

Beyond 'Democracy': Making Space for the Educational and Political in Music Education

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SETTING THE STAGE

As public interest in arts education continues to decline in contemporary societies (Allsup & Westerlund, 2012), an existential crisis has developed globally within the music education profession leading to attempts to stay relevant amidst external threats such as a lack of resources, the deprofessionalization of education and the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, the music education profession has desperately sought evidence of the value that fits with 'the language of the era' to justify the music subject in schools and teacher education (Odendaal et al., 2019). This trend is also evident in Finland, where the authors of this chapter are based, and which has long been at the forefront of the internationally significant research-based development of constructivist, democratic music education in schools, including critical popular music and music technology practices (e.g., Westerlund, 2006; Väkevä, 2006; Väkevä & Westerlund, 2007; Partti, 2012; Kallio, 2015; Ojala, 2017;

Koskela, 2022). While the Finnish school system, in general, has been praised as 'the best in the world' for its equity and high professional quality of teachers (Sahlberg, 2015; Juntunen, 2015), Finland's results in OECD's Programme for International Students Assessment (PISA) have significantly decreased in the past decade. Although music is not included in PISA, the serious decline in educational 'success' unavoidably also affects music education in schools. Responding to the most recent PISA results in the main national newspaper, Finnish Professor Emeritus Kari Uusikylä (2022, B15) asserted that the current educational crisis was 'deliberately created' by the country's shortsighted politics. More specifically, he blamed a lack of understanding among politicians regarding the basic concepts of teaching and the school curriculum. The current 'modern learning environment' in Finnish schools, he laments, consists of large heterogeneous student groups and self-directed learning environments, where

students are expected to become ‘future experts’ who must compete to earn their place in a ‘successful Finland’. The biggest single factor in this state of emergency, as Uusikylä refers to it, is the underestimation of teacher professionalism and the relinquishing of educational innovation to external ‘school developers’ such as consultants, policymakers and businessmen.

The crisis in education in Finland reflects the global trend of educational systems suffering from severe symptoms of neoliberal logic, which places market-based values and ideals in social relations (Hakala et al., 2015). This logic has also begun leading to narrow interpretations of ‘democracy’ (Giroux, 2015; Mayo, 2015), whereby democracy is only viewed as majority rule (e.g., through voting). In this chapter, we advocate against narrow interpretations and instead promote a wider interpretation of democratization in music education as a *way of life*, as was already endorsed by John Dewey (Dewey LW 11). Democracy as a way of life touches everyone, individually and communally, and, ideally, is present in everyone’s attitudes, values and interactions with others. Relatedly, educational theorist Michael Apple (2018) has elaborated upon the distinction between thin and thick democracy in education. According to him, thin democracy manifests in individualist education that is valued largely ‘as a tool for meeting a set of limited economic needs as defined by the powerful’ (p. 5) and which emphasizes school choice and the measurement of learning outcomes. By contrast, thick democracy seeks ‘to provide full collective participation in the search for the common good and the creation of critical citizens’ (p. 4). According to Chantal Mouffe (2005), ‘[m]odern democracy’s specificity lies in the recognition and legitimation of conflict and the refusal to suppress it by imposing an authoritarian order’ (p. 30). Since democracy is antithetic to totalitarianism and inequality, democracy is, and needs to be, a struggle (Apple, 2018) that is, as Dewey explained, constantly

re-discovered, re-made and re-organized (Dewey LW 11, p. 82). In seeking transformation through the *struggle of democratization* (see also Biesta, 2019), we see the need to advance discussions about the political in music education. Leaning on an understanding of the arts for helping to ‘see things in a different way’ (Mouffe, 2013, p. 96) and education and teacher education for advocating ‘genuine alternatives’ (Clarke & Phelan, 2017, p. 6), we believe music teacher professionalism requires not only practical and pedagogical craftsmanship but also a sense of ‘political identity’ (Mouffe, 2013). Such a sense of political identity is characterized by relationality in the educational and public spheres where democracy may be *performed*. Thus, democratic music education in schools ought to be conceived not only in relation to musical traditions and practices but in relation to contemporary society and its future (trans)formations.

In this chapter, we will analyze the interconnectedness of the disappearance of the educational and the masking of the political in the practice and theorization of music education in schools in the neoliberal era. We aim to expose a dilemma in contemporary music education, by showing how engaged scholarly efforts for democracy in music education (e.g., Elliott & Silverman, 2015; Gould, 2007; Väkevä & Westerlund, 2007; Westerlund, 2002; Woodford, 2005) are impeded by underlying assumptions that have been criticized by several educational theorists: a) that schools are automatically democratic as they include the entire cohort of children (Illich, 1971); b) that the purpose of schools is to prepare students for society ‘as it is’ rather than encouraging them to change it (Apple, 2018; McLaren, 2015; Dewey, 1916); and c) that student-centered pedagogies, including through repertoire selection or working collaboratively, automatically produces democratic music education (e.g., Kallio, 2015; Koskela, 2022; Muhonen, 2016). Due to these assumptions, even when pre-service music teachers

are educated to think and act according to democratic principles, their future schools may be guided by language and policy that do not support this ideal or enable teachers to strive towards wider democratization in and through education. We will further suggest that instead of giving up in the face of neoliberal logic, the field of music teacher education ought to retain the educational and unmask the political in its content and aims. Hence, the purpose of this chapter is, first, to propose an approach towards an understanding of music education in schools and music teacher education as a political and reflexive educational endeavor; and, second, to address and interpret the repercussions of the ostensibly depolitical school environment for democratic music teacher professionalism.

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF EDUCATION

The Language of Learning and Learning Outcomes

As with other educational fields, music education should be concerned about the effects of *the new language of learning*, which has become dominant (Biesta, 2005). This can be seen in the ways the neoliberal individualistic discourse of competencies has become hegemonic not only in education in general (e.g., Mayo, 2015) but also in music education (e.g., Angel-Alvarado et al., 2021; Aróstegui, 2020; Goble, 2021; Jacobsen, 2021; Kanellopoulos, 2019; Kanellopoulos & Barahanou, 2020; Karlsen, 2019). Moreover, the prioritization of science, technology, engineering and mathematics subjects (STEM) under neoliberalism has put the arts subjects at risk, ‘with the consequent repercussions on students’ learning in terms of offering them a comprehensive, integral view of the world’ (Aróstegui, 2020, p. 47). Notably, the neoliberal educational language is characterized by a shift from an *instruction* paradigm to a *learning* paradigm (Biesta, 2012), which educational theorist

Gert Biesta has coined *learnification* (2010). Simply put, learnification refers to the overemphasis of (any type of) learning within educational contexts (Biesta, 2006, 2010, 2012, 2017a, 2017b, 2019). Learnification is evident in the shifts in educational language from students to learners, schools to learning environments, teachers to facilitators of learning, and teaching to the creation of learning opportunities (Biesta, 2012; 2017a, p. 27). According to Biesta (2017a), the process of learnification abandons questions of ‘content, purpose, and relationships’ in education and instead takes a functionalist and instrumentalist view (p. 28).

One manifestation of learnification has been the reliance on standardized learning outcomes and the learning measurement industry to determine the quality of education. Although standardized learning outcomes are not used universally in art subjects, they nevertheless also shape music education, music teacher education and music education research. John Kratus (2019) argues that a standards-based, systemized and sequential approach, which demands efficiency, predictability and control, increasingly dominates not just music education in the United States but also in the rest of the world. As examples, he offers the Orff approach, the Kodály method and Gordon’s learning theory, all of which sequence discrete parts (e.g., so-mi) in students’ musical development (p. 188). Kratus is critical of mandated curriculum guides and textbook series that dictate learning and ‘recommend step-by-step lesson plans for each learning activity in the students’ books’ (p. 191). He maintains that such guides limit curricular initiatives (p. 191) and expresses concern over the sapping of ‘the professionalization of the profession’ through the control exerted through standardization (p. 192), a phenomenon that has been identified as *deprofessionalization* by Allsup and Westerlund (2012).

While we do not contend that learning outcomes should have no place at all, we agree with Biesta’s (2020) argument that they ‘can never be all and end all of education but

nee[d] to be considered in relation to the wider “telos” of education’ (p. 113). The question of the purpose, or telos, of education, is one that cannot simply be settled once and for all. Rather it requires ongoing public reflection and deliberation, regarding, for example, the criteria of what counts as an educated person. Moreover, this question is not a matter of facts, but involves normative preferences and choices. For this reason, ‘teaching ... has to be understood as a normative profession, not just a technical one’ (Biesta, 2020, pp. 113–114). Thus, education can never be only about student ‘learning’, but is also about what, why and from whom students learn (Biesta, 2017a, p. 28), as well as situational questions such as where, when and with whom.

The Disappearance of the (Music) Teacher

The neoliberal vision of the learner as a customer overemphasizes student freedom, thereby creating a distance between learning and teaching. As a result, the teacher authority has come to be seen as a threat to student freedom, causing teachers to disappear, as they step into the background as facilitators of learning at most (Biesta, 2012). This disappearance is further aggravated by what Allsup and Westerlund (2012) describe as the freedom of the music teacher in a globalizing, uncertain world strengthening the turn towards standardized learning outcomes for guiding teachers’ choices, creating unity and safeguarding certainty. The pluralizing world, they contend, has made the teacher’s institutional role increasingly unstable, as ‘She is too mechanical, too free, defined by others, untrusted with choice, or paralyzed with excessive choice’ (p. 124). Another related response to the questioning of the traditional role of the music teacher is evident in the increase in informal music learning practices (Folkestad, 2006; Green, 2002, 2006, 2008), including those in online music communities

(e.g., Partti & Karlsen, 2010; Salavuo, 2008) and community music (e.g., Koopman, 2016; Higgins & Bartleet, 2012). Community music scholars tend to make strong distinctions between teaching and facilitation, and formal and informal learning, where the ‘enemy’ is seen to be ‘institutions such as schools where authoritarian teachers are assumed to impose musical knowledge and skills on their students, thereby perpetuating the hegemony of high culture and the distinction between musical and unmusical students’ (Kertz-Welzel, 2016, p. 127). As a remedy, scholars promote the similarities between community music and music education in schools (Elliott & Silverman, 2015) and advocate for the role of community musicians in schools to ‘stimulate or establish active music-making opportunities’ (Higgins & Bartleet, 2012). However, the question of the (music) teacher’s changing role cannot be resolved merely by shifting from curriculum/teacher-centered to learner/student-centered education. Such a simplistic critique assumes that all teachers are confined to a top-down, authoritarian and controlling role. Moreover, one can ask if music education and community music in schools have the same educational, and thus political, purpose. The question of the (music) teachers’ educational task cannot be reconciled simply by focusing on practical pedagogical choices in guiding musical action, as their educational task is much more political (Biesta, 2017a).

One manifestation of the shift from teacher- to learner-centrism can be found in the literature on popular music practices in schools where the music teacher has become a facilitator (e.g., Cremata, 2017). The most well-known example is that of Lucy Green’s Musical Futures project, which aimed to bring ‘some aspects of informal popular music learning practices into the realms of the school classroom’ (Green, 2008, p. 9) through a pedagogy that promoted pupils’ decision-making, peer-interaction and the ‘relative autonomy that pupils were granted to

direct their own learning' (p. 93). According to Green, 'informal learning always starts with music which the learners choose for themselves' and 'which they already know and understand, like, enjoy and identify with' (p. 10). In the Nordic context, popular music has an additional justification in schools. It has become a hegemonic part of music education in schools as it is seen to democratize the educational situation by balancing power in the teacher–student relationship (in Finland, see e.g., Koskela, 2022; Westerlund & Juntunen, 2015). Swedish scholars Eva Georgii-Hemming and Maria Westvall (2010), however, write that the shift towards focusing on individual students' musical interests together with the use of popular music and informal pedagogy has not only limited the repertoire and pedagogies of music education in schools but also demonstrated a lack of direction in music education as well as a lack of clarity regarding the role of the teacher. Consequently, they assert that despite the original democratic ambitions, 'young people lack confidence in the current school system ... because schools "let them do whatever they want" (Sernhede, 2006, p. 15)' (Georgii-Hemming & Westvall, 2010, pp. 30–31). Instead, Georgii-Hemming and Westvall (2010) argue that schools 'need to represent a meeting place where questions can be asked from different perspectives' (p. 31). It is not only the changed teacher–student relationship in popular music practices that have been seen to be more democratic, but also popular music in and of itself.

Finnish music education scholars have argued that a one-dimensional understanding of popular music as automatically democratic has led to a paradoxical situation in which youth – in schools currently consisting of students with vastly diverse national, ethnic, religious and linguistic backgrounds – are treated as a homogeneous group and assumed to all consume the same music (Koskela et al., 2021). Such assumptions about students' musical preferences and identities contradict the idea of democracy demanding plurality

and the possibility of tension and conflict (Koskela, 2022, p. 65; see also Kallio, 2015). However, as Nordic studies by Eva Saether (2008) and Sidsel Karlsen (2012) show, students with immigrant backgrounds do not necessarily want to be identified by their ethnicity or cultural differences but often wish to adapt to the majority culture. There is, therefore, little hope for music educators to foster democracy without allowing space for plurality, attempts to reconstruct school structures that create homogeneity (Kallio, 2015; Koskela, 2022), and controversy and debate on sometimes conflicting values (Woodford, 2019, p. 23). Thus, as Biesta (2017a) articulates, the teacher's educational task reaches beyond both teaching as control and learning as freedom – not to make the students free but to help them encounter their freedom (p. 98).

The Instrumentalization of Music

The neoliberal climate has not only diminished the music teachers' educational task, as we have argued above. It has also caused music teachers to become complicit in an instrumentalization discourse, through which they attempt to justify the need for music and music education. Such discourse is not necessarily new but reflects how societies increasingly think instrumentally. Music education scholar Øivind Varkøy (2013), for example, offers four historical examples of the instrumentalization of music, including Plato's use of music for building good character; Christianity's use of music for acquiring knowledge of the faith and of divine beauty (into the Middle Ages); the use of music for developing harmonic personalities and societies (end of the 18th century); and for overcoming social differences and polarities (beginning of the 20th century) (p. 39). In Norway, he traces the justifications of music teaching in general education from God and nationalist ideas, to modern justifications based on 'a number of general education, social, health and political advantages',

even identifying music as ‘a ‘strategy for everything’ in modern Norwegian curricula’ (p. 40).

While earlier music education practices in schools have indeed reflected the values held by the state during various eras (e.g., by including Christian or nationalist repertoires), today’s language of instrumentalization is not necessarily related to real-life practices but articulates more general, hypothetical individualistic benefits that support the political agenda of neoliberal educational effectiveness. This kind of language of instrumentalization is apparent in tendencies to argue, for example, that ‘engagement with music improves a child’s social skills, performance at school, intelligence, and provides a basis for success in life’ (Odendaal et al., 2019, p. 10). This language also increasingly combines brain-based learning or neuroeducation, particularly in advocacy texts and policy guidelines (Odendaal et al., 2019). Claims are ‘made “via” the brain, and sometimes even just plainly in terms of the brain, that is, as the claim that engagement with the arts promotes brain development’ (Biesta, 2017b, p. 53). This discourse has further boosted the establishment of *neuro-myths* related to the impacts of music education in schools and society (Odendaal et al., 2019).

For decades, music educators have debated whether the instrumentalization of music and music education is good for or harmful to the field’s professional self-understanding since such justifications appear to define the purpose of music education using aspects external to music (e.g., Reimer, 2009). According to Biesta (2017b), the current instrumentalization of the arts in educational policy discourse risks the concrete disappearance of the arts from schools, as in the end, ‘it is not art that matters, but what art can produce or bring about’ (Biesta, 2017b, p. 37). Thus, art could easily be replaced by something else that can bring about the desired ends faster or cheaper. Unlike Bennett Reimer (2009) and Varkøy (2013), however, Biesta (2017b) does not turn towards the notion of art-for-art’s-sake

as a solution, as this preserves music as an individual rather than a social experience. Instead, he suggests, ‘rather than asking what education *produces*, we should be asking what education *means*. And rather than asking what education makes, we should be asking what education *makes possible*’ (Biesta 2017b, p. 54, emphasis in original), both at individual and collective levels. Biesta’s suggestion opens avenues for viewing music as intertwined with multiple values and providing a unique experience in schools without the need for instrumental justifications.

THE MASKING OF THE POLITICAL

The Myth of Political Neutrality

The myth of political neutrality is the assumption, prevalent in the field of education more broadly, that ‘there is no room for politics in the classroom and that educators should adhere pedagogically to a practice of neutrality and balance’ (Filippakou, 2022, p. 1). Neutrality has even become a professional virtue, at the same time as it has ‘freed’ the teacher from the responsibility of reflexivity and struggle (Clarke & Phelan, 2017). In teacher education, such depoliticization has been argued to be the result of a desire for epistemic certainty, ahistorical predictability and centralized control (p. 15). Despite the trend of depoliticization in music education, the field remains blind to its systemic and historical political connections, for instance, how the idea of national identity continues ‘to hold its central place in music education, often through the national curricula – or textbooks’ (Westerlund et al., 2017, p. 497).

This trend of neutrality was evident in Reimer’s (2009) approach to music education as aesthetic education, which insisted that music in schools ought to focus on the music ‘rather than on all of the societal issues that will always *surround* music education’ (p. 131, emphasis added). Another more

recent argument promotes maintaining the music education profession and curriculum as detached from the political because of a conflict between conserving (Western) traditional music practices and progressive critical pedagogies (Perrine, 2017). However, music is never neutral, whether explicitly addressing a political agenda or not. Indeed, Wayne Bowman (1998) acknowledges that ‘because different musics tend to portray different relations between order and marginality, the regulation of musics, musicians, and musical practices is [in itself] an act with far-reaching political implications’ (p. 336). While Varkøy’s (2013) art-for-art’s-sake approach relates the political in music education to various instrumentalizing societal concerns, Woodford (2019) highlights the transformative side of the political, noting how music in school can be used both as a questionable means of patriotic or religious propaganda and as a powerful tool in education to rethink history and everyday reality (p. 19). Woodford argues that the politically ‘neutral’ art-for-art’s-sake doctrine, often used to justify the purpose of the arts in schools, is a ‘romantic and sanitized vision’ that disconnects arts education completely from social and political life, making it impossible for music educators to contribute to their students’ ‘understandings of their world and of their own roles and responsibilities as democratic citizens’ (p. 22).

Woodford further contends that the political power of music is so well recognized by contemporary (neoliberal) politicians that the art-for-art’s-sake doctrine is, in fact, an attempt to tame ‘politically suspect’ art teachers (p. 22) and to restrict the rights of musicians ‘as democratic citizens to speak their minds’ (p. 115). By ignoring the tensions between different values and taking subject content and pedagogy to be politically neutral, music teacher education thus fails to equip future teachers with the ability to become aware of the moral-political connections between music education, the classroom, school and society, and to discuss these connections with each other and their

students. Thus, the myth of neutrality is never passive. Music education that perpetuates ‘neutrality’ not only fails to equip students with political agency, but also indoctrinates them into the status quo (e.g., Western music, patriarchal structures and other social hierarchies). Making space for the political in schools would thus require welcoming conflict resolution through context-specific and situational, rather than universal solutions (Väkevä & Westerlund, 2007, p. 102).

The Political in Praxial Music Education

Praxial music education is an attempt to distance music education both from the ideal of art-for-art’s sake, in which social and collective values disappear, and from instrumentalization, in which musical and educational values disappear. Praxialism also recognizes the necessary musical expertise of music educators. According to David Elliott (1995), this approach underscores the commitment ‘to achieving goals (telos) in relation to standards, traditions, images and purposes (eidos) viewed as Ideals that are themselves open to renewal, reformulations and improvement’ (p. 69). The praxial music classroom ought to be ‘a reflective musical practicum’ that approximates ‘real music-practice situations, or music cultures’ and in which students engage in performing, improvising, composing, arranging, conducting and listening to music. Such a music practicum context, he asserts, feeds back to students by ‘revealing what counts in their developing musicianship’ (p. 13).

While praxial music education has firmly established itself in the field of music education, we claim that more is needed for unmasking the political for several reasons. First, as Heidi Westerlund (2002, 2003) has noted, Elliott’s (1995) praxialism remains individualistic in its articulation of the purpose of music education and does not elaborate on either the in situ context of music-making in

education or the cultural differences (between countries), which would be necessary for eliciting the political nature of music in and out of classrooms. That praxial music education focuses on individual learning means that it emphasizes “‘loving to do what one does well” – or what [Zygmunt] Bauman calls [an] “‘I can, and *therefore* I shall and will” – self-centred pragmatist rationality’ (Bauman, 2017, p. 25, emphasis in original, cited in Westerlund, 2019, p. 506).

Second, by calling for authenticity, praxialism strongly advocates disciplined conformity. To make music education authentic, ‘music teaching and learning must involve learners in the kinds of actions and judgments characteristic of those whose music is being learned’ (Bowman, 2005b, p. 149). In other words, authenticity points to the Other, not to the students and teachers in the educational situation. This emphasis promotes the reproduction of tradition-oriented fixed ends as a guarantee of quality in music teaching and learning while at the same time remaining neutral about how social groups are formed, and possibly need to be reformed, in the actual educational situation (for the critique of authenticity in music education, see e.g., Allsup, 2016; Allsup & Westerlund, 2012; Bowman, 2005b; Kallio et al., 2014; Westerlund, 2002, 2019). The strong normative emphasis on authenticity, particularly in the Western conservatory tradition, therefore risks music education becoming yet another closed system of predetermined individualistic ends. It maintains the idea of practices in music education ‘as autonomous domains of experience’ that can be used by educational authorities to assimilate children into ‘desired social values, dispositions, and ways of thinking’ (Woodford, 2019, p. 84).

Third, since praxial music education focuses on what music is good for in a general sense, it falsely presumes that all musical practices always represent ‘good’ values (see Elliott & Silverman, 2015, pp. 48, 52–53). As has been recognized, musical practices (praxes) in societies do not necessarily

provide democratic models for education (Väkevä et al., 2022; Westerlund, 2002; Westerlund & Partti, 2018), and music can also be used for harming people (Odendaal et al., 2019; Cheng, 2019, pp. 1–23). Fourth, as Wayne Bowman has argued (2005b), much of praxial music education is based, in fact, more on certain kinds of performative rather than praxial assumptions (pp. 160–161), on craft and skill (see Westerlund, 2002; Westerlund et al., 2019). Focusing only on the performative in its narrow sense thus disregards the potential of education to strive towards transformative democratic change in musical practice, education and society (Westerlund, 2019; Westerlund et al., 2021).

Elliott’s (2012) later notion of artistic citizenship in music education appears to connect praxial music education with socio-cultural contexts. It highlights the ethical and social responsibilities of (amateur and professional) artists in society and encourages using the power of music as a political tool for social justice. As Woodford (2014), however, points out, the lack of attention to the challenges of developing students’ understandings and critical reflection in relation to social problems and injustices in this approach leads to an oversimplified conceptualization of democratic music education. Leaning on Dewey, Woodford contends that ‘unless children realize how much of what is presented to them is only based on myth, illusion, socio-historical conventions, or deliberate fabrication for political or other ends, they will likely remain more susceptible to indoctrination or other forms of manipulation and control by others’ (p. 24). Therefore, praxis ought to be understood as transformative practice in its critical mode.

Mahon and colleagues (2020) argue that educational praxis can take many forms, but is ‘morally-politically informed and oriented, reflective, agentic, context-specific, and transformative; it involves taking a moral stand in educational work, and working towards positive change’ (p. 17). They further underscore how the notion of praxis is ‘potentially useful for interrogating and rethinking education

and educational work and signals *alternative possibilities* for education' (p. 17, emphasis added). Thus, praxial music education, because of its satisfaction with reproducing authentic tradition through 'an approximation of real music-practice situations' (Elliott, 1995, p. 13), only offers a limited view of moral-political aspects and ignores democratic transformative change, such as dismantling discriminative structures that exist within musical practices. To take educational praxis seriously in music education, the field needs to reach beyond a focus on 'the goods of music', for example, by advocating a 'simplistic coupling of music and wellbeing' (MacGregor, 2022, p. 25), and instead engage with the complexity of the political in music and music education.

TRANSFORMATION BEYOND 'DEMOCRACY'

Retaining the Educational

To retain the educational in schools, we see potential in Biesta's notion of a *world-centered education*. Biesta (2022) proposes world-centered education as a third option to curriculum/teacher-centered or learner/student-centered education (see also Biesta, 2017a, 2017b). In this third option, teaching matters neither for the effective production of learning outcomes nor for enabling student freedom and expression. Rather, teaching matters for creating a dialogue between students and the world and arousing their desire for wanting to exist as subjects *in* and *with* the world, without occupying its *center* (2017a). A world-centered teacher therefore encourages students to ask, 'whether what I desire is what I should desire, whether it is desirable for my own life, my life with others, on a planet that only has limited capacity for fulfilling our desires' (2017a, p. 70). 'The educational question', Biesta asserts, is also the democratic question (2017a,

p. 72). While the 'gesture of learning' puts the student at the center, where they are simply expected to learn *something* and where they *want something from the world*, the 'gesture of being taught by' puts the student 'in the spotlight', where they must consider *what the world is asking from them* (Biesta, 2022, p. 91). Importantly, both gestures together are necessary for education. Since staying in dialogue with the world is difficult, the role of the teacher becomes crucial for directing the students' attention and supporting them through the difficulties. A world-centered education reminds us 'that education is never (only) a matter of the production of certain things (such as learning outcomes) but always also aims to contribute to the promotion of the human good' (Biesta, 2020, p. 74). Thus, music education ought to be about more than musical outcomes or students' desires regarding musical preferences, but also about being in interaction with the world along with its complexities.

Unmasking the Political

As we have argued above, music education tends to frame its purpose in schools based on the assumed benefits music brings to the context. Such positivity in music education can be seen in the desire to emphasize the individualistic 'goods' of music – be they related to mood, emotions, or personal meaning as in *expressive aesthetic cognitivism* (Alpers, 1991, cited in Bowman, 2005a, p. 54). Education scholars Clarke and Phelan (2017) recognize that such positivity involves the 'givens' in depoliticized education, such as the embracing of best practices, evidence-based policy and professional teacher standards that 'tend not to question their own grounding but instead are typically taken as the natural order of things' (p. 15). They therefore suggest that teacher education could seek inspiration from the interplay of the positive and negative. For them, negativity is 'a creative-destructive force' (p. 16), that can be seen

as a way of ‘unsettl[ing] sedimented structures and knowledges’ and disrupting normalized policies and practices (p. 16). This notion can also equip music teachers in schools to overcome neutrality and unmask the political by connecting music education, music teacher education and the outside world.

Biesta (2013, 2019) connects the notion of negativity with deconstruction – not in the sense of destroying something, but in the sense of enabling critical reflexivity, transformative communication, justice and renewal of practices. He calls this *affirmative* deconstruction because it enables the overturning of hierarchies and the critiquing of assumptions ‘to *affirm* what is excluded or forgotten; to open up the possibility for the unforeseeable’ (Biesta, 2019, pp. 64–65). In music education, Patrick Schmidt (2007), following Woodford (2005), asserts ‘the constant reconstruction of democratic practices ... cannot embrace only the unitary, the consensual, the affirmative, and the constructive: it must also contend with the multiple, the conflictual, and the *destructive*’ (p. 16, emphasis added). Indeed, unmasking the political in music education and expanding democratic aims in music classrooms is a complex task that requires effort from teachers, not only to discuss democratic aims but also to put them into action.

Performing Democracy

To reach beyond the mere language of ‘democracy’ requires engaging in the struggle of performing democracy (see also Laes & Westerlund, 2018; Westerlund et al., 2019). Our idea of performing democracy draws from Judith Butler’s (2007) understanding of identity ‘not as something you already are (a “being”), but as something that is performed again and again (a “doing”) in one’s becoming’ (Westerlund et al., 2019, p. 58). Westerlund and colleagues (2019) lean on this understanding to highlight the dialogical and transactional complexity of processes in which individual students encounter the

collective, and often public rather than private, realities in music education in schools. They argue that while group performances in the music classroom require at least some semblance of cohesion, and thus appear democratic, these collective processes and performances constitute students’ subjectivities and possibly result in emotionally charged negotiations and conflict (p. 58). This may occur, for instance, when religious repertoire is used in culturally and religiously diverse school contexts (Westerlund et al., 2019). Thus, interactions in music education are not ‘simply intellectual tasks, creative exercises or fictive identifications to be conducted for musical learning to take place’ (p. 58). Like Butler, Westerlund and colleagues (2019) highlight that in performative processes, students’ agency is ‘derived from within the constitution of subject when a subject’s performative acts both reproduce and contest the foundations and origins of stable identity categories (Butler 2007, 195)’ (p. 62). Therefore, the subjectivity of students is generated through ‘a *regulated process of repetition* that both conceals itself and enforces its rules’, where agency is ‘located within the possibility of a variation on that repetition’ (Butler, 2007, p. 198, emphasis original, cited in Westerlund et al., 2019, p. 62). In performing democracy the teacher should thus recognize that the students’ agency is ‘both constrained and dependent on normative categories imposed on individuals, in a social world they never chose’ (p. 63).

The question then becomes whether music education can facilitate the possibility of a variation of repetition for individuals (considering the potential value clashes), while, at the same time, seeking thick democracy through collectively searching for the common good (Apple, 2018). This search for the common good has become increasingly contested and complex in pluralistic societies. Hence, students cannot simply be expected to uncritically adapt to established musical practices, and music teachers need to acknowledge that participation in musical performance does not

necessarily produce value agreement or individual empowerment. The power of music education to influence students' musical identity construction is therefore not straightforward. Playing the Japanese Hichiriki instrument does not constitute the student as Shinto nor does singing the 'Hallelujah Chorus' from Handel's *Messiah* constitute them as Christian (Westerlund et al., 2019, p. 58). Rather, the subject of the student is constituted through contesting identities in any given musical performance, which 'in turn (re)enforces the boundaries of which identities are made possible, thinkable, sayable, or musicable' (p. 58). Performing thick democracy therefore entails taking risks, allowing for difficulty and welcoming uncertainty and insecurity. It requires not only practical and pedagogical craftsmanship in a variety of musical practices (cf. Elliott, 1995), but also a sense of political identity – characterized by relationality in the educational and public sphere – from the music teacher. Music education can thus be seen as a matter of performed power politics, where the democratic ideal involves not trying to make choices more simple and secure, but accepting, even embracing, the political complexity and situational struggle as part of what is considered worthwhile.

Risk and Responsibility

Performing democracy requires, as discussed above, that the praxis of music education is morally-politically oriented and transformative in the sense of signaling alternative possibilities (cf. Mahon et al., 2020, p. 17). Performing democracy in music education, then, requires more than 'simply taking a couple of tricks from our bag, such as posing "the right kinds of questions" or making sure every student participates in the discussion' (Richardson, 2007) – and thus more than playing 'the right kind of music', ensuring plurality of musical genres (cf. Elliott, 1995), or making sure every student participates in

the music-making. Following Biesta, it requires not just asking how much action is possible in schools, but also '*What kind of society do we need so that people can act?*' and '*How much action is actually possible in society?*' (Biesta, 2006, p. 141, emphasis in original). That music education is never neutral and is always affected by national and local politics raises the question of political awareness, risk and responsibility in the classroom. Indeed, as Baker (2021) underscores, 'Every program is involved to some degree in constituting political subjects; the question is, what *kind* of subject?' (p. 178, emphasis in original). Performing democracy in music education therefore depends on the teachers' simultaneous political, moral and ethical responsibility and risk-taking – not only because the risk is inevitable but 'because without the risk, education itself disappears and social reproduction, insertion into existing orders of being, doing and thinking, takes over' (Biesta, 2013, p.140). Performing democracy, then, does not guarantee a hoped-for end result but requires *maintaining* hope that the educational event will lead to more democratic subjects and society.

CONCLUSION

As we have argued in this chapter, democracy in music education in schools has for long remained 'under-defined and taken for granted as a self-evident truth' (Woodford, 2015, p. 51), and is yet to be understood as characterized by constant struggle and effort (Karlsen & Westerlund, 2010; Westerlund et al., 2020). We have traced how the reign of neoliberal forces in the school environment has kept (music) education neutral and free of politics, while music teacher education has failed to provide future teachers with the vocabulary and tools necessary for democratizing music education (Woodford, 2019), at least partly due to the adoption of the language of learning, emphasizing learning outcomes and

following instrumentalizing trends. We have suggested that music teachers ought to ask how their students could be and become democratic agents and help themselves and others to 'see things in a different way' (Mouffe, 2013, p. 96). In music education, this would mean not automatically adapting to the logic and social order of the world, but per-forming in a transformative mode, by collectively searching for the common good (Apple, 2018). Confronted with questions about the democratic condition of societies in which music education in schools takes place, it is clear that what matters 'is not so much to be found in theoretical underpinnings or socio-political agendas, but first and foremost in the very ways in which education is performed, that is, *in the forms of its enactment*' (Biesta, 2017b, p. 44, emphasis in original). For a music educator, being political is thus a relational and contextual matter.

Performing democracy comes close to Biesta's (2017a) acknowledgment of the very educational question being the democratic question: the question of whether what we desire is what we *should* desire in relation to others and the environment (pp. 70–72). To move beyond 'democracy' in music classrooms means stepping out of the level of ambiguous talk. Our vision of a political music educator, in its truly democratic sense, is of one who is aware of the political connections of music education and, more than merely teaching *about* the political aspects of music and musical traditions, encourages more *actionable alternatives* for understanding what the political means in music, education and human life. Hence, a political music educator dares to believe in the transformative power of music and music education and dares to overcome the norms of what has been done before while simultaneously taking responsibility for educating students to become democratic agents in society. The political music educator finds hope in the window between what is known of the world and where democracy can be performed, even through small steps, always moving towards a vision of what the world

could be, not only musically and socially but also educationally and politically.

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