Special issue: *Decolonising the School Curriculum*

Research article

What does it mean to decolonise the school music curriculum?

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Abstract

In many ways the school music curriculum has become increasingly diverse since the 1970s. For example, 'pop' and 'world' musics have been listed in UK curricula and syllabuses with an aim of becoming more inclusive. However, this article argues that such approaches to curriculum as *content* have confounded social justice in school music, and in particular when perpetuating a prejudicial discourse. To understand this discourse, three 'distortions' of the material nature of musical knowledge are explored as potential sources of ongoing student alienation from school music: reification, hegemonic appropriation and the loss of meaning. These distortions are also exemplified through a case study critique of social realism and the UK government's Model Music Curriculum. By way of conclusion, and as a possible resolution to the distortions, some characteristics of a curriculum as *process* are proposed that have implications for decolonisation and wider issues of social justice, such as class and gender.

Introduction

Colonialism is not only the control of people by people through military, institutional and economic dominance, but also, as Said (1978) has shown, through a domination of discourse. Furthermore, even where decolonisation appears to have taken place, the implicit values of colonial discourse can be maintained through powerful forces that continue to underpin prejudicial social and cultural structures.

Decolonisation, therefore, is not simply a legislative process which bestows self-determination on a people or country, but one in which the implicit discourse of power is fundamentally changed across institutions to promote equality. Such institutions include education, health and politics.

This article is concerned with the ways in which one corner of education, that of classroom music education in the UK, has aimed to address issues of social justice and, by implication, decolonisation. This is a small corner, but one which richly exemplifies the part that education can play in ongoing issues of injustice when under the influence of powerful and prejudicial discourses of knowledge and culture.

The article begins with a brief analysis of key moments in the recent history of music education that have been aimed at inclusion. It offers some thoughts on why these developments have had limited success as a consequence of the dominant discourse of curriculum as content. A case study on the social realist perspective on education is then used to illustrate the problematic relationship of music education to equality and inclusion. In conclusion, and by way of a response to the social realist position, some possibilities for decolonisation are presented around curriculum as process.

This article argues that of and by itself revising content is not sufficient to decolonise the curriculum and enhance social justice.

The music curriculum post-1960

Until recently, the field of music education has made relatively little explicit mention of decolonisation. However, the field *has* had an ongoing concern with diversity and equality of opportunity, which can be seen as a proxy for wider issues of inclusion such as class, race and gender. For example, 'pop' and then 'world' musics have increasingly found themselves listed in UK curricula and syllabuses over the past 60 years or so. However, in light of recent global events, and more specific attention to decolonisation, there has been a need to take a fresh look at these issues and the light they shed on the music curriculum.

To get to this point, it is worth undertaking a brief history of music education in relation to curriculum initiatives for inclusion, and which mirror wider developments in education, some of which have been given official sanction and others not. While what follow are necessarily caricatures, the timeline does present some of the key 'flavours' which have underpinned developments and debates in music education over the past six decades.

From a 'traditional' baseline (pre-1960s) of curriculum content based on the appreciation of classical music, the study of theory (for example, notation) and singing (often traditional songs), accompanied by a didactic pedagogy, there have been some significant democratic initiatives. These initiatives have been based on an ongoing concern (still with us today) that while students can be alienated in their relationship with school music, paradoxically music means a great deal to them outside of school (Schools Council, 1968, 1971). Many inclusive developments have been aimed at students being able to 'see' themselves in the curriculum, and thus heal alienation.

For example, writers such as Paynter and Aston (1970) promoted the fundamental importance of students' own creativity (compositions) being at the centre of the curriculum. While this radical reorientation of what was valued in the music classroom had limited take-up at the time (there was no official national curriculum), these ideas did have some impact on future policy developments in the UK (and around the world).

In the 1970s, work in what was known as the 'new' sociology of education (Young, 1971) also drew on the sociology of knowledge to identify 'knowledge of the powerful' (in our case, Western art music) as being an alienating force for many students in the school curriculum. In many ways, this was a class issue,

and there were calls for 'pop' music to be included as valid curriculum content (Vulliamy, 1978). Again, the impact of these ideas was relatively limited at the time, but they were more influential in policy that was to come.

Indeed, the advent of the national curriculum for music in England (DfE, 1992) crystallised these ideas, where for the first time there was a statutory expectation to study musics such as rock, pop, folk and 'world' alongside Western art music. There was also an expectation that students compose in response to such curriculum content.

However, the ongoing research of Lucy Green (1988, 2008) showed that even after such ideas and subsequent policy developments, alienation from school music was still a significant feature of students' experience. In response, Green (2008) developed an approach to 'self-directed learning', based on her research into the ways in which pop musicians learn, focusing on informal pedagogy and not prescribed curriculum content. While this radical idea was never sanctioned in official policy, it did (and continues to) have some influence in classrooms through the *Musical Futures* initiative.

Most recently, and in part as a reaction to all previous developments, there has been what might be described as a cognitive turn, a neo-traditional emphasis on the direct teaching of disciplinary knowledge, supported by research into neuroscience. The inclusive credentials of what has become known as a *social realist* position is that there exists powerful knowledge that should underpin the curriculum, the learning of which is a source of social justice for all (Young, 2008a; Cuthbert and Standish, 2021). This position stands as a critique of what are perceived to be more relativist (and progressivist) positions on knowledge (see, for example, the creativity of Paynter and Aston, 1970, and the self-directed learning of Green, 2008). The characteristics of the social realist position for music will be explored later, but it appears to have increasing official sanction in UK policy across all school subjects.

These seemingly democratic developments have come during a period of unprecedented attention to all aspects of music education, with the aim of students having greater access to participation and achievement in music.

However, the issue of social justice in the music classroom remains a problem to be solved. On an explicit level, much has been done such that students can 'see' themselves in the music curriculum through the discourse of democratic inclusion. However, what is clear is that music as a *curriculum subject* in schools still has low status for senior managers and students alike (Bath et al., 2020).

While it is difficult to pin down issues of social justice in such circumstances, one measure of participation is those opting to study music beyond the compulsory age of 14, and this continues to drop from what are low levels in the first place:

> Figures from the Department for Education show a significant fall in the number and proportion of pupils taking GCSE music. In 2014/15, prior to the re-introduction of the EBacc in 2015 there were 43,600 entries for GCSE music. In 2017/18 there were 34,708 entries. This is a reduction in GCSE music entries of more than 20% since 2014/2015. When adjusted for cohort size, again using the DfE figures, the fall in GCSE entries since 2014/2015 is 16.66%. (Daubney et al., 2019: 3)

While there are various other explanations for this issue, for example, the pressures on schools to achieve highly in the English Baccalaureate, which contains no compulsory arts subjects, the 'double life' of music as an extra-curricular subject, and the presence of other post-14 arts courses (such as BTEC), it remains the case that most students turn their backs on school music as soon as they can.

The issue of alienation from school music has never really gone away, and seemingly democratic change has not proved to be emancipatory (Philpott and Kubilius, 2015). This situation has been maintained through a discourse which has the power to confound the distribution of access, success and achievement in music education: a discourse that is as pertinent to class and gender as it is to race, and what we might mean by a decolonised curriculum for music.

The discourse is perpetuated by at least three distortions to musical knowledge that are a consequence of curriculum as content, and it is to these that we now turn.

The consequences of curriculum as content: three distortions

Although not explicitly referred to as such, the democratic changes above can, at least in part, be seen as attempts to decolonise. There is much in the most recent narratives to suggest that curriculum content

is central to inclusion and, by implication, decolonisation (DfE, 2021). It will be argued that curriculum as content (or product) is problematic and that this is still the dominant formulation in the context of UK policy.

Stenhouse (1975) problematised curriculum written as content, and he had at least three related concerns with a curriculum that furnished what he called the 'objectives model'. First, there was the issue of an approach to school knowledge that 'readily trivialises' it (Stenhouse, 1975: 83). Second, curriculum as content (that furnishes objectives for learning) vastly underestimates the full extent of curriculum, which in reality embraces all that goes on in a school as part of the learning process. Third, curriculum as content *distorts* knowledge through appearing to be beyond criticality when imposed by powerful structural forces: 'For the key procedures, concepts and criteria in any subject … are important precisely because they are problematic within the subject. They are the focus of speculation, not the object of mastery' (Stenhouse, 1975: 85). Furthermore, if 'knowledge is to be approached as a resource and an open system rather than as an imposition by those who possess it, new styles of teaching need to be evolved, and this is by no means easy' (Stenhouse, 1975: 32). It is salutary that we are still concerned with such issues nearly 50 years later in the context of decolonising the curriculum. What Stenhouse referred to as 'teacher proofing' (Stenhouse, 1975: 83) the curriculum is still very much with us at local and (inter)national levels. It is this notion of distortion raised by Stenhouse (1975) that I will now explore.

Three related types of distortion will be raised, which together have sustained a discourse that has neutered democratic change from being emancipatory: (1) the reification of curriculum as content knowledge; (2) reified curriculum knowledge being appropriated by hegemonic discourses; and, as a consequence; (3) the loss of 'meaning' in curriculum knowledge and our critical sense of it. Together these have, through curriculum as content, maintained a discourse that has confounded decolonisation and social justice in areas such as race, class and gender.

While many of these issues have been explored elsewhere, it is important to take a brief overview before undertaking a more specific case study. How does curriculum as content have the potential to confound inclusion, decolonisation and social justice?

Curriculum as reified content

Cooke and Spruce (2016: 67) outline the consequence of reified curriculum content:

> Both 'curriculum as content' and 'curriculum as product' are what might be described as *reified* forms of curriculum … whereby essentially abstract phenomena are treated or thought of as concrete objects. A consequence of reification is that meaning is seen as being inherent in the reified form … and consequently remains fixed in all times and places.

Here, reification is a strong foundation for a discourse of power in music education that sustains colonialism and other forms of injustice. Such knowledge can appear in the form of musical theory, concepts, skills and lists of 'musics' to be studied. While well intentioned, the inclusion of a wide range of musics can take on the appearance of things to be 'ticked off' and 'delivered', and there are at least three significant and related consequences of reified (and thus commodified) knowledge:

1.   it has the potential for having an alienated relationship with *all* students
2.   in being most readily written as knowing 'about', as concepts, theory and skills to be learned, it can take precedence as high status over more experiential forms of musical knowledge
3.   it can be divorced from the authentic and material nature of musical experience itself. (Philpott, 2010)

In all subjects, reified content is most easily appropriated by powerful hegemonic discourse and, in this case, the ideology of the Western art music tradition.

Curriculum as content and powerful hegemonies

Reification serves to objectify the dominant discourses of music as being powerful knowledge. In the case of music, the power of Western art music is both implicit and explicit in so many ways where curriculum is seen as content. Here, the ideology of Western art music – for example, its complexity, and its self-evident autonomous and objective universality – are powerful structural forces when we consider what is 'good' music, and where other musics are judged in terms of the ideology of the Western art music tradition (Philpott, 2012). This manifests itself in several ways in music education.

Assessment

Through its hegemonic status, Western art music defines *what counts as good music in its own terms.* For example, local, national and examination assessment criteria are infused with reified theoretical constructs derived from Western art music (loosely known as the 'elements' of music) used as a basis for appraising the worth of a piece of music, usually in terms of ever-increasing complexity equalling better music (Philpott, 2010). When applied to all musics, this has the power to prejudicially homogenise other traditions and the creative products of children themselves.

Knowledge

There is an increasing, if controversial, literature on the racial bias of reified musical knowledge, especially theoretical knowledge, derived from the Western art music tradition. Philip Ewell (2021: 325) argues that 'in order to debunk the many mythologies of music theory's white racial frame, we must confront its core beliefs head on'. He suggests that a White racial frame believes that 'the music and music theories of white persons represent the best framework for music theory' (Ewell, 2021: 325). Furthermore, 'among these white persons, the music and music theories of whites from German-speaking lands of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early-twentieth centuries represent the pinnacle of music-theoretical thought' (Ewell, 2021: 325). Ewell (2021: 325) cites the pervasive example of Western functional tonality 'as the only organizational force in music worthy of music theory's consideration in the classroom', which as a result is 'racialized as "white"'. In short, the frame through which we analyse our music, and which finds its ways into curriculum as content, is problematic in being derived from the hegemony of Western art music.

Tokenism

Simply including other musics in the curriculum is not a recipe for inclusion. There are several levels to this. Even when 'let in' to a content-driven curriculum, the nomenclature for other musics can be patronising, inaccurate and less than authentic. For example, the prevalence of units of work in UK classrooms on 'African music' or 'Indian music' (themselves interesting colonial choices) can be evidence of prejudicially 'othering' and trivialising musics from cultures and traditions outside of Western art music. Hess (2015: 339) refers to this as a 'touristic' approach to the music curriculum, where:

> musics that are drastically different from one another … are marked 'Other' to Western classical music by virtue of their place in the 'hierarchy of civilizations' – always already inferior to the West, and thus also to Western classical music. The school curriculum's privileging of Western classical music marginalizes all 'Other' musics, effectively arranging them around the Western classical center in such a way that affirms and reinforces racial hierarchies.

The reification of curriculum knowledge and its hegemonic appropriation is responsible for the last distortion, the loss of meaning.

Curriculum as content and the loss of meaning

Reified and hegemonically endorsed musical knowledge promotes itself as powerful knowledge. Such distortions, it can be argued, are not consistent with the material reality of musical experience, where knowledge of musical meaning is our intuitive and foundational touchstone with the discipline (Philpott, 2021). While this is no place for a full exposition of the 'meaning' of musical meaning (see Bowman, 1998; Swanwick, 1979; Green, 1988), suffice to say that our understanding and making of meaning (the reason why we engage with music in the first place) is primordially wrapped in complex webs that are social, personal, cultural, political and so on. In short, we can 'know' music without any recourse to theory or concepts: this is the material reality for most people in the world in all countries.

This loss of meaning from curriculum as content has another insidious consequence whereby music's role, place in and relationship to society is set aside. Additionally, when music is characterised as being self-evidently good for us (Hallam, 2015), its complicit relationship with wider inequalities and structural injustices is placed beyond critical consideration, thereby leaving the status quo unexamined.

Thus, music as a subject can deny the role it played in colonial, class and gender injustices by being autonomously 'good' for us, and this is a particularly strong narrative at the time of a pandemic.

In short, curriculum as content has the power to distort the nature of knowledge, to be appropriated by powerful structural forces and, by appearing transcendental, to bypass meaning and criticality. This is how a seemingly democratic discourse fails to become emancipatory.

These distortions are in need of exemplification through a critical examination of the currently prominent social realist approach to education and the recent publication by the UK government of a Model Music Curriculum (DfE, 2021), itself an example of social realist epistemology.

Case study: social realism, the Model Music Curriculum and the three distortions

Social realism

The social realist position in education of 'bringing knowledge back in' (Young, 2008b) is not one that needs fully rehearsing here. The core argument is that disciplinary knowledge can be identified in each subject which transcends the accusation of an interest-based 'knowledge of the powerful', and so can form the basis of curriculum as content.

By way of example, the New Zealand music educator Graham McPhail (2016, 2018) argues that there exists powerful musical knowledge that is independent of the social, political and individual. Social realists in education typically argue for some level of transcendence and universality accrued by the evolution of disciplinary knowledge, and it is worth quoting McPhail (2016: 54) in full on this point: 'What is required for education is a flexibly evolving "canon" based on judgemental rationality rather than relativistic preferences, that teachers use to guide students to a critical awareness of the musicing judged most compelling within given musical practices, genres, styles, and cultures.' Furthermore:

> In musical terms this is the idea that there is conceptual knowledge about music that is not tied to specific contexts and that may be utilised across contexts. For example, the expressive potential of 'western' tonal harmony has been adopted, adapted, and utilised by many cultural groups around the world, just as many aspects of non-western music also exert influences on western practices. In a postcolonial environment this conceptual knowledge moves well beyond its site of production to be used by anyone who has access to it and sees in it some creative potential: epistemological motivations rather than political ones … It may be that such generative concepts of a discipline hold the key for enabling students to make connections through various forms of content to pivotal knowledge that reaches across stylistic and even across cultural contexts. (McPhail, 2016: 51)

What counts as powerful knowledge here are transcendental (postcolonial) musical concepts, for example: analytical concepts, such as form and structure; perceptual concepts, such as recognising a perfect cadence; and concepts associated with musical 'literacy', such as 'reading' crotchets and quavers. Furthermore, this account of powerful knowledge as disciplinary knowledge assumes that there is a hierarchy of music for the appropriate learning of these concepts, and that a 'canon' can be decided for this purpose.

McPhail (2016: 55) argues that access to powerful conceptual knowledge is emancipatory and a basis for critical engagement with all knowledge (powerful or not): 'In this moment there is a realisation that conceptual knowledge must play a pivotal role in establishing an unalienated curriculum for students, one that ultimately is of use in expanding and explaining the world they already know.' In relation to decolonisation, this 'interest-free' curriculum based on powerful knowledge would appear to be key to social realists for the attainment of social justice.

While it must be acknowledged that McPhail's approach to music education is consistently based on engagement with, and experience of, making music, his account of powerful knowledge in music does not avoid the three distortions which are at the core of a discourse that perpetuates injustice.

On the first count, the issue of reification is obvious in relation to his version of powerful knowledge that is broadly disciplinary and conceptual in nature. However, the epistemological issues run deeper than this when we consider what counts as powerful knowledge in music in relation to our material experience of it.

Just because we can think conceptually about music does not mean that the essence of musical knowledge *is* conceptual. Swanwick (1988: 147) notes the dangers of a purely conceptual approach to music education:

> But how do concepts relate to musical experience; to what Polanyi would call 'dwelling in' music? They are at best critical generalisations that we are able to form after a number of musical encounters: at worst they become substitutes for musical experience. On analysis, 'concepts' usually turn out to be either parcels of information, knowing 'that', or aural skills of identification, knowing 'how'.

In short, conceptual knowledge is not necessarily derived from the material nature of music itself, but from reified and hegemonic influences.

The social realist argument that the learning of such disciplinary knowledge is key to social justice is an important one. If such knowledge is enshrined in curriculum and examination syllabuses, then for children *not* to learn it will indeed place them at a disadvantage. However, in order to rationalise this position, disciplinary knowledge is regarded as being beyond politics. Here, McPhail (2016: 53) argues for a certain transcendence that 'is context-independent knowledge that provides the mechanism for the development of critical understanding'.

Clearly, such de-politicisation serves to perpetuate a view of knowledge that is transcendent. However, of and by itself, this does not place such an epistemology beyond the influence of ideology, for this version of curriculum knowledge has its roots in the hegemony of Western art music.

On the second count of hegemonic appropriation, McPhail (2016: 51) fetishises Western musics when he claims that (to repeat) 'the expressive potential of "Western" tonal harmony has been adopted, adapted, and utilised by many cultural groups around the world', and that this has taken place in 'a postcolonial environment'. This underestimates the political nature of such musical knowledge, especially in the current global context. Furthermore, his reification of 'conceptual knowledge' would seem to invert his claim that such a view of knowledge has 'epistemological motivations rather than political ones' (McPhail, 2016: 51), deriving as it does, unashamedly, from the Western art music tradition. Powerful knowledge, in McPhail's definition, is not beyond the influence of knowledge of the powerful.

Lastly, such a view of knowledge distorts the nature of musical experience by placing meaning and criticality as a sequential consequence of learning conceptual understanding, as opposed to a foundational and primordial understanding of meaning *as* the most powerful musical knowledge (see Swanwick, 1979, 1988; Reid, 1986).

This is the crucial schism between curriculum as content and alternatives such as curriculum as process. For the social realist, there is a movement *from* conceptual understanding *to* meaning. Rata (2016: 180) argues for: 'the principle of conceptual reasoning as the way with which to give meaning to human experience. This is the meaning not fixed in a group's cultural and historical experiences (ones that cannot be shared universally), but a meaning captured within abstract and universalised concepts.'

The position taken in this article is that an intuitive and foundational knowledge of musical meaning is not conceptual. While conceptual understanding can (and does) iteratively feed back on to our understanding of meaning, the foundational and primordial direction of understanding is from meaning to concepts, and the former can, and certainly does, exist without the latter. The research and scholarship of Swanwick (1988, 1994) is a direct example of this argument characterised by the move from *intuition* to *analysis* in musical experience and learning. This orientation has important implications for the curriculum and pedagogy of the music classroom, as we shall see.

The accumulative distortion of knowledge away from meaning to a reified and hegemonically appropriated form of knowledge has the most significant consequence of all for what we might consider to be decolonisation. The relegation of meaning not only means that a student's experience of music in school is alienated from their material experience of music, it also places the experience of music itself beyond critical analysis, behind a reified and hegemonically appropriated musical knowledge. In short, through bypassing meaning as the most powerful knowledge, we are less likely to focus on understanding how music is made and its complicit role in injustices of the past and present. Indeed, the transcendence of McPhail's (2016) powerful knowledge would appear to put it beyond this analysis, and what is seemingly a democratic discourse is unlikely to become an emancipatory one.

The Model Music Curriculum as social realism in policy

The most recent and conspicuous example of a social realist music curriculum is the Model Music Curriculum (MMC). This is not statutory, but it does set itself up as 'model', and it is a strong manifestation of curriculum as content. The context of the MMC is the political desire for what Nick Gibb (2021), the then UK Schools Minister, who commissioned the document, refers to as a 'knowledge-rich curriculum', citing the notion of powerful knowledge (and the work of Young, 2008a) as the paradigm example of this. The framework of distortions will be used to briefly exemplify the MMC's social realist credentials, and some of the critical issues arising from it.

Reification: The MMC is heavy on content, with attendant lists of potential works to be studied, concepts to be learned, glossaries to be understood, and notations to be read. While all of these are sold as suggestions, the 'model' does itself model a reified epistemology for those that will be most likely to use it, namely, music teachers. The accompanying metaphor is one in which knowledge is seen as object and commodity, and where: 'The key aim is that by the end of Year 6 pupils should have an aural bank of music along with knowledge of its cultural context' (DfE, 2021: 9).

Hegemony: The 'othering' of musics is apparent from the outset, where the Schools Minister Nick Gibb (DfE: 2) asserts: 'The Model Music Curriculum is designed to introduce the next generation to a broad repertoire of music from the Western Classical tradition, and to the best popular music and music from around the world'.

Furthermore, the musical tourism noted by Hess (2015) in her Canadian experience is present in the consistent ordering and naming of musics in lists, which 'ensure that pupils gain a broad aural knowledge of Western Classical Music, Popular Music (defined broadly) and Traditional Music from around the world' (DfE, 2021: 8).

This is a barely concealed hierarchy (always in this order), which Hess (2015: 339) argues leaves Western art music 'intact as normative or naturalized [and with] no questioning of the center; marginalized musics simply affirm it'. The MMC's illustrative chronology perpetuates the same through imbalance hugely in favour of Western art music.

Ewell's (2021: 325) concerns about a 'racial white frame' is evident in the MMC's concern with staff notation, which 'provides the opportunity for pupils to be taught music independently both in class and after they have left school'. Given the low importance of notation to millions of musicians and consumers of music throughout the world, and in many musical traditions, the significant preoccupation with notation in the MMC can only be seen in hegemonic terms.

There is much more, but even where students are given the opportunity to create knowledge through composition, it is from a patronising view of 'other' musics, for example, 'to compose music using rhythmic *ostinato* (repeated rhythm) influenced by Samba and Nigerian Drumming' (DfE, 2021: 9), or from a restrictive technical/theoretical response to reified hegemonic content, for example, 'combine known rhythmic notation with letter names to create rising and falling phrases using just three notes (*do, re and mi*)' (DfE, 2021: 24).

Loss of meaning: The MMC is interesting in its position on musical meaning, noting that older students should have built 'an understanding of how musical elements work and discussed how these interact with subjective and objective models of musical meaning' (DfE, 2021: 37). There is negligible indication of what is meant by 'meaning' here, and an opportunity is missed.

However, it is clear that for the MMC, the learning of reified hegemonic knowledge is a necessary precursor to the understanding of meaning, and that meaning is only available to older children once they have learned the 'knowledge', again leaving Western art music, as Hess (2015) describes, with an appearance of being 'normative or naturalised'.

Where older children are encouraged to develop their 'shared knowledge and understanding of the stories, origins, traditions, history and social context of the music they are listening to, singing and playing' (DfE, 2021: 16), there is no hint that such 'stories' are problematic. As might be expected, any criticality is neutered.

Furthermore, the vast chronology of Western art music (which far outweighs any other list in the MMC) is testament to a loss of any other histories or stories that might be related to race, gender or class.

Finally, a 'music is good for you' narrative in the MMC bypasses the rich, and yet often uncomfortable, truths about the ways in which meaning is made in music: 'Music connects us through people and places in our ever-changing world … The sheer joy of music making can feed the soul of a

school community, enriching each student while strengthening the shared bonds of support and trust which make a great school' (DfE, 2021: 4).

This loss of meaning from curriculum as content distorts: (1) the material nature of our experience of music; and (2) music's role in culture and society, where it is ever intertwined with all that is good and bad (Philpott, 2012). The consequences are that the MMC is both unmusical and prejudicial to social justice.

What, then, might be some of the features of a curriculum that is more conducive to decolonisation and wider social justice? What are the ingredients for a process-driven music curriculum which has the potential for more conspicuous agency in relation to the distortions?

Curriculum as process: resolving the distortions

It has been argued that the relative failure of the democratic discourse in music education, and its implications for decolonisation, has been due to a wider obsession with curriculum as content. Curriculum as process recognises the relationships among children, teachers, pedagogy, policy, society, culture and knowledge. As with Stenhouse (1975: 84), it also aims to 'arrive at a useful specification of curriculum and the educational process without starting by pre-specifying the anticipated outcomes'. This will be exemplified through notions of emergent curriculum, a relational interpretative epistemology and a dialogic and critical pedagogy.

Emergent curriculum

Cooke and Spruce (2016: 73) suggest an emergent curriculum as an antidote to curriculum as content, and one in which 'knowledge only emerges through interactions, either with peers, teachers, resources or other influences'. They draw on the work of Osberg and Biesta (2008) to argue that:

> We should be 'concerned with the emergence of meaning [through these interactions] rather … than with the transfer of meaning from teacher to student' (Osberg and Biesta, 2008: 314). The purpose of the curriculum is therefore no longer to facilitate the acquisition of knowledge *about* a reality that is presented by someone else but for young people to find their own reality. (Cooke and Spruce, 2016: 73-4)

Here curriculum is 'lived experience' (Osberg and Biesta, 2008, as cited in Cooke and Spruce, 2016: 74) – interactions in a context where meaning and learning emerge, and curriculum evolves. Such a curriculum does not lend itself to being written down as reified content; instead, skills and concepts are themselves emergent from a process that is owned by learners, having the potential to remedy distortions related to student alienation.

Relational and interpretative epistemology

How then does knowledge function in a process-based curriculum? Hess (2015) has suggested that in order to move away from a hegemonically appropriated musical tourism, we need what she calls a Comparative Musics Model. This is a model that places meaning making at the centre of the curriculum, and not as a consequence of it:

> Repositioning this model as the *Comparative Musics Model*, a music curriculum following this model would not take an additive approach to music education. Nor would it assume that only 'Other' musics are worthy of study, normalizing Western classical music in the process. Rather, such a course would be taught as a comparative course that emphasizes the interconnectedness between the musics and the contexts of the musics. It is also attentive to power relations … Such a course will bring the intersections of race, class, gender, dis/ability, and nation to the forefront and focus on the way that these fluid categories intersect with each other … Teaching and thinking comparatively and relationally allows us to think broadly *across* categories, thinking through power relations as they pertain to the musics of the world and as they relate to bringing those musics into an elementary school classroom. Understanding musics relationally also allows students and teachers to come to know themselves relationally, as thinking in this manner facilitates the analysis of all relationships. (Hess, 2015: 342)

This relational approach can be underpinned by an interpretative (hermeneutic) epistemology, where all acts of musical engagement (listening, composing and performing) have the potential for interpretation and criticality. Gadamer (1996) suggests that in making meaning during engagement with art (music), there is a 'fusion of horizons' between the work itself and the human subject. Gadamer (1996) argues that we bring our socially and culturally located prejudices (prejudgements) to a work of art which has prejudices of its own, and that any engagement is an act of interpretation. Thus, both art and subject bring to the experience a complex background, and in the dynamic, playful and imaginative act of interpretation, meaning is made through a 'fusion of horizons'. Such interpretative moments open what Kramer (2011) calls 'windows' to criticality:

> In this sense, the creation of meaning is always potentially porous to critical meaning and the interpretative moment always has critical potential. For example, the act of composition is an act of interpretation, a fusion of horizons, a hermeneutic window where students (or musicians) may intuitively create compositions which 'fuse' different approaches to music, construct new meanings and throw up alternatives to previously held 'prejudices'. (Philpott, 2021: 133)

Musical meaning as a primordial, intuitive and foundational form of powerful knowledge is related to our material experience of music itself, and holds the potential for critical interpretation. The relational, critical and hermeneutic orientation to music education does not promote one set of musics over another, but it does imply that the interpretation inherent in all musical engagement, from Stormzy to Mozart, should be subject to criticality when discoursing *in* and *about* music. For Walker (1996: 11), this means that we should recognise all musics 'as socio-cultural acoustic phenomena even if it means placing nineteenth-century beliefs into the pluralist's bag despite the belief in universal properties'.

Such an approach to curriculum as process through the making of meaning aims to offer an alternative epistemology to curriculum as content. Here, curriculum is all that takes place in schools during the process of learning, and this has significant pedagogical implications. Curriculum as process is curriculum as pedagogy.

Dialogic pedagogy and critical pedagogy

In support of a relational and interpretative epistemology, Spruce (2017: 730), drawing on Wegerif (2011), argues for a dialogic 'conception of the music classroom as one where musical knowledge is not simply transmitted from teacher to learner (deliverology), but rather as a "dialogic space" where there is a "dynamic continuous emergence of meaning" from the "interplay of two or more perspectives" (Wegerif, 2011: 180)'. Furthermore:

> Within these spaces, musical gestures and artefacts are not simply encountered and experienced as structured collections of sonic elements, but rather are understood as imbued with cultural, historical, individual and collective meanings and significance. Each musical event is then a unique occasion from which new meanings (both individual and collective) and new forms of musical knowledge and understanding emerge. Here, learners experience parity of participation in the construction of musical meaning and knowledge as sentient musical beings that bring to their learning and the music classroom their musical enculturation and individual and community heritages. This brings a social justice imperative to the perhaps rather hackneyed maxim of 'starting where the young people are at'. (Spruce, 2017: 730)

An important adjunct and consequence of a dialogic pedagogy is a critical pedagogy. A critical pedagogy is a natural consequence of a desire to understand how knowledge, meaning and understanding are constructed in music, society and education, and how these meanings act on the distribution of success in relation to gender, ethnicity, class and so on (Philpott and Kubilius, 2015).

A critical pedagogy, then, suggests engaging with musical meaning as valid curriculum content, and where tacit political and cultural meanings are part of the pedagogical transactions between students and teachers. By way of example, Green (1997) has suggested that wider social processes can be seen in the prejudicial gendered meanings inherent in music, and that the stereotypes arising need to be challenged in the classroom. The same can be done for race and class as part of decolonisation.

Such a perspective on curriculum as process and pedagogy is one with the potential, at least, for some immunisation against prejudicial reification, hegemonic appropriation and the loss of meaning.

Conclusion

Should more music by a fully diverse range of composers find its way into schools? Should the stories of the same be more readily known? The answer must be yes. However, this article has argued that just changing the content may not change the outcome for social justice. As Ewell (2021: 325) has suggested, just by including female and Black composers in our textbooks will not solve issues of gender and racial imbalance. The problems with curriculum as content are not only related to repertoire, but also to the implicit ideology of the theories behind the repertoire.

Developments in curriculum content, while appearing to be democratic, are not necessarily emancipatory. At the forefront of an emancipatory discourse is a relational, interpretative and critical epistemology that has the potential to lay bare the ways in which music is made, and its relationship to culture and society – where meaning is the most powerful knowledge. This can be viewed within the wider context of social justice, for example, in relation to gender, class and disability.

However, it would be naive to suggest that a process curriculum could in some way tear down educational injustices, for the notion is itself bound within structures of culture and society that perpetuate inequality. Added to which, it is very much off the agenda in UK policy at present. However, if the metaphor of curriculum as content sustains structures, then the metaphor of curriculum as process does at least present itself as a 'model' for agency, a model for decolonising the music curriculum.

Finally, curriculum as process does not imply a 'tearing down' or 'cancelling' of Western art music. By aiming to resolve the distortions, we should be committed to understanding the relationship of *all* musical knowledge to the structure of society and social justice. However, a good starting point is the particular power that the ideology of Western art music has over music education.

Declarations and conflicts of interest

Research ethics statement

Not applicable to this article.

Consent for publication statement

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Conflicts of interest statement

The author declares no conflict of interest with this work. All efforts to sufficiently anonymise the author during peer review of this article have been made. The author declares no further conflicts with this article.

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