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The Language of Music

Writing Assignment #2

As I opened the doors, the warmth of the heating unit in the building gently hits my face. The somewhat tacky burgundy colored furniture looks pretty comfy to sit in, and the dim lighting makes for a very peaceful environment. There are several different noises in the background such as: beating drums, the sounds of different instruments, the talk of music theory classes, ear training, and music literature, and the talk of the new building by the professors. What are these conversations about music theory, and ear training? Why it is none other than the language of music.

For my field research I wanted to explore the literacy that was the music building here on campus. There are many different texts involved with the music building. There are two huge bulletin boards by the office that has various announcements, rehearsal times and schedules, and flyers for teaching opportunities and various performances and events. There is also a welcome sign with different events and the dates and times of those events. I find this to be a very organized way to keep things. During marching season the director would always tell us to “check the board” to help us know what is going on with the different rehearsals and stuff. There are also different music books like books for music literature class, books for ear training, sheet music, and tons of other different things in the library of the building. Barton and

Hamilton define literacy as a social practice. They state that “within a different culture, there are different literacies associated with different domains of life” (47). There are many different literacies that you can observe while sitting in the lobby of the music building. What you hear depends on where you sit. For instance, when I sat near the rehearsal hall, I could hear the jazz band in rehearsal. I must say they were playing some very cool sounding music. I could also hear the choir rehearsing in the recital hall. Now when I sat near the downstairs office, I could hear the directors talking to prospective students about the program and the new music building, and I could also hear many people that were in the practice rooms hammering away at some music. There are also a ton of music student talking about classes like music theory, ear training, string methods and music literature. They are using words that I have never heard before like “hemiolas” and all kinds of other words in Latin or German.

I have been in band for 7 years, but in those years my knowledge of music was basic. Now that I’m in college I don’t have any music classes that teach me these things since I am biology major. So when I hear someone talking about ear training, music theory and different composers and stuff, I am totally in the clouds. Music theory is a study of fundamentals, chords, keys, voice leading, harmonic progression, inversions, cadences, phrases and periods. Music literature deals with the characteristics of musical sound, and the elements of music as found in the music of recognized composers including world music and technological changes. Ear training is the fundamentals of music through sight singing, ear training and the incorporation of movable solemnizations. All of this is totally something new to me. But I’ve discovered that this is the language that is music. A social practice usually connects all those

involved in it. When the bands get together and play music, we all come together to create something pretty amazing. It could be something like football for instance: all of the players on the field hold different positions and their roles are different, but they all come together and contribute to the certain play that is being run. The same could be said for music: people that play different instruments all come together with different parts of the song such as the melody, the counter melody, and the bass line, and they put it together to make the song.

Beverly Moss states in her article that a literacy event is when a group of people get together and a text is the center of that gathering. The text at the center of a band rehearsal is obviously the sheet music. Many students that play the same or different instruments come together in a rehearsal and put there different parts together to create music. The text of music is highly based on the gathering of the different bands and ensembles. I am involved in symphonic band. Many sections have split parts, for example, the clarinet parts have clarinet 1, clarinet 2, and clarinet 3. This is usually the same for the French horns, the trumpets, trombones, flutes and saxophones. In her article over literacy events in African-American churches, Moss states that the interactions inside the church have dialogic qualities. She basically means that when the preacher speaks to the congregation, they respond with like an “amen” or something. In music rehearsal, the interactions have dialogic qualities also. When the directors about the music, we respond to them by playing the music how they explain it and how they want it to be done. This dialogue is more of a cycle of social interactions. When one person speaks the others respond, and it continues until rehearsal is over. It is pretty much a never ending circle of interactions. The notes on a page are transferred into our instruments,

and our instruments transfer those notes into music. The music is a text all in itself because it tells a story.

The text used in the music culture is extremely important because it is the main way that the students interact with the professors and with each other. What they see on a page is different than what non-music students interpret it as. They may see the musical text as just random stuff on a page. If they didn't know even the simplest thing about music, then they may think that what we see doesn't make music at all. They probably don't understand the whole concept the transferring those random signs and symbols on a page in to music. To me music is an art form. In rehearsal my director makes that art come to life. Many band directors just direct time and it could get a little boring. But here, I have observed that the directors don't direct time. They direct the motion of the music, and that's exactly what they teach the music students in the program. As I sat in the lobby of the music building and I observed the students talking to the different music professors in the department, many of them were explaining how directing the motion of the music makes it seem different than just directing patterns of the music. This puts the true art form in the music. It helps the music come to life and tell a story. It turns the music into something more than random notes on a page. To me it helps the listener understand what story the song is trying to tell. Whether it's a sad one, a happy one, a scary one or maybe a love story, the director directs the shapes of the music to make it appealing. Directing shapes helps the musicians play the music with more feeling and emotion.

So what is the language that is music? Well it is the talk of music theory and ear training and the directing of patterns to make random signs on a page come to life. It is the unique

interaction between the directors, the students, and they're instruments. It's telling a story without words or pictures. It's the beating of drums, the playing of different instruments, all set to come together and create something great. Music is a unique art form that changes the life of many people, and the music department here is doing a great job teaching their students how to change lives.

Works Cited

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