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## Afterword

### **Present and future prospects of collaborative professionalism in music schools**

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#### **On living in times of crisis and rapid systems change: What we continue to learn from the COVID-19 years**

In this book, we have argued that collaborative professionalism is an ongoing and never-ending endeavour and that the struggle involved in collaborative efforts is worthwhile because collaboration and collaborative professional culture can support institutions, especially in challenging times. During the writing of this publication, times have indeed become considerably more difficult for all music education. Living conditions in Europe and around the world changed dramatically as the COVID-19 pandemic brought societies to a temporary halt and caused profound economic and social changes. During periods of lockdown, illness, fear, and social distancing, children and young people were particularly affected and suffered great psychological stress, the consequences of which can still be felt today and are likely to remain a concern in the years to come. Moreover, the existential threat of climate change affected many areas of society; for example, questions about sustainable transportation once more came to the fore as the effects of fewer face-to-face and more digital encounters and the associated reduced traffic became measurable, as well as the rapid backlash as soon as more extensive travel was possible again. Last but not least, growing political instability has led to uncertainty and polarisation not only in Europe but all over the world. Within Europe, war no longer seemed imaginable, yet we were confronted with it. Thus, many critical social, economic, and political issues have moved to the centre of public debate and become a concern for all citizens. At the time of writing, a large number of uncertainties continue to affect everyday life across the world.

This global situation that also has inevitable impacts on realities in music schools has made collaboration more complex and, at the same time, even more necessary. The pandemic and concurrent societal changes have affected music schools in their daily work and their strategic partnerships. Music school education means not only weekly lessons, alone, in

pairs or in groups, but above all making music together. During the pandemic, the social communities within the music school, the values of making music together, and the personal encounters were sorely missed not only by the music students but also by their teachers. As contact restrictions made teaching collaborations in schools in many countries harder or impossible, music schools and general schools had to find new ways to work together. Videos, online tuition, and blended learning became more frequent in music schools. Pozo et al. (2022) found that cooperative activities, especially those aiming at fostering cooperation between students, were the least common of all the types of activities during the COVID-19 lockdowns since teachers tended to use the information and communications technology they already knew before the pandemic. The results point toward the need for instrumental teachers and musicians to connect and learn from and with each other (López-Íñiguez et al., 2022) since the energy is directed to the field's own survival and resilience.

According to some research, some teachers have in fact collaborated perhaps more than ever while learning new ways to teach and use technology (Joseph & Lennox, 2021; Thorgersen & Mars, 2021). Thorgersen and Mars (2021) report that the COVID-19 pandemic created new collegial forums in which teachers could support each other by asking questions, sharing materials, solving educational problems, discussing working conditions, and letting off steam. Local and regional networks were identified as essential for these processes of change, with teacher respondents in one study (Aigner et al., 2021) reporting that their local colleagues, even though they taught different instruments, had been the most important source of support, followed by the teachers' own students. Facing an unexpected challenging situation together can therefore strengthen previously loose partnerships and networks or create new ones.

Consequently, the situation has been far from what Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018) describe as business as usual in which stressed and overworked teachers are tempted to resist collaboration and "hunker down and bury their heads in the sand, choosing to seclude themselves in their own classrooms rather than take the time to look around and see what their colleagues might be doing" (p. 20). This emerging collaborative culture can indeed "provide teachers with moral support, shared celebration and places where people can express and embed their very selves and identities" (Hargreaves, 1999, p. 48). In the same way, this book has addressed how collaboration can work and already did so in the context of music school research and practice before and even during the critical times of the pandemic.

However, this is also the time to remind ourselves of the societal and social power that music schools potentially have in their changing environments. Sudden crises may give birth to and even require activism towards

collaboration and the creation of collaborative organisational culture. As Watson (2021) writes, the crisis exemplified the perhaps undervalued potential of musical practices and art in times of crises:

Practicing what has been termed alternatively artistic activism, community-based art, and relational aesthetics, socially engaged artists and curators offer new and sometimes revolutionary responses to the world that seek to support communities and cultivate resilience ... By collaboration with others, we learn empathy and acceptance, and by studying objects and histories removed from our own personal experiences, we witness cultural diversity.

(p. 169)

### **On “professionalism”: some afterthoughts**

In this book, we have highlighted the benefits of the conceptual use of “professionalism” and “collaborative professionalism”. We have presented collaborative professionalism as a positive conceptual frame with occupational value and power for supporting the development of occupational identity and cooperation (see Hargreaves, 2000). We have also put forward the hope that “a mature profession takes a transformative view of teacher professionalism” (Sachs, 2016, p. 422) rather than a defensive stance when confronted with change. Sachs (2016) cites two features of a mature profession:

[First], teachers possess skills as producers and consumers of research; second, members of the profession must establish trust among and between various stakeholders and constituencies and be prepared to take risks in shifting boundaries that can act as impediments to change.

(p. 422)

We have aimed to strengthen both of these features of professionalism in music schools by encouraging and creating space for practitioners at music schools to publish insights from their developmental projects, and, by doing so, to encourage the field to take risks and reach beyond the established practices – in other words, to reach towards a transformative view of collaborative professionalism. For music school research, collaborative projects offer important opportunities to expand researchers’ views of the issues that are experienced as essential in the music school field, and further, to drive theoretical and methodological development that will improve and enrich understandings about what is involved in music school education; from micro-level learning processes or parental motives for encouraging children to study music to the social and structural systems

that shape life in music schools within and across different countries. Especially when partners hold different views and values, the dialogues and struggles inherent in collaborative work can favour more thoughtful and ethical ways of relating to and learning from each other. Through collaborative professionalism and in ways that resemble certain transdisciplinary approaches (Renn, 2021), practitioners and researchers can start to build a knowledge base which may be used in preparation for decisions that are ethically substantiated and – as far as possible – evidence-informed, collectively accepted, and practically applicable (pp. 5, 14).

The optimistic view of professionalism as a guiding framework in developing music schools and music education in general is of course not the only view. Some versions of professionalism can rightfully be seen as ideological, taking their pace from markets and neoliberal politics, and they can also be based on self-interested professional advocacy and monopolising control of work (e.g., Sachs, 2016). Particularly in everyday use, and unlike in this book, professionalism can be used to refer to the quality of one occupational group. Hence, as the book has hopefully demonstrated, we do not suggest collaborative professionalism as a new way of introducing standards for occupational work even when such professionalism is connected to policies that are concerned with the directions that contemporary societies are taking. Instead, we have wanted to promote practitioners' own occupational interests and "dreaming" of new practices in changing societies in which occupational change is accepted as unavoidable but in which teachers can also reach beyond any managerial control. Furthermore, we have also aimed to reach beyond such "practical professionalism" (Hargreaves & Goodson, 1996) that situates music school teachers' professionalism simply in the personal practical knowledge and subject expertise but neglects the way teachers can contribute knowledge, experience, and practical wisdom to broader issues in their communities and societies. We have hopefully succeeded in highlighting that music schools and teachers in music schools can, if they want and are given the space to do so, engage in the wider societal issues within their occupational realms and that they should not be treated simply as technicians who deal with presumably neutral musical knowledge.

### **Even small efforts matter**

We have emphasised that the growing complexity of the world requires music schools to reorganise themselves in order to deal with societal changes and shifting demands; a challenging task especially for music school leaders. It takes courage to examine and question institutional practices and beliefs and attempt something new while being willing to fail, learn, and try again. However, even small collaborative initiatives can lead to long-term significant changes and promote an increasingly collaborative

culture. The power of small efforts to pave the way to directions that cannot be fully imagined beforehand should on no account be underestimated. Powerful efforts are not necessarily totalitarian processes, and organisational changes rarely happen in complete agreement (Westerlund, 2021). Moreover, not everyone needs to do the same things: “the idea that you have to get everyone on board is a trap ... [but] you need a form of critical mass” (Reese, 2020, p. 13).

Collaborative initiatives emerge independently of hierarchical structures and can be conceived and developed bottom-up as well as top-down, some striving ambitiously for sustained collaborative professionalism, some revealing the strength and benefits of collaborative work perhaps for the first time. Whilst this volume only presents examples of “successes”, there are surely many more new and innovative practices and projects that may have failed but generated learning and will be visible in the future. The examples in this volume already show a broad conception of music schools’ opportunities and capabilities to engage with societal change through collaboration; however, there are still multiple fields and possibilities that were not elaborated in this volume, including collaborations with youth protection authorities, vocational schools, special-needs schools, orphanages, asylum camps, sheltered workshops, senior citizens’ homes, nursing homes, hospitals, arts institutions, theatre companies, museums, media companies, and more. The examples we have provided highlight inclusivity and democratic processes and thus involve a political element. Yet, they also show that collaborative efforts can grow out of music school teachers’ own work, intuitions, and experimentations while at the same time resonating with wider policy recommendations.

This book would not have been possible without the large number of people who have been preparing the ground in practice and research for a great many years. European music school models have emerged or have been established to promote strong and sustainable music education in various ways, to prepare future students for diverse and challenging music studies, to strengthen regional cultural scenes and traditions, and above all to support children and young people in finding their personal approaches to music. In this way, European diversity has led to a rich and varied landscape of music school systems that operate in different contexts and under different policies but share one thing in common: they nurture communities of teachers and leaders who have dedicated their professional lives to music and music education. It is thanks to all these people that we have been able to bring together threads that had been started and bundle some of them in this publication – and to put European music schools at the heart of a major international anthology for the first time.

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