

Reimagining Policy: Power, Problems, and Public Stories

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Abstract

The authors of various practitioner and scholarly documents suggest markedly contrasting understandings about the nature of “policy.” These divergent conceptions raise the question: What is at stake by understanding the nature of policy in one way as opposed to another? The purpose of this philosophical inquiry is to interrogate the nature of “policy” as it relates to music education and to question the values that do and might underlie and propagate through contrasting understandings of “policy.” Subsequently, I examine two aspects of policy, problem identification and meaning-making, that have gone largely unexplored in the arts education literature.

Using Foucault’s (1980) writings, I argue that power-laden policy texts often have the greatest impact not when they are mandated, but when they go unrecognized as common sense. I also advocate for the consistent use of the terms “policy texts” and “policy actions,” including as an alternative to the imbalanced designations of “soft policies” and “hard policies” (Jones, 2009). Drawing on Dewey (1927), arts educators might form “publics” around problems having consequences that they deem far-reaching, recurrent, and irreparable. Individual and collective political narratives, including what Ganz (2007) explains as “stories of self,” “stories of us,” and “stories of now,” can foster the meaningful connections necessary for forming “publics” who address pressing problems in arts education.

Keywords: policy, power, Foucault, Dewey, philosophy, narrative, music education

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The word “policy” is not uncommon in music education discourse. There exists an International Society for Music Education Commission on Policy: Culture, Education and Media and a Policy Area for Strategic Planning and Action (ASPA); this journal is entitled *Arts Education Policy Review*. Yet, the authors of various practitioner and scholarly documents suggest markedly contrasting understandings about the nature of “policy.”

Jones (2009) asserts the need to consider documents such as university admissions criteria and curricula, music teacher organizations’ activities, textbooks, sheet music publications, and music industry products as “soft policies.” Jones explains that while “soft policies” shape values and practices without coercion, “hard policies,” such as evaluations of teachers, use carrots and sticks to achieve specified results. For example, if a school has purchased a certain set of method books, then teachers will likely come to value the practices and repertoire within them. While arts educators can usually deviate from those texts without facing clear repercussions, many will still center their curricula on such “soft policies.” Conversely, those teachers who do not demonstrate the requisite student growth demanded by the “hard policy” of teacher evaluation may risk dismissal from their positions.

Kos (2010) goes further, calling policy “both text and discourse simultaneously” (p. 97), and Schmidt (2017) explains it as “formal or informal, obvious or subtle, soft or hard” (p. 12). Schmidt elaborates, “Policy is as much legislation as it is a set of practices, as much analysis as it is a disposition, as much a process as a set of outcomes” (p. 12). In marked contrast with Jones (2009), Kos’ and Schmidt’s more expansive definitions encompass not only texts but actions.

Alternatively, authors of the National Association for Music Education’s (NAfME) website imply that most if not all documents created by the music education community do not

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qualify as “policy.” Webpages entitled “Public Policy Hub” and “Public Policy Newsroom,” which house information on President Trump’s proposed budget and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESSA), demonstrate that their authors understand federal-level initiatives as “policy,” including those that have yet to become law (NAfME, 2017b). Yet, the organization’s webpages devoted to the National Standards and Model Cornerstone Assessments make no mention of “policy” (NAfME, 2017c, 2017d). The authors of the Framework accompanying the 2014 National Core Arts Standards go further, suggesting a clear distinction between the standards and policy. They write: “Teachers, students, parents, and decision makers all have a stake in the work of creating coherent standards that will shape policy and classroom practice” (State Education Agency Directors of Arts Education, 2014, p. 2); the standards “shape” policy, but they are not “policy.” Likewise, a reviewer from a prominent journal recently wrote: “Remember that the Model Cornerstone Assessments are not ‘policy’ they really are not intended as policy.”¹ The reviewer juxtaposed this comment with statements about the “adaptable” and “voluntary” nature of the Model Cornerstone Assessments, implying an understanding of “policy” antithetical to such qualities.

Common usage and scholarly definitions of “policy” do not necessarily provide further clarity. Authors of the *Oxford English Dictionary* define policy as “The art, study, or practice of government or administration; the conduct of public affairs; political science” (“Policy,” 2006). Similarly, in *Theories of the Policy Process*, Sabatier (2007) explains: “In the process of public policymaking, problems are conceptualized and brought to government for solution; governmental institutions formulate alternatives and select policy solutions; and those solutions get implemented, evaluated, and revised” (p. 3). In other words, policy involves governing bodies proposing solutions to perceived needs or problems.

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The authors of these definitions suggest that whether or not individuals interpret music standards and related documents as “policy” depends on the extent to which they understand groups such as NAFME and their constitutive committees as “governing institutions.” Although national organizations such as NAFME do not have the authority to mandate the adoption of documents such as standards, they can and do encourage state-level policymakers to require their use. As such, these texts may amount to what Sabatier (2007) calls “policy solutions” that local governing bodies adopt or adapt, but they may not necessarily constitute “policy” prior to their implementation.

Given these divergent understandings about the nature of “policy,” I wonder: What is at stake by understanding the nature of policy in one way as opposed to another? The purpose of this inquiry is to interrogate the nature of “policy” as it relates to music education and to question the values that do and might underlie and propagate through contrasting understandings of “policy.” Subsequently, I examine two aspects of policy, problem identification and meaning-making, that have gone largely unexplored in the arts education literature.

What’s in a Name?

While one might argue that the exact language surrounding a given text or set of ideas is unimportant, Schmidt (2009) asserts, “Language is the most important capital in the policy realm” (p. 43). For example, calling legislation “Obamacare,” as opposed to the “Affordable Care Act,” implies the handing over of control for health-related decisions to a politician. It follows that the presence of the term “policy,” or lack thereof, can also impact thinking and action. Understanding the nature of this influence necessitates investigating the power relations invoked when applying the term “policy” to certain documents, ideas, or practices and not to others.

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Drawing on Foucault's (1980) work, I explain power as a flow that circulates through and beyond individuals. Foucault writes, "[Power] is never localized here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth" (p. 98). Individuals do not possess power; rather, power exists in and through the changing relations that in part constitute them. Applying to Foucault's work to education, Ball (2013) asserts the need to explore specific instances of "relations entwining power and knowledge" and notes the importance of inserting the subject between power/knowledge (p. 15). For instance, calling oneself "teacher" may set certain power flows into motion, but it does not mean that the teacher holds permanent or even immediate control. Power circulates through the teacher to the extent that students and others identify her as having authority. The moment a student undermines the teacher's control, perhaps by walking out of the room or complaining to an administrator, power circulates away from that teacher, at least momentarily.

Power depends on and moves through language. Foucault (1980) explains that relations of power "cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse" (p. 93). As such, discourse related to "policy" furthers certain power relations while inhibiting others.

On the one hand, there may exist a risk in terming items "policy" because the term can imply an unchangeable mandate. As previously noted, authors such as Sabatier (2007) explain "policy" as involving governing bodies. Since such institutions usually have the capacity to prescribe consequences for those who do not abide by their dictates, regardless of whether or not there exist actual repercussions for deviating from a text, terming it "policy" may encourage individuals to endow it with added authority. Stated differently, the word "policy" involves a certain gravitas, providing its authors with greater power than its implementers. Take, for

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example, two teachers, one who conceives of curricula as “policy” and the other who does not. Both teachers consider it in students’ best interest to deviate from a district-wide curriculum and anticipate that they will face few, if any, consequences for doing so. Because of the power relations invoked by the word “policy,” the teacher who understands the curriculum as “policy” may feel more obligated than the other teacher to obey it rather than to adapt or dismiss it.

On the other hand, the term “policy” can imply something changeable and contingent. Since “policy” links problems with possible solutions, if individuals acknowledge that both dilemmas and available paths forward evolve over time, then they might understand “policy” as variable. For example, American teachers currently working under the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA), especially those who had previously taught under its immediate predecessor *No Child Left Behind*, likely understand it as a temporary set of power relations that will inevitably give way to new legislation and accompanying power dynamics. Likewise, to define a given set of music standards as “policy” enables educators to conceive of those standards as but one selected solution to contemporary needs rather than as a universal agreement applicable for all times and places. In short, the term “policy” may foster obedience, but it can also encourage acknowledgement of a text’s temporary and contingent nature.

While acknowledging the potential drawbacks of applying the term “policy” to texts that Jones (2009) calls “soft policies,”² I argue that the absence of such language can reinforce problematic assumptions that limit teachers’ autonomy and creativity. Circulating in conjunction with power relations, discourses produce and sustain what Foucault calls “regimes of truth,” ideas that come to constitute common sense in regard to specific institutions and activities (p. 133). Foucault argues that such “regimes of truth” distinguish the normal from the deviant. For example, Mantie (2012) utilizes Foucault’s writings to illuminate how music educators’

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changing discourses surrounding school wind bands legitimize certain practices while excluding others. He explains that although much of the original appeal of wind bands stemmed from them being “of the people, for the people,” as university bands sought to legitimize themselves through “art music in the manner of the orchestra,” K-12 music educators followed suit (p. 72). When individuals enact the discourse of a given discipline, contingent truths become unquestioned forces of normalization that influence thinking and action.

Regardless of whether or not individuals designate them “policy,” items ranging from assessments to method books propagate power-laden discourses. Often complementing or deriving from “hard policies,” these “soft policies” are not benign, apolitical, or inevitable. They do not just impact arts teaching and learning; they come to constitute teaching learning.³ Yet, absent the term “policy,” arts educators may find themselves accepting such documents as axioms. Through this acceptance, those ideas become not a “variety of truth” but a single “Truth” that defies interrogation and the consideration of markedly different alternatives. To deny such documents and ideas the gravitas associated with the term “policy” neglects the power relations that circulate through them and that in turn define arts educators and students.

When applied to texts such as curricula and the work of arts educators associations, the weight and significance of the word “policy” can assist teachers in understanding the profound impact that these documents can have on their thinking and action. Given that policies change over time, designating ideas as “policy” can also encourage awareness about the contingent nature of the discourses in which teachers work. This does not mean that calling a text policy brings it outside of a “regime of truth;” policy discourse still functions to promote certain ways of thinking and action while excluding others. Yet, applying the term “policy” to certain ideas may dissuade teachers from conceiving of them as universal, permanent, and unquestionable.

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If teachers generally face no direct consequences for deviating from certain “policies” such as curricula, then why not maintain Jones’ (2009) distinction between “hard policies” and “soft policies”? One could argue that teachers equating “soft” with malleable would reinforce the importance of terming specific documents “policy” while empowering themselves to adapt those documents to their local circumstances. While I agree that arts educators may at times find Jones’ distinction useful, its limits also necessitate acknowledgment.

Writing about Others, othering, and the problems of liberal democracy, Gould (2008) explains that dualisms always involve ranking and inferiorization. Through the power relations invoked by the language surrounding two seemingly equal terms (e.g., White and Black or heterosexual and homosexual), one term becomes “normal” and associated with more powerful relations than the other “deviant” term. Likewise, to distinguish between “hard” and “soft” policies creates an inequality between those two categories. While “soft” can imply malleability, it also suggests weakness and secondary status. Just as one may associate adjectives like “cute” and “friendly” with archetypal soft objects such as teddy bears, the term “soft” may encourage teachers to conceive of the policies connected to it as benevolent. Conversely, “hard” implies strength, stability, and influence. As such, distinguishing “soft policies” from “hard policies” propagates the assumption that the former are less impactful than the latter.

While one might argue that because “soft policies” lack mandates and formal enforcement processes, they rightfully deserve this lesser status, I contend that “soft policies” are often more influential than “hard policies.” As opposed to the overt carrots and sticks that police “hard policies,” the informal mechanisms that instill and propagate “soft policies” tend to go unnoticed because they take the form of subtle, commonplace interactions. Foucault (1980) explains:

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Relations of power are interwoven with other kinds of relations (production, kinship, family, sexuality) for which they play at once a conditioning and a conditioned role; these relations don't take the sole form of prohibition and punishment, but are of multiple forms. (p. 142)

For example, daily household relations propagating conceptions of fathers as authority figures and mothers as selfless caregivers may have greater impact on females' corporate or political aspirations than some forms of institutionalized sexism. This is not to say that addressing sexist aspects of corporate and political structures lacks value, but wide-scale changes also demand attending to power-laden relations within families and other intimate communities.

Likewise, the peer-to-peer power flows reinforcing pervasive "soft policies" can have a more profound effect on thinking and action than the rare administrative slap on the wrist for failing to follow a state-level mandate. Teachers deviating from the norms of preexisting curricula may not face overt reprimands, but everything from poor competition rankings to a lack of perceived respect from colleagues may guide their practices. These everyday encounters regulate behavior while going unrecognized as inevitable aspects of music education; since their value and accompanying power relations often remain unquestioned, they tend to become more and more pervasive and entrenched. As such, it is problematic to use language implying that policies such as assessments and textbooks are less significant than formal policy documents, at least in terms of their potential impact on practice.

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Action and Problems

In addition to circulating through discourse, power propagates via teachers' other actions. It follows that the question of whether or not something *is* policy may be secondary to examining how teachers do and might act in light of such understandings. This idea echoes Schmidt's (2017) assertion: "To know what policy *is* then, we need to be active *in* it" (emphasis his, p. 12). Stated differently, one's understanding of policy is experiential, developing in and through everyday actions. Despite the possibilities enabled by conceiving of documents and ideas beyond government mandates as "policy," those understandings have little influence if teachers do not critically reflect on their own power-laden practices. Such thinking raises the question: Is policy just texts, or is it also action?

To call the text "policy" but not its enactment encourages an understanding of policy as abstract and disconnected from embodied experiences. Yet, policy texts only come into being through practice, and those practices – be they conducting specific assessments or playing prescribed repertoire – often vary greatly from teacher to teacher. To use language that separates policy-related experiences from the documents inciting them neglects that teachers often have great leeway in deciding how they enact policy texts. If students have markedly contrasting experiences with teachers' divergent interpretations of a single policy text, then they have experienced the same policy in name only.

Moreover, given that the word "policy" invokes power-laden relations, to define policy solely as texts places the power primarily in the documents and their authors, as opposed to the teachers and administrators who enact them. Such a conception may encourage teachers and students to imagine a unidirectional power trajectory; power originates in the texts and then flows through them. Yet, rather than conduits for preexisting power relations, through their

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actions or inaction, teachers and students create power relations. Expanding the definition of policy to include texts and actions, foregrounds educators' active, power-laden roles in such processes. However, the structuring of the English language may inhibit understandings of "policy" as both texts and actions.

English words are generally either nouns or verbs. Classifications also tend to break down along this noun-verb divide; people talk about categories such as motions and actions (verbs), or colors and objects (nouns). Since only rarely do categories include both nouns and verbs, using the term "policy" to encompass both documents and practices defies typical English language usage. While one might profess to understand "policy" as text as well as action, because writers most commonly use it as a noun, individuals may default to such a conception. For example, an educator might use the phrase "the policy of state arts standards" to mean both the text of the standards and their implementation, but those reading or listening will likely imagine the standards documents and not the practices associated with them. This ambiguity has the potential to undermine any definition of policy as both text and action.

One way of addressing this limitation may involve using the word "policy" to mean policy texts and a phrase like "policy processes" to mean the actions related to those texts. Such a distinction, however, creates an imbalance. Making texts synonymous with the power-laden word "policy" implies that they hold greater importance than "policy processes," in which the word "policy" serves only as an adjective.

Given these difficulties, I propose that the profession might instead adopt the discourse of "policy texts" and "policy actions." Doing so provides added clarity while maintaining a balanced parallel between "texts" and "actions." Furthermore, talking about "policy texts" and "policy actions" may encourage attention to instances in which individuals address one without

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the other. For instances, in the face of repeated references to “policy texts,” the absence of utterances regarding related “policy actions” becomes obvious.

Expansive definitions of “policy texts” and “policy action” that include everything from federal mandates to implementing standards to adopting textbooks have the advantage of encouraging arts educators to see their work as a fundamentally political endeavor. Yet, their broadness also has the potential to make them meaningless in practice. If everything counts as some form of policy, to what should teachers and students attend? While one could further delimit the definition of “policy,” doing so runs the risk of excluding potentially impactful policy texts and policy actions.

Instead, I propose that focusing one’s attention involves not a question of ontology or definition, but a question of axiology (value). Arts educators and students ultimately work from their own individual value systems, and those systems influence how they attend to policy texts and what policy actions they take. However, given that policy texts link problems with possible solutions (Sabatier, 2007), considerations about the nature of those problems might also inform what policy texts and policy actions one comes to value.

In his 1927 book *The Public and Its Problems*, Dewey elaborates on the role problems play in political interactions. In order to determine the significance of a specific problem, Dewey turns to its foreseeable consequences. While acknowledging the “vagueness” of what constitutes a problem of sufficient “importance,” he suggests a few “factors which go to make up importance” (p. 64). These include consequences that are: far-reaching in nature, clear and recurrent, and irreparable. I offer that these factors might constitute a starting point for determining which policy texts and policy actions deserve arts educators’ and students’ attention.

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Examining documents and practices through Dewey's factors involves looking to consequences not only for students but also for teachers, communities, and the profession at large. For example, imagine a beginning arts educator whose continued employment depends on an evaluation based partly on demonstrating student growth. Perhaps these growth measures involve one class and two assessments. Given the limited reach of these assessments, the teacher may deem the consequences for her overall population of students relatively minor. However, because risking her own employment constitutes an irreparable consequence, she may wisely choose to focus on taking thoughtful policy actions.

Alternatively, an ensemble director's decisions regarding method books or repertoire selection have important, far-reaching consequences for students. Materials not matched to students' current skill development, that include only White or male composers, or that address music from various cultures in a limited or essentialist manner constitute problematic policy texts. The consequences of enacting policy actions utilizing such policy texts are recurrent in that they repeat for weeks if not months on end; they are also potentially irreparable if females or students of color become discouraged about their potential to create music, or if students from diverse backgrounds come to understand their heritage as lesser than that of students with European backgrounds. While teachers cannot possibly interrogate thoroughly all the policy texts with which they interface at any one time, attending to Dewey's factors may assist them in focusing their policy actions on the most pervasive and potentially impactful ones.

Creating Publics

My description of policy thus far is still problematic because it almost exclusively addresses existing policy texts. Arts educators generally enter their classrooms with preset federal and local mandates, standards, course materials, and curricula as well as their

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accompanying discourses and other actions. There exists an often unquestioned assumption that these documents directly respond to pressing problems within the profession. Kingdon's (2003) well-known policy model indirectly challenges such a conception.

As a result of 23 case studies and 247 interviews involving individuals affiliated with federal policymaking, Kingdon (2003) posits a theory of policy formation involving the confluence of three "streams": problems, policies, and politics. He asserts that the policy stream involves diverse stakeholders who volley over possible plans, the elements of which recombine and mutate. The surviving actionable proposals wait for the alignment of the problem stream, which can occur through systemic indicators such as crime statistics or events such as shootings, as well as the politics stream, which includes changes in administration and pressure from group campaigns. For Kingdon, the policy text, or at minimum variants of it, predates the specific problem, at least in its current manifestation. While Kingdon's model necessitates problems, it highlights both how problems that lack pre-formed policy texts can go unaddressed and how existing policy texts can latch on to "problems" that are not necessarily pressing or pervasive.

Consistent with Kingdon's model, arts education organizations do not necessarily seek out what diverse individuals or members as a whole currently consider the most significant issues before authoring policy texts. For example, even though every state had their own set of functioning arts standards, national arts education association personnel and volunteers invested substantial resources into authoring a drastically revised set of national standards. The writers of the Conceptual Framework accompanying the 2014 National Arts Standards imply obliquely that they in part responded to the problem of keeping pace with the authoring of the Common Core Standards. They make copious references to Common Core throughout the document and state: "These standards are also developed with the full knowledge of current trends in the field of

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public education, including – notably – the Common Core State Standards” (State Education Agency Directors of Arts Education, 2014, p. 7). Three years after their release, only five states have adopted the music standards outright, and ten more have adopted them with revisions.⁴ This is not to say that the new national arts standards lack value, and certainly standards revisions can and should take time. However, their slow adoption rate suggests that these policymakers did not work in direct response to a pressing problem, at least not a nationally pervasive one.

While Kingdon’s model may accurately describe the complexities of federal policymaking, I wonder: Might other forms of governance, particularly those dealing with smaller populations, enable spaces for policymaking that more directly interface with contemporary problems? By demonstrating a process beginning with using scholarly literature to identify significant problems in music education and moving to evidence analysis, the formulation of alternatives, and decision-making, Kos (2010) indirectly challenges the practice of starting with policies rather than problems (p. 98). Likewise, Dewey (1927) offers a reimagining of policy action that is responsive to immediate circumstances. However, he troubles the notion that any one person, even in consultation with others’ writings, can determine which problems deserve attention.

Dewey (1927) argues that a “public” is called into being in response to a specific problem with consequences members deem serious enough to warrant attention. Stated differently, a “public” forms when individuals concurrently decide that an issue demands attention. Dewey does not mandate a specific number of persons needed in order to constitute a “public,” and he acknowledges that publics will differ from “epoch to epoch and from place to place” (p. 65). Through the claims made by this public, political institutions temporarily form; the “state” does

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not preexist a “public” (Dewey, 1927, p. 66). For instance, a group of arts educators concerned about the overwhelming Whiteness of the profession might form a “public.” This “public” calls governing institutions such as university admissions committees and national or state-level arts education associations into existence and tasks them with addressing the problem.⁵

Drawing on such thinking, imagine a teacher education policy lesson that begins not with specific policies, such as ESSA or arts standards, but by asking students to list possible problems consistent with Dewey’s aforementioned importance factors. Subsequently, students might investigate to what extent existing policy texts and policy actions do or do not address their stated problems. They could also brainstorm what new policies might better attend to those issues.

Moreover, arts educators at all levels might consider what problems they find most pressing and then work with governing organizations such as NAFME, educators associations, professional arts groups, and others to create new policies. Such action constitutes a shift from current practices, in which the impetus to author policy texts such as standards tends to come from organization leaders rather than from the membership at large. The leaders of such governing organizations might also open additional avenues for “publics” to express their problems, altering their policymaking priorities in response. These could include time at conferences for open dialogue with leaders or virtual events focused on listening to members rather than sharing information.

“Publics,” however, do not just form spontaneously; they demand that concerned individuals convince others about the significance of specific problems. Dewey (1927) writes about the need to perfect “ways of communication of meanings so that genuinely shared interest in the consequences of interdependent activities may inform desire and effort and thereby direct

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action” (p. 155). The question of how to communicate meaning speaks to a larger issue in policy discourse.

Arts education writers routinely urge individuals to care about policy texts by offering logical rationale (e.g., Colwell, 2006; Schmidt, 2017). Yet, they provide little attention to the meaning-laden, emotional mechanisms that actually convince people – be they teachers or elected officials – to care. While Dewey (1927) does not offer further specifics regarding the role of meaning-making, his attention to “meanings” and “shared interest in the consequences” aligns with those asserting the roles individual and collective storytelling might play in policy action.

Meaningful Stories

Writing about “narrative politics,” Mayer (2014) explains, “Stories imbue our experience with ‘meaning.’ Events become meaningful to the extent that they can be fit into or evoke some larger narrative about ourselves or our world” (p. 7). The arts educator who conceives of policy action as linked with her personal stories, perhaps including why she entered teaching or why she values the arts, may feel more inclined to join a “public.”

Additionally, stories can call us to political action by enabling one to consider alternative narratives. Mayer (2014) explains that when “caught up in a story,” individuals feel compelled to actions such as making sacrifices and working towards justice “because our identity is at stake, because those acts are what the plot demands of our character” (p. 97). Building on this sense of purpose, political storytellers try to persuade listeners that collective action determines the outcome of a story (Mayer, 2014).

Imagine a group of educators who, thinking that new arts standards will undermine their efforts to implement more culturally relevant practices, couch their policy action in the form of a

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story. They may explain personal narratives about students who they saw touched by practices excluded from those standards and assert how the standards limit their own autonomy. Finally, they might argue that they still have time to stop the adoption of the standards, and while doing so will require courage, their identity as caring teachers who put students first demands it. In Mayer's (2014) words: "The message is simple: This is *our* story to write" (emphasis his, p. 130).

In addition to reimaginings of policy action related to existing policy texts, attending to meaning-laden narratives may encourage arts educators to consider new problems and possibilities. Grassroots organizer and researcher Marshall Ganz (2007) offers a framework for such undertakings. He explains that what he terms a "public story" includes three elements: a story of self; a story of us; and a story of now. A "story of self" involves explaining why you were called to your current work. A "story of us" involves explaining the shared visions, values, and aims of a specific group. A "story of now" involves explaining the challenges faced by a certain community, including the decisions it confronts and its hopeful aspirations (p. 2).

Although President Trump does not directly acknowledge drawing on this framework, his rhetoric often closely aligns with it. He is a successful, deal-making businessman (story of self), and Americans need to restrict immigration and keep jobs from going overseas (story of us) in order to "make America great again" (story of now). Similarly, a music educator might tell how her own experiences of gender inequality (story of self) encouraged her to join a group devoted to promoting the work of female composers (story of us). In light of recent sexist comments made by a prominent political figure, she might explain the timely importance of implementing a curriculum centered on female and LGBTQ music making (story of now).

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Through the Share Your Story campaign, NAFME leaders have collected what fit Ganz's definition of "stories of self" (NAfME, 2017a). In these narratives, diverse stakeholders provide an individual story about how music education has impacted their lives. Yet, NAFME has not organized these individual stories into broader narratives addressing contemporary problems. Extending this initiative to foster "stories of us" and "stories of now" would likely increase its political impact.⁶ For example, consider a nation-wide compilation of individual stories of students who would not have come to school absent the self-expression and welcoming environment fostered in their music classes. Rather than making the claim that music education increases attendance and graduate rates, which neither has a strong research grounding nor is unique to our "now," music educators might link this collection of stories to current events. Perhaps arguing that their work takes on increased ethical significance in an era of evermore commonplace hostility towards racial minorities, transgender persons, and others, music educators might tell a story of "now" in which they aspire for all students to value musically expressing their differences and learning from others' contrasting musical expressions.

Additionally, at the local level, imagine an arts teacher education class in which students create stories of self, us, and now, or envision experimenting with these practices at conferences or other professional development events. Such action might combine individual reflection with collaborative dialogue, including the respectful engagement with divergent visions of "us" and "now." While this collective storytelling will likely invoke some disagreement, participants might welcome the tension between actionable plans formed through points of alignment and ongoing considerations about exclusions and possible alterations.

Expanding on such thinking, I wonder: What might artistic endeavors contribute to policy actions centered on stories of self, us, and now? Dewey (1927) asserts that artists can play a role

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in communicating information related to problems and their consequences in ways that incite “publics” to form. He writes, “Artists have always been the real purveyors of news, for it is not the outward happening in itself which is new, but the kindling by it of emotion, perception and appreciation” (p. 184). Imagine a student telling about her experiences with school bullying via prose verses through a musical composition. Musical “stories of self” enable the student to express the emotional aspects of her story in ways unavailable through language alone. More broadly, consider a classroom of students that identifies a collective problem and then creates an artistic event, perhaps combining performances of existing theater or dance pieces with newly created ones, in order to highlight their predicament. The emotional aspect of such artistic stories of “us” and “now” can deepen participants’ and audiences’ concern for consequences, perhaps motivating more meaningful and engaged collective policy action.

The arts may play an even more important role in fostering the ability to think creatively about the “now” and potential near futures to which individuals and groups might aspire. Greene (1995) writes that artistic engagements can allow those involved to “see from unaccustomed angles” (p. 20) as well as to “*see* more in our experience, to *hear* more on normally unheard frequencies, to *become conscious* of what daily routines have obscured, what habit and convention have suppressed” (emphasis hers, p. 123). Artistic endeavors can provide a space of free-play, in which the “now” as one commonly understands it gives way to possible transformations. Developing the policymakers of the future begins with fostering children’s dispositions towards identifying problems and imaginative solutions in the present, including through artistic undertakings.

In summary, policy texts often have the greatest impact not when they are mandated, but when they go unrecognized as common sense. When music educators do not understand

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“policy” as encompassing more than formal mandates, they may neglect the power-laden implications that ideas such as standards and curricula have on their practices, including the temporal “regimes of truth” that they impose. In addition to diverse ways of interaction with existing “policy texts,” “policy action” might involve beginning from what communities perceive as consequential, pervasive problems. Individual and collective storytelling can foster the meaningful connections necessary for forming “publics” who advocate for policy texts and policy actions addressing these problems. Moving beyond stories of “self,” I wonder: What are the problems of “now,” and what inspiring stories of “us” might our communities and profession artistically tell?

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Notes

¹ Review of Richerme (2016).

² While Jones (2009) relies mainly on texts as examples of “soft policies,” he also implies that “soft policies” can include actions such as “music teacher organizations’ activities” (p. 28). While I later address the implications of using the term “policy” to denote both texts and actions, in this instance I am specifically interested in “soft policy” texts.

³ For further discussion about how assessment practices come to constitute teaching and learning, see Richerme (2016).

⁴ Personal email communication with Lynn Tuttle, NAFME Director of Public Policy and Professional Development, on June 27, 2017.

⁵ This is not to say that members of the “public” have no role in directly addressing the problem; along with engaging government bodies in the formation of policy texts, individuals might also, for instance, conduct a critical examination of their own practices and make alterations in light of their findings. However, Dewey (1927) is generally referring to overarching issues that necessitate funding and other resources.

⁶ While working as a Policy Analyst at NAFME from 2012-2013, I drew on Ganz’s work when offering the initial idea for what other NAFME employees and I developed into the Share Your Story Campaign. I left my position at NAFME while the campaign was still underway. More recently, as a member of NAFME President’s Task Force for the Broader Minded Advocacy Campaign from 2015-2016, I encouraged NAFME leaders to consider the possibilities of “stories of us” and “stories of now.” At the time of this submission, they have not overtly acted on these suggestions.