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**Critical Praxis Engagement of the Senses – Can We Do More Singing?**

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As I write this editorial, I am reliving my visit to the symphony this Winter. Beethoven's Symphony No. 9, *Ode to Joy*, was performed by the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, along with the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra Chorus (ASOC). Nathalie Stutzmann was the music director. When I attend the symphony, I am transported to another world as I receive the music and watch members of the orchestra, choir and conductor. There is so much to see, feel, hear, and sense. I am moved by the emotional pathos of the music, the facial expressions of everyone on stage, the movement of their hands, and the lilting voices of the soloists and the choir. I can sense the engagement of the audience around me. Everyone is very still, often like mine, their bodies are alert as they take everything in. When it is time to applaud, we break out of our inner silos to become a powerful, exuberant collective force of clapping, shouting, and standing to show our response.

For this *Ode to Joy* performance, I paid particular attention to the members of the choir. I was thinking about how we sing, our breathing, our enunciation and articulation, our posture, and how the pages of the music folder are turned, silently. As I succumbed to the singing of Symphony No. 9, I was transported back in time to what made me love singing and the people who fostered a love and appreciation for singing in me. First, my mother and my primary school teacher, and then later, my choir directors at school and at church. Hearing my mother sing at home while she ironed our school clothes rests deep within me because somewhere in the recesses of my being, I picked up more than singing. I felt pain, longing, yearning, and resurrected memories. At primary school, I sang in class with my classmates, and in secondary school, I sang in the chorus and performed in many wonderful plays such as *My Fair Lady* and *West Side Story*. Lastly, I sang in church – all my life and still to this day.

Singing resurrects every fiber of our being, all the synapses vibrate, and all our senses are awakened. This fall, for the first time ever, I participated in a community singing event at a local church. It was a diverse intergenerational gathering on a Friday evening for *Beer and Song*. The church invited all to come for beer and then to sing together. The beer part of the event actually included coffee, tea, water and/or beer along with sandwiches, cakes, tarts and various other delicacies contributed by the church members. After eating *and* drinking, we all went into the church. There were about 100 of us scattered throughout the church, but we were invited to come nearer to the front and to sit closer to each other. We were told by the organist that we could select any hymn that we wanted from the church hymnal, and then everyone was invited to sing along. I loved this idea, and I was thrilled to experience this event. It was very different from being at the Symphony and watching and listening to others as they sang. This time, everyone could shout out a hymn number, and then everyone could join in the singing. No one was assessing the quality of your singing. No one was checking your posture when we sat or stood up. No one was correcting your pronunciation of words. It was truly freeing, but what was most liberating was the uninhibited joy and participation of the singers. All of us could feel the happiness emanating from our fellow singers' embodied engagement, and all of us could see and hear the beautiful power of communal singing of the different harmonizing voices. This was the feeling of community chorus: unrehearsed, united, powerful and heartwarming.

As I write about these singing experiences and sensations, I am wondering if any of them could serve as a metaphor for critical praxis. By this, I mean in the community space or learning space, everyone feels welcome to participate, not a select few who meet certain qualifications. In a learning space participants can be spontaneous, like suddenly, exuberantly and uninhibitedly, bursting into song as we might do in the shower. Imagine a learning space where there is no

hierarchical order based on who has the most smarts, the privileged accent or is the best dressed in the class. How can we invite more singing, more learning engagements that affect all our senses, that touch our souls and inspire us? Singing or learning that moves us to tears or laughter, can connect strangers to one another or classmates to each other and the world at large. Like the singing flash mobs on YouTube or TikTok, popping up unexpectedly in public spaces, and the happiness brought to the space, how can we do more singing in our lives and invite others to join us? Shelley D. Wong, Mary Romney, Thuy Tu and Janna Mattson, have just published a book that is freely available to everyone. *Freedom Songs, A Resource for Teachers by Teachers* (2026), is described by the editors as “a book that offers many ways in which music can be a tool for English language learning, language arts and literacy, as well as cross-cultural understanding and peace.” The book, the editors continue, “exemplifies the power of music to transform language learning, promote peace and foster intercultural understanding.” A link to this beautiful free resource is given below. Please share and bring more songs to our classrooms! It is not just for language classrooms but can be used for all classrooms regardless of content area or subject being discussed. Let’s do more singing!

Art is like singing. It has the potential to liberate and transform us individually and collectively. Our two papers in this Fall/Winter 2025 edition have used art as a metaphor to support preservice teachers in exploring their own creativity and sensitivities in the content areas of literacy and math. Anastasia Y. Goodwin sought to support teachers in appreciating the arts in teaching through utilizing theatrical design in the adoption of Dolly Parton’s book, *Coat of Many Colors* and through the integration of materials and artistic media in their response to the text read. Goodwin’s class created works in the communal space of the makerspace, and students later exchanged artistic artifacts. In our second article, Melanie Fields, Laura Isbell and Julie J.

Williams Mills explored the pre-service teachers' thoughts and emotions about teaching mathematics in their teacher education class. Their students were encouraged to utilize artifacts such as works of art to express their sentiments about teaching mathematics and other content areas. The artistic explorations and reflections on the teaching/learning process proved to be very pedagogically instructive for both teacher educators and pre-service teachers.

In both articles, the authors demonstrate their pre-service students' emotional and relational awareness in becoming expert teachers in different subject areas and what lessons can be learned and taught through reflexive explorations in artistic curricula development. Both articles show the power and potential of incorporating artistic works in any teacher education course and, like singing, there are very rich returns.

As always, very special thanks to our reviewers who supported the publication of these articles. We can always use more. Thanks for spreading the word.

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Editor

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## Reference

Wong, S.D., Romney, M., Tu, T., & Mattson, J. (Eds.), (2026). *Freedom songs: A resource for teachers by teachers*. 123 Press Publications. <https://doi.org/10.13021/MARS/15313>