**Conservatism and Democratic Teaching Practices Among Pennsylvania Music Ensemble Teachers**

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Democratic teaching practices (DTP) in music employ student choice, critical pedagogy, community, and dialogue to educate students for citizenship in a pluralistic society (Allsup, 2007; Elliott, 2012). In a recent survey, Pennsylvania music educators reflected positive, conditional, and negative views regarding incorporating DTP in their ensembles (Fulcher, Gossett, Han, Shevock & Thornton, 2014, June). Further research seemed needed to explore possible reasons for these varied views, which this author investigated in the present study within the construct of conservatism.

Conservative global capitalism has been portrayed in opposition to democracy (Benedict, 2013), and research elucidating the relationship between conservatism and DTP seems crucial if researchers would better understand DTP in the U.S. *The purpose of this study was to examine the nature of the relationship between conservatism and democratic teaching practices among music ensemble educators.* How is *conservatism* related to ensemble teachers’ *DTP* in music ensembles?

The researcher employed a survey design to understand this possible correlation. Music ensemble teachers were identified using the Pennsylvania Music Educators Association directory. The questionnaire consisted of three sections, demographics, *Democratic Teaching Practices in Music Ensembles* (a researcher constructed tool) and *Conservatism* (Conservatism, n.d.). A Pearson’s *r* was calculated and there was a low, negative correlation (r = -0.24, p = 0.05) suggesting conservative music teachers may be slightly less likely to incorporate DTP. However, there was low reliability in the *Democratic Teaching Practices in Music Ensembles* tool (Alpha = 0.274), suggesting random chance might affect the findings.

* “Democracy, of course, is concerned with the effort to ensure the equal rights of all members of a given society… it is believed that schools are ideal ‘societies’ for fostering democracy… democracy is not an ideal to live by but an ongoing way of life” (Allsup, 2007, p. 52)
* Democratic teaching practices (as a praxis) can include critically reflective teaching, critical pedagogy, dialogue, student choice, and a focus on pluralism.
* Conservatism (as a sociological concept) in the U.S. is typified by support for Republican candidates, Christian fundamentalism, neoliberal economic reforms, and resistance to change.
* Hypothesis to be tested: Conservatism (among Pennsylvania ensemble teachers) will negatively correlate with democratic teaching practices.
* I piloted the tool, *Democratic Teaching Practices in Music Ensembles*, with 13 Idaho music ensemble teachers. It was reliable (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.651).
* However, the tool was not reliable with 228 Pennsylvania ensemble teachers in the main survey (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.274). Not a reliable tool (random noise/ chance).
* Low, negative correlation between conservatism and democratic teaching practices (r = -0.24, p = 0.05). Conservative music teachers may be slightly less likely to incorporate DTP.
* Gender differences were slight. Women were slightly less conservative and more likely to incorporate DTP than men.

References

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