Learning the Art of Memory: Developing reflexive professionalism in music teacher education

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Music teachers and music teacher educators are faced with the problem of what to include in their classrooms, with mounting pressure to include more music from a wider selection of available world musics. However, the selection of what we remember and forget in conservatories, universities and music teacher education has a great deal to do with the societies within which we work and who we as music educators are in this society. In this theoretical paper, we view the curricula of music teacher education not simply as a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to produce musical outcomes where teachers are typically inducted into the neutral mastery of disciplinary knowledge. Instead, in this paper we draw on the perspective of cultural memory studies (e.g. Miztal 2010), to view curricula as organized cultural practices that are reflective of the current societal and political order, and which thus also contributes to who the music teacher becomes by remembering certain ideas, practices or values and forgetting others. We characterise the majority of previous research in musical memory as taking an “ocularcentric” and “panoptical” (Foucault 1977) epistemological stance which reduces memory to the individual human mind and psychological phenomenon. Against this ‘container model’, we argue that memory is also an inherently social process, affecting not only the individual but also groups, communities and society, and that all memory, both individual and social, is mediated and shared.

We use examples from two vastly diverse contexts, South Africa and Finland, to consider, firstly, the mechanisms of collective remembering and forgetting which improves or hampers equality in music teacher education curricula. Secondly, we suggest ways of developing a politically aware collective epistemology within departments or music teacher education programs where the micro issues of deciding, for example, what music to include, which pedagogies to employ, or which political-historical views to emphasise, in a particular lesson can be collectively framed and
critically discussed through politically aware memory work. We argue that, in order to develop professionalism and a reflexive social epistemology, music teacher educators should search for a new dialectic between memory and forgetting, understood here as social and collective phenomena. As such, this suggestion is related to the current turn in professionalism towards ethical and moral responsibility (see, e.g., Cribb & Gewirtz 2015), a turn that in education and music education is still largely absent.