

Envisioning Real Utopias in Music Education

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This paper adopts a perspective from the sociology of music education oriented towards Erik Olin Wright's (2006) 'emancipatory social science' in which researchers attempt to produce knowledge pertaining to the common goal of disrupting oppression and providing conditions enabling humans to live abundantly. According to Wright (2006) three essential tasks are required to complete this purpose: diagnosing and critiquing the world as it exists; envisioning viable alternatives; and understanding the obstacles to and possibilities and dilemmas of change. In this presentation, these tasks are undertaken in relation to music education.

Examining the effects of neo-liberal education policies and change-resistant cultural hegemony on 21st century music education in many contexts, the author turns to the thought of Canadian theorist Richard Day (2004) in identifying and addressing the effects of the 'hegemony of hegemony' on society, reorienting this in relation to contemporary music education. The work of Côté, Day and de Peuter, (2007) is then discussed in relation to the potential of 'Utopian pedagogy' to provide a viable alternative. Such pedagogy does not represent "'utopia' in the sense of rationalistic dreams of a future perfect society" but rather "an ethos of experimentation that is oriented toward carving out spaces for resistance and reconstruction here and now". (p.317) In this way, "Utopian theory and practice acquire a new relevance as something other than and outside of the hyper-inclusive logic of neoliberalism." (p.317) Part of this work, the authors state, is to disseminate efforts that present other educational worlds as

possible, indeed, as already in existence.

In a similar vein, Tomlinson and Lipsitz (2013) describe the university as offering a set of 'insubordinate spaces,' (p.3) that can provide "opportunity for critique and argument that can counter neoliberalism and its racial project" (p.3) and suggest that if we expand our counter-pedagogic imagination we can find such spaces for pedagogic activism in the community.

Tomlinson and Lipsitz, like Day, discuss the growth of a new 'social imaginary' developing in the margins of society that shows "seeds of a democratic, cooperative way of living together" in projects such as "community gardens and urban farming, community-run youth programs and arts spaces, and economic cooperatives. (Lipman 2011, 147). They cite examples such as the Seattle Fandango Project and the Center in New Orleans' Ninth Ward as attempts at 'popular education' that also present 'important sites for struggle' and as evidence that both within and outside schools, neoliberalism may be countered by encouraging "collective capacity for democratic deliberation, collective decision making, and public engagement and accountability". (Tomlinson and Lipsitz, 2013, pp4-5) The paper proceeds to consider what such spaces might look like for music education and where they might be situated. The final section of the presentation ponders the obstacles to such alternative visions of music education and the potential possibilities and dilemmas inherent in such change.

References

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