does not yet seem at a point where such work can (or should) be left solely to those from equity-seeking groups.

20. This amounts to around a hundred hours per year—hours I am not spending doing other things, such as my own research and scholarship. Perhaps I should do less peer-reviewing. (Or would this unfairly increase the workload on everyone else?)

21. I pondered this often during the countless hours I spent drafting this article.

22. By “principle of rules” I am not referring to “the rule of law.”

23. One is reminded of the Monty Python “Argument Sketch,” where debate is reduced to mere refutation. (“No, it isn’t.”) For those who value democracy, however, this becomes a very dangerous game, as the aftermath of the 2020 US election illustrates.

24. Schmidt and I share an appreciation of Hannah Arendt’s (1963) argument in *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*.

25. There are recent efforts (e.g., Publons) to recognize peer-reviewing work. Maybe some sort of system will catch on, but I’m not holding my breath.

26. DiAngelo (2018) writes, “emphasizing intentions over impact . . . privileges the intentions of the aggressor over the impact of their behavior on the target . . . [This] tells victims that as long as there was no intention to cause harm, they need to let go of the hurt and move on” (p. 126). John McWhorter (2020), somewhat ironically, takes DiAngelo to task, writing, “Despite the sincere intentions of its author, the book diminishes Black people in the name of dignifying us” (n.p.).

27. Many examples could be cited, but I am thinking here of Canada’s horrific history of residential schools.

28. Should I not have written this Perspectives article?

29. There are alternative strategies, of course. One can “work with” members of equity-seeking groups and jointly publish. Regrettably, however, the university’s logic of “distribution of effort” in annual reporting is a zero-sum game where co-authorship effectively results in collaborative research receiving less “credit,” thus de-incentivizing such work.

30. Or, in the postcolonial positioning of Gayatri Spivak (1988), *epistemic violence*.

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