

# **Social justice in the English Secondary Music Classroom**

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## **Introduction**

There has been an ongoing sense in English music education that social justice is a problem to be solved, in that access to achievement and ‘music for all’ has been an elusive goal and especially so in the secondary music classroom. The seminal, and to a certain extent mythical, root of the issue arose from the paradox identified in the Schools Council report of 1971. Here the adolescents surveyed suggested that while music was their least favourite school subject it was the most important discipline to them outside of school. The assumption has been that this paradox has had a negative impact upon the access of pupils to success in the secondary music classroom, and other studies have verified the persistence of the problem (see Harland et al., 2000; Lamont & Maton, 2008, 2010).

Of course such issues with classroom music did not start in 1971. However, it *can* be said that the most recent and significant moments in the history of music education in England have, on the face of things, aimed to provide a solution to the problem. As such, one of the main aims of recent initiatives, writings and policy in music education has been for greater inclusion and social justice in the music classroom. These developments in music education have always had the aim of facilitating a wider distribution of access to achievement and success in the secondary music classroom (‘music for all’), even if such aims have been implicit rather than explicitly expressed.

The following questions have been used to structure the argument of this chapter:

- what is meant by social justice in the music classroom?

- what are the indicators for a socially just music classroom?
- in what ways have significant moments in the history of classroom music aimed to promote social justice?
- in what ways have the aims of significant moments in the history of classroom music been confounded in relation to social justice?
- what does this analysis mean for a school in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century?

In critically exploring these questions, the chapter will focus very specifically on the English secondary classroom where *all* pupils have been expected to study music as part of the curriculum over the past 50 years between the ages of 11-14. By way of exemplification of the issues raised in this paper, the thoughts of a head of music with a strong reputation for leading inclusive music education in multi-cultural, comprehensive and urban secondary schools, are inserted at significant points. These vignettes serve to illustrate how issues of social justice impinge upon the day to day work of a music teacher in an English classroom.

### **What is Meant by Social Justice in the Music Classroom?**

There are at least two levels to the discourse about social justice in the music classroom. On the one hand there is the ‘democratic’ discourse that can be found in many writings, curriculum documents and initiatives at national, local and school levels. Spruce characterizes the democratic discourse as “participation, diversity and inclusion” and these concepts are “understood as a triumvirate which are fundamental to social justice” (2013, p. 23). At this level social justice in the music classroom involves making sure that *all* pupils are able to take part and ensuring that a wide variety of musical knowledge and perspectives are fully embraced.

However, Spruce also draws out implications for an ‘emancipatory’ discourse where the development of emancipatory knowledge “enables individuals and communities to recognise and understand the power-relationships that exist in their world and to draw on this understanding as a means of interacting with, and fully participating in, that world” (2013, p. 23). Such knowledge, he suggests, helps us to see the world “as a dynamic phenomenon upon which, and within which, a person consciously acts in the construction of knowledge and understanding” (Spruce 2012a, p. 191).

This transformative theme is picked up by Woodford (2012) who maintains that social justice goes beyond an inclusivity of curriculum content and being responsive to pupils’ cultural needs. He targets his critique of the democratic discourse in relation to the many developments that have taken place in the USA and Britain, at the end of the last century, under the slogan of ‘music for its own sake’.

By declaring that music should be taught for its own sake, divorced from the world and its problems, music teachers were aligning themselves with democratic realists who believed in rule by social elites and experts and who were deeply suspicious of notions of social justice that attempted to go beyond negative rights such as equality of opportunity. (2012, p. 86).

Furthermore, Woodford notes that “proponents of social justice in music education often emphasize musical diversity and inclusivity while neglecting to explicitly teach students how music and music education related to politics and other forms of experience” (2012, p. 85).

Philpott and Wright (after Bernstein, 1996) echo the implications of both Spruce and Woodford by viewing democratic concepts through an emancipatory lens where *inclusion* means “the right...not to be absorbed”; *enhancement*, “the right to...critical reflection [on] possible new

futures”; and *participation*, “the right to participate in situations where order is formed and changed” (2012, p. 454).

These democratic and emancipatory discourses elicit distinctive indicators for social justice in the classroom which can be used as headline criteria to analyze initiatives, policy and curriculum developments.

### **What are the Indicators for a Socially Just Music Classroom?**

We would like to propose a set of indicators for social justice in the music classroom, that can be drawn out from the theory and practice of the democratic and emancipatory discourses. The democratic discourse leads us to propose the following indicators:

#### **1. Curriculum, pedagogy and assessment.**

- a) a wide conception of what counts as musical knowledge;
- b) a wide conception of what counts as musical learning and development;
- c) a wide conception of what counts as musical achievement;
- d) a wide distribution of musical achievement among various social and cultural groups;
- e) assessment practices that are able to recognize the same;
- f) assessment strategies that validate a wide range of musical achievement;
- g) a wide range of resources (human and technological) that promote inclusion.

#### **Vignette 1** <note to editor: to be placed in box>

*An essential way of considering an inclusive music department's success is to look at the strength of the formal curriculum. It is in the day to day teaching that you meet all students and that all students have a chance to make music. The rest is extra – important, but an addition to what should be an already inclusive department. It is important to recognise that in terms of inclusion,*

*many students making music at many different levels is more important than a few students playing at a very high level.*

*In trying to widen what counts as musical knowledge it is important to recognise the act of music making as the central way we come to express our knowledge, understanding and skills in music. This means a more co-constructed approach to teaching and learning where music is often created in dialogue with the students and where aesthetic/compositional choices are negotiated and discussed along with possible success criteria.*

*From the curriculum can come much of the showcasing of students' work. We can try to recognise the real life musicianship that many students bring rather than look to how they fulfil the criteria of the statutory levels or examination syllabus grades. We can also use as many opportunities as possible to celebrate the various musical traditions in the school.*

*However, an open policy to what counts as musical knowledge is increasingly difficult to maintain. Still, it is important that all students are treated as musicians through emphasising the support and development of their musicianship in the classroom.*

## **2. Inclusion, participation and diversity.**

- a) pupils having ownership of and responsibility for their knowledge and learning;
- b) pupils having some choice over the musical practices they engage with;
- c) teachers and pupils making music together as 'real' musicians do;
- d) an inclusive conception of who is regarded as a musician among staff and pupils;
- e) respect for a wide range of cultural traditions;
- f) pupils' own cultural image reflected in school curriculum;
- g) the open accessibility of resources (physical and human);
- h) high levels of motivated participation at all levels of schooling and in wider society;
- i) a lifelong approach to musical learning.

**Vignette 2** <note to editor: to be placed in box>

*Social Justice starts with the curriculum, a curriculum designed so that it enables all students to make music and which connects in some way with their own sense of musicality. There needs to a space in the curriculum which allows students to see themselves and who they are reflected in the music that they make. Some believe that we should be presenting the best that culture as to offer, and this means the agreed and accepted greats of western music, but of importance are the relationship between the people who make music and the actual music making itself, not the quality perceived or otherwise of the music.*

However, and more controversially, the emancipatory indicators imply a significant realignment of the relationships between teachers, pupils and musical knowledge and include:

**3. Criticality and reflection.**

- a) a dialectical construction of knowledge and pedagogy between pupils and teachers;
- b) an awareness of the political dimensions to culture and musical practices;
- c) critical reflection on cultural ‘givens’ and possible futures (teachers and pupils);
- d) critical reflection on curriculum, pedagogy and assessment (teachers and pupils);
- e) the pupil as cultural and educational critic;
- f) an openness to change in musical practices that can be instigated by pupils and teachers.

These emancipatory indicators have significant implications for pupil and teacher agency and a critical pedagogy. In light of his critique, Woodford proposes that social justice in music education can *only* be achieved through a critical pedagogy that is nothing less than social and political activism through “empowering teachers and students to reclaim ownership over the design and direction of their musical lives by helping them to see and hear the world with critical eyes and ears” (2012, p. 98). A similar critical pedagogy is implied by Spruce where the

emancipatory discourse is “manifest through the involvement of individuals and communities in deciding what is worthwhile musical ‘knowledge’ and how that ‘knowledge’ is best learnt” (Spruce, 2013, p. 23).

Critical pedagogy in an emancipatory discourse promotes the importance of human agency in social justice. The implication being that the democratic discourse will not by itself lead to the changes that have characterized previous injustices in the English music classroom. The implications of the emancipatory discourse for social justice in the music classroom are controversial and challenging and we shall return to these later.

### **Significant Moments in the History of Social Justice in the English Music Classroom**

Recent initiatives and policy in England have focused on social justice in the music classroom through explorations in epistemology, pedagogy and technology, and these, as we shall see, can be characterized as being part of the democratic discourse.

Epistemological developments in the history of English music education have related to either (a) content knowledge, or (b) the nature of musical knowledge. While this is not the place for a full historical analysis, an example of (a) can be seen in the early 1960s where there were calls for ‘pop’ music to be included as a valid curriculum content (see Vulliamy, 1977) as well as knowledge of the dominant western classical tradition. An example of (b) can be seen in the work of Swanwick (1988), who had an important influence on the formation of the first English national curriculum for music in 1992. Swanwick argued for a wider conception of knowledge based on the nature of music itself and emphasized the primacy of our lived relationship with music in education. Each of these examples serves to illustrate a tendency towards a wider

conception of what counts as musical knowledge and thus what counts as achievement in a (potentially) more democratic and socially just classroom.

The pedagogical developments in various initiatives and policy have related to (a) the ways in which we learn music, and (b) the relationships between teacher and learner. An example of (a), from the 1970s, can be seen in the work of Paynter and Aston (1970) who maintained that the way to learn how to compose is to actually do it; and developed a sophisticated pedagogy to underpin an approach that placed children as creative agents at the centre of the music curriculum. This, of course, also exemplifies (b), where the relationship between the teacher and learner is fundamentally changed and the flow of knowledge is no longer one way, as was the case in the 'traditional' music classroom. The radical implications of this idea can now be seen in the self-directed learning associated with projects such as *Musical Futures*, which is an ongoing curriculum development project focusing on pupils' ownership of musical learning. Again, the principal aim of such pedagogical developments was to facilitate social justice in the music classroom through, it is argued, a more democratic set of pedagogical relationships.

Technology is at the heart of how we engage with and mediate music at a very fundamental level. Technology enables us to 'do' music and can also provide access to it. Whether intentionally or not, it can be argued that all technological developments have facilitated a more inclusive, accessible and thus socially just music classroom from the use of Orff instruments, through to the tape recorder, to electronic keyboards and to the use of mobile technology. The development of diverse technologies have underpinned both epistemic and pedagogic aims for democracy and social justice in the music classroom through aiming to make musical learning more accessible

Table 1 draws together a summary of some key moments in the development of classroom music in England cross referenced with the most significant of the indicators proposed earlier (see page x). Again it is worth noting that this analysis focuses on the English secondary classroom for pupils aged 11-14.

**Table 1 Policy and initiatives for the English music classroom and indicators of social justice.**

	Epistemology: the content of the curriculum, the nature of music and our relationship to it	Pedagogy: the ways in which we learn and relationships between teacher and learner	Technology: how we engage with and mediate music
Traditional 'baseline'	Closed curriculum content based on singing (traditional songs), appreciation (of classical music), and theory (notation)	A closed pedagogy involving didactic learning and based on choices made by teachers	Closed choices of technology limited to the voice and gramophone
Late 60s early 70s: Developments inspired by the sociology of knowledge (see	A wider conception of content knowledge if still located in a 'closed' curriculum	Conceptions of learning closed with teachers still making pedagogical choices	Wider technology (if still limited) including recording and playback technology

<p>Vulliamy, 1977) to validate ‘pop’ music</p> <p>1a, 1c</p>			
<p>Late 60s early 70s: Developments inspired by the ‘creativity’ movement (Paynter and Aston, 1970; Schafer, 1965) to validate composition in the classroom</p> <p>1a, 1b, 1c, 2a, 2b, 3a</p>	<p>A more open conception of content where children are seen as creators of musical knowledge</p>	<p>More open and less hierarchical relationships between learners and teachers</p>	<p>The addition of ‘accessible’ Orff instruments for creative music making</p>
<p>Late 80s early 90s: The first National Curriculum for music (DES, 1992), an eclectic curriculum integrating listening, composing and performing.</p> <p>1a, 1b, 1c, 1d, 1f, 1g, 2a, 2b, 2e</p>	<p>A wide breadth of content now drawing in world musics (see Kwami, 1996) and focusing on making music</p>	<p>A mixed pedagogy based on ‘instruction and encounter’ (see Swanwick, 1988)</p>	<p>The addition of popular ‘democratic’ electronic keyboards, sequencing and sampling technology</p>

Early 2000s: Self-directed learning (see Green, 2008, and <i>Musical Futures</i> ) 1a, 1b, 1c, 1d, 1g, 2a, 2b, 2e, 2c, 2d, 2e, 2g, 2i, 3a	Open content based on children making choices about the music that they play	An open pedagogy with teachers as facilitators and children make pedagogical choices	The addition of authentic instruments and mobile technology
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Necessarily all these snapshots are problematic distillations that miss many nuances of actual practice (if they ever permeated many classrooms at all). For example, some involved in the ‘creative movement’ have been accused of having a ‘closed’ approach to creativity through focusing on models inspired by western avant garde art music (see Green, 2008). Similarly, self-directed music in the classroom has often been criticized for having a ‘closed’ view of content based on ‘pop’ music.

However, what is true about each is that democratic indicators dominate successive attempts towards a more socially just music classroom. Each instance exemplified above has aimed in good faith to validate and recognize a progressively wider conception of what counts as musical knowledge, pedagogy and achievement in the classroom. All have contributed to progress in relation to what we have called the democratic discourse surrounding social justice through epistemological, pedagogical and technological developments in English classroom music.

Having said these things, there is evidence to doubt the a body of critique success of these predominantly democratic developments in producing a more socially just music

classroom. It would appear that wider cultural and sociological processes have confounded aims for a more socially just music classroom. If this is the case, how have these mechanisms worked to do this?

### **Reform in the Music Classroom and Social Justice**

Over the period of time outlined in Table 1 there is no doubt that the political and economic agenda has delivered significant gains for the funding and provision of classroom music in England. This has been a period of unprecedented attention for all aspects of music education with the avowed aim of a more democratic and socially just music education where all pupils have greater access to participation and achievement in music. However, various commentators and critics have also suggested that the impact of these democratic reforms have been confounded by a range of social and cultural mechanisms.

How do we know that the issue of social justice in the music classroom remains a problem to be solved? Given the relatively low status of music as a *curriculum subject* in schools, as opposed to a set of *extra curricular activities*, there are few studies that get to the heart of social justice in the music classroom. Classroom music in schools in England not only competes with itself outside of the curriculum for importance, but also all other subjects in school. However, one measure of participation is those opting to study music beyond the compulsory age of 14. This continues to drop for music in most recent times from over 48,000 in 2011 to just over 41,000 in 2013, compared with over 70,000 who studied Drama in 2013; and, unlike music, Drama has not been compulsory for 11-14 year olds as part of a national curriculum. While it is acknowledged that music is different from some other subjects, in the sense that participation can take place outside of the classroom, it is argued that greater inclusion for 11-14 year olds would mean greater numbers feeling included beyond the compulsory age.

While there are various other explanations of this issue, for example, the pressures on schools to achieve highly in the English Baccalaureate which contains no compulsory arts subjects (and thus no Drama also!), it remains the case that, as Evans has pointed out, “It has proved difficult to reverse the position where approximately nine out of ten students turn their backs on ‘school music’ at the earliest opportunity” (Evans, 2012, p. 197).

This situation transcends recent initiatives and policy, where historically low levels of participation beyond the compulsory curriculum, (and thus the wide distribution of achievement) would appear to have consistently confounded social justice in the music classroom. While on the face of things social justice has been actively promoted (through a more ‘democratic’ approach to social justice), it is argued here that these developments (even those seemingly radical ones) have been appropriated by powerful cultural and sociological forces, thereby neutering attempts at a socially just music classroom. There is a range of strong and implicit reasons for continued injustices and it is to these that we now turn.

### **Confounding Social Justice in the Music Classroom**

The literature indicates that there are several mechanisms at play that confound social justice in the music classroom, in spite of democratic developments, and these include:

- subtle mechanisms which perpetuate the pervasive and exclusive elitism of the western classical tradition;
- the related socialization of music teachers both in their own training and when working as teachers in schools;

- the construction of and justification for music in the classroom which promotes a hierarchical dichotomy with other school subjects and an impoverished discourse on the nature of music as a discipline.

We will explore each of these in more detail.

**Perpetuating the exclusive elitism of the western classical tradition.** There is a well-established critique of classroom music that relates to the pervasiveness of the western classical tradition and this pervasiveness is both explicit and implicit. In confounding social justice in the music classroom, the western classical tradition, it is argued, has the power to define what counts as ‘good’ music by appearing to have values that are autonomous and universal; through the objectification of these values when music is regarded as an object; through these values being measured and characterized by ‘complexity’.

***‘Good’ music as having values that are autonomous and universal.*** Of explicit significance here is the transcendental status of western classical music being autonomously, universally and self evidently perceived as a measure of ultimate value in music. Here “great music is made to appear, and required to appear, eternal, natural and universal....poor music is rooted in society...” (Green, 1988, p. 101). An example of the socially unjust consequences of this is where:

...western classical music is then rationalised by evaluating non-art music (*pop*) on art music’s (*classical*) terms: as an autonomous object, detached from its social and cultural context, valued only in terms of relationships between its musical materials. An exercise in which non art music can only come off worse. Thus the bourgeois aesthetic is

confirmed as intrinsically superior and, by association, so are its consumers and creators (Spruce 1999: 79).

Furthermore, the self-evident universal value of western classical music has meant that classroom music in England has struggled to shake off the perception of youngsters that it is underpinned by a 'bourgeois aesthetic'. For example, Lamont and Maton (2008, 2010) have suggested that pupils perceive post-14 music courses to have an 'elite' content based on possessing specialist knowledge against which they are reluctant to be judged. These factors may account for some of the lack of participation in English classroom music beyond the age of 14 and thus social justice.

**Vignette 3** <note to editor: to be placed in box>*Recently exam specifications have started to redirect and reshape our teaching and particularly expectations surrounding 'musical literacy'. Naturally I am sometimes worried about the impact of a lack of 'musical literacy' for students. Of course the issues are around how overwhelmingly classically centred the 'language' around musical literacy is for GCSE examinations which nearly always points to students using staff notation whether or not it is relevant or helpful. Here there is a real pressure to try and ensure the students succeed but it does encourage a hoop jumping exercise and a narrower vision of what is acceptable musical knowledge. This is a tension that can restrict what we celebrate as valid musical knowledge.*

*One gifted pianist I taught whose harmonisation of melodies was incredibly sophisticated had difficulty finding a C on a piano. How's that for progress? Then of course I have known a number of students who primarily see themselves as MCs/rappers and this is very difficult to recognise through officially sanctioned assessment criteria.*

**Music as object.** Closely related to values that appear to be autonomous and universal is the objectification of music. The notion of music as object means that:

The ideology of music being ‘out there’ is promoted particularly in the western classical tradition through the idea that the objectified forms of music – the scores and recordings – are synonymous with ‘the music’. Music – or one of its objectified forms – then becomes an object to be taught. (Spruce, 2012a, p. 188)

One of the consequences of music as object is that it becomes susceptible to reification and commodification resulting in an alienated relationship between learner and musical knowledge that can explain, at least in part, the paradox that pupils identify more with music outside of school than they do in the classroom.

Alienation arises as a result of disjuncture between the material nature of musical learning...and how it is experienced as part of a socially mediated school music curriculum....In music education this can be illustrated by a disjuncture between most pupils’ experience of music outside of school...and music in the classroom. (Philpott, 2010, p. 83)

The power of music as object to permeate curriculum developments can be seen in the way in which a seemingly more socially just National Curriculum (in all of its incarnations), which included a wide range of ‘musics’, was commodified through taking a ‘museum’ approach to the study of musics. Here programmes of study promoted the notion that ‘musics’ can be objectified as musical processes to be studied as objects quite separate from the cultural context in which they had been used and produced. “The consequence was a music curriculum in which music took on the charter of a *commodity* to be ‘done’ in the roundabout of curriculum coverage” (Philpott, 2010, p. 83).

In summary, it has been argued that, when working together, the concepts of ‘good’ music exhibiting values that are autonomous and universal *and* music as an alienated object can subtly confound social justice in the music classroom.

***Good music being characterized by its complexity.*** Once again closely related to values that are autonomous, universal and objectified in the western classical aesthetic, is the idea that good music can be ‘measured’. These criteria have underpinned approaches to formative and summative assessment in the music classroom (see Philpott, 2012b) and include the notion that ‘good’ music can be characterized through its:

- complexity;
- originality;
- difficulty;
- breadth of influence(s);
- linearity of associated musical learning and development.

These socially and culturally derived assumptions, characteristically promoting ‘more is good’, impinge upon the curricula and assessment regimes of classroom music at all levels in England, taking on the appearance of being universal and yet as Swanwick argues:

Complexity by itself is no virtue. Performing a wide range of complex music without understanding would definitely not count as a high level of achievement. And it is certainly possible to perform, compose and enjoy a high quality musical experience without any great complexity. (1999, p. 78)

The result is an exclusivity that impinges upon social justice in the music classroom through an implicit definition of what counts as ‘good’ music and thus the recognition of what counts as achievement.

There is evidence that this implicit pervasiveness has the power to appropriate even the most radical (and potentially emancipatory) of developments such as the self-directed learning associated with *Musical Futures*. As an example, the project published assessment criteria compatible with what, at the time, was the current statutory National Curriculum (see Philpott, 2012b) within which ‘more is good’ is implicit. Sanctioning such criteria has the potential to be prejudicial to ‘good’ music exhibiting other characteristics such as simplicity of structure, of melody, of harmony, i.e. music that champions simplicity *can* be great music. Given that much of the self-directed musical learning identified in the *Musical Futures* research (Green, 2008) showed that it could be characterized by the quality of music making above any quantitative measure of difficulty or breadth, it is questionable whether such criteria, derived from the dominant ideology of western ‘art’ music, are appropriate for self-directed learning. In short, summative and formative assessment criteria based on the assumptions and values of western art music can impinge upon social justice for pupils in terms of what can be recognized as worthy achievement.

**Vignette 4** <note to editor: to be placed in box>

*To what extent are we trying to broaden horizons? This has been an ongoing debate for me. I don't really remember focusing on more than one instrument and one particular style in my teens (classical music) and really when it came down to it studying just a handful of composers never seemed to penalise me. However, being an MCer is nearly always (and unfortunately) seen negatively as a lack of real musical knowledge, a serious restriction and focus which is unhealthy – almost non musical.*

**The socialization of the music teacher and pupil.** The socialization of music teachers and pupils in their musical training and the culture of schooling in England can serve to perpetuate

injustice in the music classroom and reinforce the pervasiveness of the western classical aesthetic.

There is some evidence to suggest that the professional backgrounds of music teachers are liable to reinforce and perpetuate the values wrapped up in 'good' music being constructed as object, as having autonomous and universal values and being characterized by complexity. Green has suggested that the "majority of school music teachers in the UK...have classical backgrounds" (2008, p. 27) and Finney (2007) also notes that music teachers' backgrounds and training enables them to empathize with the elite 'codes' wrapped up in officially sanctioned curricula and assessment criteria.

Quite apart from the role of music teachers' training in perpetuating these values, this issue is also played out through the socialization of class music teachers into a culture of accountability through assessment. Here the power of league tables and measurement of pupil progress serves to perpetuate a culture of good equals complexity (more is good). This has led to what often amounts to the over assessment of pupils in the music classroom when using quantitative criteria derived from statutory documents.

Even Ofsted (2012), whose job it is to inspect for accountability in England, have noted the pernicious impact of such socialization on the quality of music teaching "linked to schools' requirement for teachers to provide half-termly numerical levels and sub-levels of attainment for every student" (2012, p. 37). They go on to say that:

While it is important to demonstrate, measure, track and challenge students' progress through comparison of their work and achievement over time, this led to frequent instances of teachers artificially and inaccurately dividing the levels into sub-grades or assessing isolated areas of musical activity, rather than considering students' musical

responses holistically....considerable amounts of teaching time were spent on the mechanics of assessment procedures. This often had a negative impact on students' engagement, enjoyment and achievement... (2012, p. 37)

**Vignette 5** <note to editor: to be placed in box>

*I have tried to avoid indiscriminately 'levelling' students' work using the national curriculum criteria and this has not seemed to matter to OFSTED or senior leadership teams. Avoiding class discussions around abstract levels has allowed more focused discussion on the music making in front of us, not on 'how does this music fit the criteria' but more on its own terms and what makes this good.*

*However, the tension of accountability and autonomy in teaching and learning has begun to influence more day to day teaching. The issue of showing progress in lessons and over time can make some lessons more 'conservative' with a sense that teachers needed to intervene to ensure maximum progress for all students and to show 'impact'. This is probably not unique to music. There is a tension between seeing music education as about developing your music making as part of your cultural practice and linear progression of the mastery of certain skills and knowledge. The latter used for accountability as evidenced in 'progression', can restrict and reshape your views on what is important in the music classroom.*

In short, it is argued that the hegemonic assumptions wrapped up in music curricula and approaches to assessment in England are embedded in a culture of schooling dominated by accountability. The values of complexity, difficulty, breadth, and linearity of learning are eminently measurable (if not musical or inclusive), and the 'ease' of quantitative measurement is facilitated through criteria incrementally written to assess various curricula and syllabi. These are implicit influences on the socialization of music teachers that militate against social justice for all pupils.

Of course, these influences play out equally on the socialization of pupils. The playing of certain types of instruments (from the western classical tradition and usually learned outside of the classroom) and certain types of musical backgrounds are more likely to predispose a pupil to success. Those who have benefitted from an aesthetic that is consonant with the western classical tradition are most likely to succeed to the exclusion of others who may have ambitions in relation to other musical traditions (see Philpott, 2001). There is also some evidence to suggest that those who play a 'classical' instrument are more likely to opt for music at post 14 (see Bray, 2000).

**The construction of and justification for music in the curriculum.** Finally, there would appear to be a set of issues surrounding the social and cultural construction of music and its justification in the curriculum that additionally serve to challenge the impact of developments in the music classroom on social justice.

Justifications for music in the curriculum most commonly come in the following extra musical constructions (see also Philpott, 2012a):

- instrumental justifications: in which the study of music is said to be able to develop, for example, mathematical skills, spatial skills;
- therapeutic justifications: where music can have cathartic and healing powers;
- civilizing justifications: where music makes us a better and more rounded human being;
- emotional justifications: where music facilitates the development our emotional intelligence.

Music is also commonly justified in the curriculum for the contribution of music education to a personal, social and economic good. This is most easily exemplified through most recent policy

statements such as, “The value of music as an academic subject lies in its contribution to enjoyment and enrichment, for its social benefits....” (DfE, 2011, p. 6).

Instrumental justifications for music in the curriculum most commonly suggest that music is ‘good’ for us (see also Philpott, 2012a) and these overarchingly instrumental justifications are problematic for social justice in the music classroom. It is also the case that one of the tacit assumptions of such justification is that the music that is good for us is ‘good’ music, i.e., the music of the western classical tradition.

There are two seemingly contradictory nuances to this construction. Firstly, there is the construction of music as an amelioration and counterpart to a more rational and (more important) scientific world promoting a stratified, hierarchical epistemology that militates against the arts. Such a construction adopts a dualism that has subjugated music (and the arts) beneath other ‘harder’ subjects thus establishing a hierarchical dichotomy. However, while on the one hand music is constructed as a ‘soft’ subject whose strengths lie in our inability to ‘measure’, paradoxically it is justified for its transferable and measurable impact on other aspects of our life. In a culture of accountability politicians who ‘sponsor’ initiatives and statutory curricula are attracted by evidence that can show the potential impact of music on wider educational success and thus economic good. This is another manifestation of a hierarchical epistemology.

The inherent hierarchical dichotomy here has undermined the case for music and the arts through emphasizing its independent autonomous (and ‘soft’) values that separate it from an emancipatory discourse through a partial and impoverished exposition of the nature of musical expression, meaning and understanding.

The contention is then that the ‘soft’ justifications have made it easier to take music (and the arts) less seriously and that they are derived from a partial analysis of musical

meaning. Given that any symbolic mode is subject to wide and powerful political, social and cultural forces, this construction of educational music has not helped the cause.

(Philpott, 2012a, p. 50)

The argument here is that what appear to be strong constructions and justifications for music in the curriculum result in a subversion of its importance in relation to what are 'harder' disciplines. The result has been an underplaying of music as a curriculum subject (e.g. in terms of the curriculum time devoted to it) that amounts to a lack of access and thus social justice for pupils. Furthermore, such constructions serve to perpetuate values of autonomy, universality and objectification.

By way of summary to this section, we have seen that there are important critiques of what we have called democratic developments in the music classroom, and that explicit and implicit aspects of school music, which are strongly informed by an elitist western classical tradition, have served to perpetuate long-standing injustices in the music classroom. These are subtle and nuanced forces that confound the avowed aims of the democratic discourse and which add up to injustice for many pupils that participate in the English music classroom.

### **Concluding Discussion**

Previously we have seen that much progress has taken place in the English music classroom in relation to the democratic discourse surrounding policy and initiative. However, we have also seen arguments that developments in the democratic discourse have been appropriated by sociological and cultural mechanisms that have negated significant gains in social justice.

The difficult question remains as to what we can conclude from this analysis? It would appear that of and by itself the democratic discourse is not enough. What are the possibilities for

an emancipatory discourse and how might this manifest itself in the classroom? There are three main implications arising from the analysis for an emancipatory discourse that can be drawn out:

- a critical pedagogy;
- teacher and pupil agency;
- the possibility of moving music out of the curriculum and compulsory classroom.

What is a critical pedagogy? A critical pedagogy suggests going beyond democratic discourse to an emancipatory discourse that engages with the complex meanings of music as valid curriculum content, and where tacit political and cultural meanings are part of the pedagogical transaction of pupils and teachers. By way of example, Woodford (2012) has suggested that the reasons why ambitions for social justice in music education have been confounded relate to our passive acceptance of mechanisms that are functions of a neoliberal and corporate political agenda Green (1995, 1996) 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. A critical pedagogy would aim to open up the implicit politics of music in the classroom and, by so doing, enable teachers and pupils to understand the ways in which music is subject to powerful social and cultural forces as part of their learning and teaching. Such a process, it is argued, has the potential to be emancipatory and promotes teacher and pupil agency. Where is the 'space' for teacher and pupil agency to influence the course of social justice as part of a critical pedagogy and emancipatory discourse? Philpott and Wright (after Bernstein, 1996) suggest that:

The power to influence change...is apparent in the gaps between the various sites for the recontextualization of curriculum and pedagogy i.e. at the levels of *state, school, and individual teachers and pupils*. It is here that agency can operate....' (2012, p. 456)

What does it mean for teachers and pupils to have agency when working in ‘discursive gaps’? The argument here suggests that where teachers have power to change the status quo is where they work in the gaps between policy and practice. The power to influence real change in social justice (for teachers and pupils) is apparent in the gaps between the various sites for the re-contextualization of curriculum and pedagogy, i.e., at the levels of *state*, *school* and *individual teachers and pupils*. It is here that agency and an emancipatory discourse can operate as pupils and teachers reinterpret policy and initiatives.

However, these important implications for an emancipatory discourse are problematic on many different levels for the ‘jobbing’ music teacher in the secondary classroom. It would be invidious not to recognize the power of what Bernstein calls the ‘regulative discourse’, related as it is to wider social and cultural structures, for as we have seen there is a long history of the status quo embracing change with potentially little or no redistribution of access to achievement and success in the music classroom.

**Vignette 6** <note to editor: to be placed in box>

*There are tensions between developing and challenging the students’ musical horizons and allowing students them to explore their own. This is part of a long standing debate. Musical Futures has been for me the most important recent curriculum intervention and is a good example of a ‘ground up’ approach with much of the work coming from teachers or based on research working with teachers. The influence of student voice became stronger because of Musical Futures.*

Teachers and pupils are inevitably subject to powerful structural processes of socialization, which are all the more pervasive where there is a strong culture of external accountability. For example, it takes some courage to eschew assessment practices that are based on regular ‘levelling’ using criteria dominated by values of complexity. Such expectations are often most

strongly articulated at the level of individual schools and in such circumstances emancipation is rarely high on the agenda for most music teachers.

There is an inevitable tension between a democratic discourse and an emancipatory discourse when the implicit politics of music are laid bare. For example, in self-directed learning who chooses the 'what' and 'when' of the critical revelation and, if the teacher, then does this risk further alienation of pupils should they not wish to have the politics of their self-directed learning revealed? This is a tension that a pedagogy for social justice will need to resolve if it is to be both democratic and emancipatory. The problem with much critical thinking about music is that it is a discourse *about* music rather *in* music. Furthermore, this can be someone else's critical thinking (the teachers?) and, as we have seen, social justice has often been confounded through pupil alienation from the 'reified' musical knowledge of others. The challenge here is for pupil 'ownership' of the discourse *about* music as well as the discourse *in* music.

**Vignette 7** <note to editor: to be placed in box>

*Possibly the area that I have engaged in less is the more critical approach to music i.e. the more historical and social aspects of music making. What would it mean to put the rather silly masculinised posturing of some of the MC/rapping lyrics in context, if at the same time we did not look at sexist practices in other musics. Sexism in classical music is well documented but how many music teachers would be happy to situate Classical music making as the sexist white middle class hegemonic practice it has become? I know most teachers would be much more comfortable pointing out heavy metal's sexist lyrics or reggae's homophobia – without really addressing the complexity of the issue. That is the recognition that rappers challenge sexism, that a lot of rap addresses issues of class/race and gender and that an everyone (white) likes to focus on the more extreme of rap at the expense of much other rap music. Given the rather conservative nature of most music teachers I imagine much critical discourse about music to be reinforcing and essentialising notions of the 'other', problematizing popular music and*

*critiquing text at the expense of the acknowledgement of context. I imagine the power of the music teacher to label approval at certain musical practices and disapproval at others too strong to make the discussion useful. I doubt people take on board enough that who they are socially and culturally gives them a partial view of other people and that their own partial view needs critiquing and challenging. I imagine most people are of the view that young people need to be taught and that our experience and knowledge gives us an authority to speak with wisdom and insight.*

*The complexities of discussing critically different music might just re-inscribe the difference and the power inequalities we wish to challenge.*

There is much work to be done here on what is a sophisticated and complex pedagogy. Making progress in social justice in the music classroom will require courageous music teachers and senior leaders in schools who promote music being treated as the dominant language of the classroom, where music making itself *is* the critical discourse and not words about music (although these have their place). The vision here is for a classroom music that is both democratic and emancipatory in its approach to social justice and where music is the discourse that underpins both a critical pedagogy and the exploitation of ‘discursive gaps’.

The aim is for the music classroom to be democratic, in the sense of the inclusivity of the musical discourse, and where there is a conspicuously wider distribution of musical achievement. The aim is also emancipatory, in the sense of the criticality implicit of the discourse *in* music and, where there is discourse *about* music, that this arises from the pupils’ ownership of making and thinking in music. The implication is for a complex, subtle and nuanced pedagogy for social justice and there is still much research and thinking to be carried out here.

## **Postscript**

By way of a final thought (and the third implication for an emancipatory discourse noted above) we also ought to consider the proposition that curriculum classroom music is destined to be a place for injustice in music. Given the cultural and social forces at play, which have been reported here, it could be that music in the classroom is always held in the bind of such forces. In this context, the ‘space’ for a critical pedagogy and genuine pupil and teacher agency as part of an emancipatory discourse seems an increasingly distant prospect. This is especially so when, at the time of writing, the epistemological and pedagogical implications of the most recent (and as yet not fully operational) developments in England are set to backtrack on even the democratic discourse (see Spruce 2012b, 2013) and where examinations in music and the arts are to become, in the discourse of government policy ‘tougher and more rigorous’ focusing on the ‘best’ of our culture. Such issues should cause all to ask fundamental questions about the purpose of compulsory classroom music in the English secondary school; whether it needs to be a weekly timetabled subject with a formal curriculum; what physical resources are most appropriate; and who should be the teachers.

Perhaps we should countenance taking music *out* of the compulsory curriculum both for its own sake and for the sake of social justice; this will also take courageous leadership. Perhaps the radical implications of a critical pedagogy, pupil and teacher agency, and an emancipatory discourse is best served by other ways of organizing music in schools. The self-directed learning model of *Musical Futures* promised much in this regard and one of the more radical implications of such work is for music to be arranged in non-compulsory open curricula, in open classrooms and with open resources where criticality *in* music has a higher chance of flourishing in an ever open ‘discursive gap’ . If criticality, agency and emancipation are so important to social justice in music education, as outlined here, then we should at least consider these options. To do

otherwise risks ignoring the lessons of the past and perpetuating the ongoing problem of social injustice in the English secondary music classroom.

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