Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education
October 2021. Vol 20 (3): 82–107. doi:10.22176/act20.3.82

Music Education, Neoliberal Social Reproduction, and Play

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The dual aims of this essay are to consider some ways in which school music reproduces neoliberal rationalities and to suggest possibilities whereby playful aspects of music education can open spaces for disruption and resistance. After defining key terms (capital, neoliberalism, rationality, social reproduction, and alienation), patterns of social reproduction through school music are discussed in relation to three conceptual constructs: alienated labor, bottom-line mentality, and cultural elitism. It is argued that school music can be especially alienating when it focuses on the bottom line of exemplary performance, especially within the limited scope of European classical music. Finally, play, understood as autotelic experience, is offered as a means to counteract neoliberal rationalities by fostering personally fulfilling and socially emancipatory musical experiences.

Keywords: *school music, neoliberalism, capital, social reproduction, alienation, play*

Show me a line (snap, snap)
Show me a line (snap, snap)
Show me a line, we're lookin' fine
Show me a line (snap, snap)

Our feet are pointed forward
Our fingers pointed downward
Our lips are zipped together
And now we're in a line.

(Elementary classroom transition song,
sung to Vic Mizzy's *The Addams Family* theme song)

In modern neoliberal societies, schooling is a primary means for disciplining young minds and bodies to the realities and rationalities of global capitalism. Rather than enhancing individual freedom, as trumpeted by far-right media and a growing number of think tanks funded by "dark money" (see Mayer 2016), neoliberal ideologies survive by attuning upcoming generations to accept and

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occupy their various positions as laborers, patients, and consumers in an ever-expanding capitalist economy. As Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek (2008) remarked, “Capitalism can only thrive in the conditions of basic social stability, of intact symbolic trust, of individuals not only accepting their own responsibility for their fate, but also relying on the basic ‘fairness’ of the system—this ideological background has to be sustained through a strong educational, cultural apparatus” (2). Within this framing, my aim in this essay is to identify conceptual structures and social practices within school music that may serve the purposes of reproducing an unequal, alienating, and exploitive society. I will also consider some ways music education might disrupt this social reproduction to foster more egalitarian, meaningful, and sustainable social arrangements.

Capital

To begin, I will endeavor to define some key terms. First, what is the *capital* of neoliberal capitalism? Mathieu Hikaru Desan (2013), taking a fresh look at the original works of Karl Marx, argues for a definition of capital that emphasizes its performative dimensions. In addition to economic values gained from human and natural resources, capital can be understood as the acts of exploitation from which these economic values derive. In the words of Desan (2013), “Marx constructed a concept of capital precisely to demonstrate the constitutively historical and social character of … reified forms and to render legible the relations of exploitation that they entailed” (332). Some degree of labor, in combination with natural resources, is essential to meet basic human needs—building shelters, obtaining food and water, caring for one another. Capital subjugates these primary relationships to basic valuations of labor that necessitate ever-increasing levels of profit extracted from natural and human resources, along with the manufacture and proliferation of consumer needs, goods, and services. This contrasts with the post-capitalist world that Marx and other social reformers envisioned, in which oppressive social relationships are fundamentally transformed and exploitation avoided in communities where each individual receives according to their needs and labors according to their abilities (Hudis 2017).

Neoliberalism

Second, *neoliberalism* refers to the particular iteration of global capitalism that prevails today. In the words of Wendy Brown (2019), neoliberalism "is most commonly associated with a bundle of policies privatizing public ownership and services, radically reducing the social state, leashing labor, deregulating capital, and producing a tax-and-tariff-friendly climate to direct foreign investors" (17–18)—whatever it takes to increase profits. Quinn Slobodian (2018) explains how neoliberalism developed well before the 1980s, though, the era of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher and the growth of conservative interests in supposedly smaller government and increased privatization. He describes neoliberalism's origins in central Europe more than a century ago as the "encasement" of capital within national and international governmental institutions for the purpose of protecting global corporate greed from popular resistance:

> The market does not and cannot take care of itself. The core of twentieth-century neoliberal theorizing involves … the meta-economic or extra-economic conditions for safeguarding capitalism at the scale of the entire world.… The neoliberal project focused on designing institutions—not to liberate markets but to encase them, *to inoculate capitalism against the threat of democracy*, to create a framework to contain often-irrational human behavior, and to reorder the world after empire as a space of competing states… (loc. 92–96, emphasis added)

In sum, terms such as "neoliberalism," "modern or late capitalism," or "neoliberal capitalism" generally connote the imposition and perpetuation of a grossly unequal, hierarchical, and global society wherein some people take advantage of the labor, needs, and wants of diverse others, including as "others" what is commonly referred to as the natural environment. Thus, in this essay, I use neoliberalism and capitalism interchangeably, not only because they tend to be conflated in the literature from which I am drawing, but also to underscore the perspective whereby both neoliberalism and capitalism are about exploitation in the pursuit of profit and power.

Rationality

Third, as multiple philosophers, psychologists, and ethologists have argued, humans have a natural inclination to care for and about each other, to reach out in the face of suffering and destruction—to help and to repair (see de Waal 2009, Lakoff and Johnson 1999, and Noddings 1984, as discussed in Bates 2017). Hence, it is essential under capitalism to develop intricate forms of logic to assuage natural propensities toward empathy—denying feelings altogether as weak-minded—to uphold the natural order of things, a dog-eat-dog world, survival of the fittest. In the words of economist Thomas Piketty (2020), "Every human society must justify its inequalities: unless reasons for them are found, the whole political and social edifice stands in danger of collapse" (1). Neoliberal or capitalist rationalities, in this light, are *rationalizations*—justifications with and through which people engage to sustain unfair and competitive social structures and consequent injustices.

Wendy Brown (2015) underscores the comprehensive nature or *totality* of neoliberalism: As "a widely and deeply disseminated governing rationality, neoliberalism transmogrifies every human domain and endeavor, along with humans themselves, according to a specific image of the economic" (loc. 57–61). Furthermore, because of its pervasiveness, neoliberal rationalities typically go unnoticed or, at least, are taken for granted. Thus, they can be inculcated within the next generation outside of explicit curricular scope or sequence—simply part of the fabric of curriculum and instruction in neoliberal educational institutions.

Social Reproduction

The field of *social reproduction theory* (SRT) has emerged from ongoing efforts on the part of critical theorists to make implicit patterns of exploitation explicit—exploring how neoliberal capitalism (human and environmental exploitation in relentless pursuit of an economic bottom line) is perpetuated in societies through institutions such as school and family (Bhattacharya 2017a, 2017b; Ferguson 2017). Emphasizing the performative and exploitive facets of capital, Tithi Bhattacharya (2017a) writes:

> SRT is especially useful … because it reveals the essence-category of capitalism, its animating force, to be human labor and not commodities. In doing so, it exposes to critical scrutiny the superficiality of what we commonly understand to be "economic" processes and restores to the economic process its messy, sensuous, gendered, raced, and unruly component: *living human beings, capable of following orders as well as of flouting them.* (19, emphasis added)

Schooling, accordingly, occupies a liminal space in capitalism; teachers are in a position to either perpetuate or challenge and disrupt neoliberal rationalities. As people who were themselves socialized within a capitalist totality, however, teachers may have a tendency to take neoliberalism for granted as the natural order of things and pass its corresponding rationalities along to the next generation through learning experiences and classroom environments that parallel and support exploitive capitalist structures. Against this grain, Henry Giroux (2013) suggests that teachers embrace their role as public intellectuals and “take active responsibility for raising serious questions about what they teach, how they are to teach, and what the larger goals are for which they are striving” (463). This, of course, can be much more difficult than it sounds, since the constructs that some teachers and scholars are trying to uncover and critique are often the same constructs through which they think.

The degree to which people can actually disrupt neoliberal rationalities is a perennial issue in critical social theory. A pivotal figure in social reproduction theory, Pierre Bourdieu (in response to criticism that his theories were too deterministic—that they did not adequately allow for or acknowledge the potential for resistance and disruption) gave assurances that “*the dominated, in any social universe, can always exert a certain force*, inasmuch as belonging to a field means by definition that one is capable of producing effects in it (if only to elicit reactions of exclusion on the part of those who occupy its dominant positions)” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 80, emphasis in the original). In other words, domination tends to call forth resistance, even though resistance will often bring about a comparable level of retribution. What usually happens in schools is that most of those who might naturally resist are eventually forced to adjust to and internalize neoliberal realities and rationalities. Social reproduction theory, even though it does hold out a degree of hope, also shows how effective schools can be in getting students and other stakeholders, even those living in or having lived in poverty and those from working-class backgrounds (historically exploited groups), to consent to the inequality of neoliberal capitalism. In Bourdieu’s words again, “the logic of adjustment of dispositions to position allows us to understand how the dominated can exhibit more *submission* (and less resistance and subversion)” (81, emphasis in the original).

Alienation

A few days ago, I sat on the porch as some men worked on the street in the heat of the day. One went before a flat-bed truck with a powerful air compressor, blowing debris out of cracks that had developed in the asphalt. Two followed the truck with long wands through which hot tar was applied to the cracks. A final man carried a motorized leaf blower to dry the tar and, it appeared, blow some dust over it. Maybe they found this work personally gratifying on some level, but having grown up as a manual laborer, I doubt it. This type of work, at least in the society in which I live, is more aptly characterized as one of many "service" jobs that take a serious toll on the body while providing minimal salary, benefits, or personal fulfillment. Marx described it as alienated, and capitalism generally as alienating. For many occupations under neoliberal capitalism, the primary if not sole benefit is simply to earn a meager wage. Workers are often not directly or fully vested in the products they manufacture or the services they provide, and the wage they receive is a fraction of the economic value their labor yields. Devorah Kalekin-Fishman and Lauren Langman (2015) summarize this enduring Marxian perspective thus: "Turned into extensions of machines, workers were estranged from their work, their products and from their very selves" (918).

Alienation remained a central theme in sociology and critical theory after Marx in the writings of Weber, Lukács, and members of the Frankfurt School (Kalekin-Fishman and Langman 2015). From the 1950s through the 1970s and beyond, alienation has received attention as a research topic in psychology and related fields, including education, where Tina Hascher and Andreas Hadjar (2018) have operationalized it as "individual perceptions of powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, cultural estrangement from societal values, self-estrangement through a lack of intrinsically motivated activities, and social isolation" (174). Conversely, these same researchers define non-alienated labor and other activities as being "linked to individual enjoyment and the value attributed to the production activity itself, in addition to the significance assigned to the individual and societal outcomes of production processes" (173). Similarly, Jeff Noonan (2019) describes non-alienating labor as involving "not only creative self-realization in the realm of social freedom, but also, and equally, caring labor that attends to the needs of others within a realm of permanent natural necessity" (300). Again, a fundamental insight of social reproduction theory relative to alienation is how schooling in neoliberal societies helps students acclimate to levels of alienation reflective of their social class as preparation for lifetimes of alienated labor.

Music Education

With these definitions in hand, I will next consider three conceptual constructs relative to which school music potentially reinforces and reproduces neoliberal capitalist social practices, structures, and rationalities.

Alienated Labor

According to what have come to be considered generally as praxial philosophies for music education, students should receive the full benefit of their musicking; their actions ought to be personally relevant and fulfilling, as well as culturally responsive, and should have optimal likelihood of extending throughout life. Considered in light of the foregoing definitions, this approach to music education seems to align well with what has been described as non-alienated labor. Tom Regelski (2020) writes: "As praxis, music is good to the degree it satisfies the many social and even practical needs that bring different types of music into being to begin with: good church music, good concert music, good dancing music, and many other 'good fors' that qualify why a music praxis exists at all" (2). That music persists throughout the world is most likely attributable to its capacities for adapting and conforming to diverse and changing human needs and satisfying those needs directly in the here and now (Bates 2009). True, like most everything else in capitalist societies, music can be co-opted for primarily commercial purposes, from music used in advertising in order to manipulate human thoughts and desires, to direct marketing of musical equipment, notation, and recordings as consumer goods. But individually and socially satisfying musical engagements do not have to cost much or be at all commercial. As I have pointed out before, poverty does not preclude musical participation; in fact, musical innovations often arise from those who lack the means to purchase excessive quantities or qualities of musical and associated consumer products (Bates 2016).

In the United States, a predominantly neoliberal society, school music appears to reflect or embrace neoliberal perspectives on labor. Under neoliberal capitalism, "real work" produces commodities or services for the market (Bhattacharya 2017a, 2). Likely because people find music enjoyable, it tends to be understood popularly as a form of entertainment or leisure, distinct from "real work." Thus, music education advocates typically have to contend with the notion that music and the arts are frivolous, ancillary to more important matters. Within the school curriculum, music tends to occupy a position subordinate to language arts and STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math)—subjects linked directly in the neoliberal imagination intent on maintaining global economic competitiveness. Consequently, in efforts to justify the place of music in schools, music educators have sought to align music with these higher-priority subjects. As a teacher of prospective elementary educators and as one specialized in the arts, I have regularly attended workshops since the early 1990s and have reviewed the corpus of research/advocacy literature pertaining to the arts, wherein a key argument continues to be that participation in music and the arts can increase student achievement in subjects typically measured through standardized testing (e.g. Fitzpatrick 2006 and Antmann 2015 for music education, and Catterall 2009 for arts education in general).

Other advocacy arguments emphasize aspects of music teaching and learning that relate to personal qualities required in the labor force. For instance, in the United States, the National Association for Music Education (NAfME) provides a list of dispositions that are believed to be developed through participation in large ensembles (NAfME 2017). A number of these are directly work-related, including collaboration ("working with others independently to perform a task and the achieve shared goals"), goal-setting ("establishing specific and timely goals for completion of work"), and self-discipline/perseverance ("demonstrating independence and self-motivation, managing impulsivity, and being comfortable with delayed gratification as they strive for excellence"). I have heard a considerable number of band and orchestra directors offer this type of reasoning to justify having students spend years to learn an instrument that will seldom if ever be played outside of school settings or after graduation. Even though the immediate or long-term musical benefits might be negligible, so this reasoning goes, students will have learned important skills for the workplace. Using more critical terminology, music education, by focusing on the needs of global capital, can teach students to embody "discipline" (conformity and obedience) or, citing Bourdieu again, to "exhibit more submission (and less resistance and subversion)" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 81).

In light of the theorized totality of neoliberal rationality, it is possible to see how alienation in neoliberal societies might also extend beyond the world of work by undermining music's personally fulfilling potential as leisure. First, as mentioned, school music under neoliberalism is thoroughly commercial, centering as essential the purchase of curricular materials, methods, and specialized equipment. Thereby, from the primary grades on up, music students and teachers alike are constructed as music consumers. This socialization is upheld by professional music education associations which, historically and currently, ally closely with the music industry (Koza 2006). Second, as an elective, school music includes a limited array of options masquerading as free and open choice relative to which student participation is carefully manipulated. For example, in North America the school band tradition, which has a veritable monopoly on instrumental music education (Give a Note Foundation 2017), is perpetuated in part by limiting instrumental music options and through intense recruitment and retention campaigns or, in other words, marketing and advertising. Finally, school music can often lack a sense of open-ended fun and creative diversion traditionally associated with leisure (Rojek 1985). Instead, personal/social enjoyment and intrinsic motivation can be undermined by grades, rewards, continuous evaluation, and other forms of behavior management (see Ryan and Deci 2020). Were it not for their compulsory attendance and limited choices, I wonder how many students would choose to participate in the types of musical engagements offered in neoliberal schools. Furthermore, as Regelski (2007) has argued, when students fail to develop musical skills conducive to life-long music making, musical participation "consists more often of passive consumption than of active, enthusiastic participation" (22).

Finally, music may also have the tendency to reproduce or reinforce capitalist rationalities when it is used in schools as a means to motivate students to work more diligently and effectively. The epigraph that introduced this article is a song popular in elementary schools throughout the United States. It is a fun way to get students to line up at the door in preparation for walking quietly and single-file through the hallway to their next activity. Even the most mundane tasks can be engaging when set to music in this way. Whereas music and the other arts have been marginalized in the curriculum, in arts integration circles they are promoted for their utility in enhancing instruction in "core" subjects. For example, it has become common in the United States for elementary students to stand at their desks and sing/dance along with musical videos as a "brain break," after which they can get back to the "serious business" of learning "core" subjects such as math or science. The veracity of this type of arts integration is supported by research demonstrating how music can enhance work performance (Lesiuk 2005) and motivation (Wooley and Fishbach 2016). To put it another way, music can make alienated labor more tolerable. On a more general level, anecdotal evidence abounds of students who persist in school because of their participation in high school band, orchestra, or choir. Music electives, in these instances at least, may serve as motivation for general participation in school despite traditionally less engaging or fulfilling non-elective courses. Thus, school music can pacify participants who might otherwise question the injustice of being subjected to instruction that is not intrinsically satisfying or meaningful; students potentially learn to cope with, rather than challenge, exploitation and alienation.

Bottom-Line Mentality

In countries such as Finland where neoliberalism is arguably less pervasive, well-being and equity are principal guides for instructional decisions (Sahlberg 2015). In countries like the United States, by contrast, neoliberal rationality generally directs intense focus on the bottom line of economic profit. Researchers in the fields of psychology (Greenbaum, Mawritz, and Eissa 2012) and sociology (Quade, McLarty, and Bonner 2020) have identified a variety of harmful effects that "bottom-line mentality" can have in workplaces, including unhealthy competition, compromised ethics, and diminished social cohesion. Although this research is not based in critical theory, bottom-line mentality can be conceptualized as an element of the neoliberal totality referred to previously (Brown 2015) and relates to what Herbert Marcuse (1964) famously identified as one-dimensional thinking; it is the reductionist practice of taking any single quantity and making it the ultimate goal. Educational institutions in neoliberal societies, even though they are increasingly focused on financial gain (Bryant 2020) have situated standardized testing as the bottom line (Muller 2018). Especially for students from low-income families, this one-dimensional thinking or bottom-line mentality underwrites exploitive and alienating practices through authoritarian management and sterile, less-than-engaging pedagogies (Bowles and Gintis 1976, Gorski 2013, Kozol 2005, Bhattacharya 2017a).

Music educators in the United States, I argue, have a propensity to consider exemplary performance, particularly by large ensembles, as the bottom line. This makes sense within neoliberal forms of logic because performance can be quantitatively measured, evaluated, and ranked. Rather than taking their lead from students' musical interests, needs, and cultural backgrounds (as praxial theorists and other critical social theorists would have them do), music teachers working in societies pervaded by neoliberalism are apt to make key curricular decisions based on extrinsic professional and institutional rewards. When they do this, qualities associated with living the good life (Regelski 2020) are elided by a variety of quantities associated with excellence (e.g. festival ratings, professional awards, ensemble size and balance, economic resources, music and instrument inventories).

This centering of performance skills rather than, for example, long-term musical interactions in the home or community, reinforces neoliberal rationality in at least three overlapping and otherwise related ways. First, it places priority on identifying the most effective and efficient pedagogical technologies, including the scientific management of music students (Bates 2015). To this end, empirical research in music education generally aims at establishing "best practices" and reflects a "hyper-positivism" (Williams 2015) involving a single-minded pursuit of ever more effective and efficient ways to improve technique. Of course, this research can have an important part to play in fostering culturally, socially, and ecologically responsive (see Shevock and Bates 2019) music education, when it is balanced within a more comprehensive view of "best practice" that includes philosophical, sociological, and anthropological perspectives as well as a full accounting of what praxial theorists have identified as practical "goods" that can come from music teaching and learning. When efficiency and effectiveness in performance are the primary or sole considerations, there is real potential for the ends to justify an array of ethically suspect, personally demeaning, and socially unjust means. So long as the bottom line is reached, music educators can too readily abide in the assurance that their work has value, and the profession can rest assured that the field is healthy, because "our ensembles sound great." This bottom-line mentality can further relieve music educators and administrators from the burden of critical thought (i.e., from becoming public intellectuals) and veil the aforementioned empathy that undergirds more ethical and emancipatory pedagogies.

Second, bottom-line mentality recreates within school music programs the structural divisions and disparities that exist outside of schools. Where "excellence" in large ensemble performance is the main goal, attention, resources, and rewards are often bestowed upon large suburban schools where economic and cultural "privileges" increase the possibility of developing the best sounding bands, orchestras, and choirs. In the United States, these programs often consist of large "feeder systems" with elementary and middle school music teachers working diligently to prepare musicians for auditioned high school ensembles. Comparisons between schools can reinforce hierarchies in which larger and better-resourced schools dominate (see Perrine 2016). Because schools in the United States serve geographical regions segregated by class and race, students in lower-income schools are more likely to participate in ensembles judged less successful relative to the bottom line. Given the professional rewards of working in schools with more successful ensembles, teachers are naturally drawn to these positions, while schools with fewer resources and fewer students are more likely to see higher rates of teacher attrition (Gardner 2010). Students who already are less apt to feel a strong sense of self-efficacy due to their social class (James and Amato 2013), are likely to feel even worse about themselves given relatively lower levels of musical performance.

Third, bottom-line mentality teaches and reinforces meritocratic ideologies. One of the most lasting impressions that music education makes in the reproduction of exploited and alienated labor, is the belief that hierarchies of expertise and achievement are fair reflections of individual talent and diligence. It is more likely, however, as education theorist Paul Gorski (2013) points out, that academic excellence reflects opportunity, for which, in unequal capitalist societies, there are serious and persistent gaps. The reproductive function of competition is to determine relative merit, providing a rationalization for economic inequality and assuaging natural propensities to empathize with the "less fortunate." Joseph Abramo (2017) provides a clear description of how meritocracy functions in school music competitions:

> If one word could define the current educational epoch, it would be competition.... Politicians and policy makers call for competition amongst students measured by standardized tests, leading to the "need for competition" among schools through "free choice" and charter schools, all induced by the specter of competition among countries in a "globalized economy." In music education, competition has the ingrained and longstanding practice of students competing in solo and ensemble festivals or contests. In competitions ... bands, orchestras, choirs, chamber ensembles, and soloists perform so judges may evaluate and score the performance in order to compare students, assign winners, award certificates and trophies, and select honor ensemble participants. (151–52)

Through generally accepted practices such as auditions for chair and ensemble placement, competition becomes a way of life within individual ensembles and programs. In my daughter's junior high school orchestra, for instance, she won first chair in the cello section and our neighbor down the street won first chair for violin. They attend a school with a majority of students from low-income families, and they are the only students in the orchestra receiving private lessons. Wealthier students have distinct economic advantages over less-privileged students, including—in addition to access to private instruction—high quality musical instruments, reliable transportation, and family income substantial enough to cover fees associated with co-curricular school music participation (Bates 2018). Thereby, they have an obvious edge, and they inevitably come out ahead of students with fewer economic advantages. In itself, this reproduces social stratification, given that tangible accolades have eventual currency in vocational and educational options. However, a likely greater impact is made by perpetuating the neoliberal logic of meritocracy that paints this reproduction of inequality as just and fair. A positive outlook ("You can achieve anything you want if you work hard enough!") effectively veils the basic falsehood of equal educational opportunity and lays the blame for relatively low levels of achievement on those who are thought to have failed to put forth sufficient effort in pursuing the bottom line.

Cultural Elitism

Finally, I argue that subjecting students from low-income families to the culturally elitist school music programs that prevail in neoliberal nations such as United States can also ultimately influence them to accept the seeming inevitability of exploitation and alienation. Young people living in poverty or from working class backgrounds simply do not identify with "western art music" (Peterson and Kern 1996, Tzanakis 2011), or what I will refer to in this essay as classical music (reflecting the US vernacular). Yet, in schools from university "on down," classical music and its adherents dominate. In a recent chapter in an edited volume, *Seeing Race Again*, Loren Kajikawa (2019) critiques this centering of classical music in university schools and departments of music. She argues that "the fetishization of classical performance standards … impedes an institution's ability to recognize the full humanity and artistry of the world beyond its doors" (157). Not recognizing an individual's "full humanity" certainly could elicit the previously mentioned conceptions of alienation, including "powerlessness, meaninglessness, [and] cultural estrangement" (Hascher and Hadjar 2018, 174). And, there is a real danger that students will internalize and accept this rationality to the point of seeing their own cultural background as deficient (Bates 2011).

Cultural elitism also runs much deeper than the style of music. Understood broadly, "culture" extends far beyond music to include all human behavioral patterns—what John Hartigan Jr. (2005) refers to as "etiquette." Children learn implicitly early on in school music programs that cultural practices associated with wealth and prestige have cultural capital; standard behaviors of the middle to upper classes are understood to be the reason for wealth and prestige, and social justice programs too often focus on helping students acquire this cultural capital (Bates 2019). One rural music teacher, for instances, suggested to me that because she spent so much time teaching "discipline" to her mostly underprivileged students, there was precious little time left to focus on music. Against this deficit thinking, Desan (2013) has suggested, "it is not cultural capital that determines class… Rather, it is membership in a class that determines whether one's particular habitus [an intricate combination of personal behaviors and worldviews] counts as cultural capital" (324). Furthermore, as Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant (1992) have pointed out relative to music, "access to 'high' art is not a question of virtue or individual gift but of (class) learning and cultural inheritance. The universality of the aesthetes is *the product of privilege*, for they have a monopoly over the universal" (87–88, emphasis added). Efforts to help the socioeconomically less privileged by "uplifting" them culturally thereby have the opposite effect of reifying their subordinate status as culturally inferior. It is a way for the economically privileged in neoliberal capitalist societies to rationalize not only their privilege, but the relative poverty and alienated labor of others.

Play

As mentioned previously, in connection with social reproduction, there may be opportunities in schools to disrupt or undermine neoliberal structures and rationalities. Susan Ferguson (2017) notes that "capitalist children and childhoods are engaged in a constant negotiation between a playful, transformative relationship to the world and the more instrumental, disembodied state of alienation required to become laborers for capital" (114). Praxial theorists in music education generally have sought to emphasize the active and, I suggest, playful facets of musical engagement. David Elliott (1995) associated "musicing" with autotelic experience, optimal experience, or "flow," and Tom Regelski (1998) framed "musicking" relative to *phronesis*—actions that bring about good or right results for self and others.

Following from these theories, I have discussed how school music can satisfy what Richard Ryan and Edward Deci (2000) have identified as basic human needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competence (Bates 2009). When music education satisfies these types of primary needs in culturally responsive ways, I argue, there is a decreased likelihood that the effort expended will be personally alienating; music students will receive full and direct benefit rather than devoting their labor to the needs and desires of dominant individuals or institutions. Less alienated experiences are also more likely to be autotelic, meaning that motivation for continued engagement comes from the actual experience (Inghilleri 1999). Putting the educational terminology to the side for a moment, people commonly refer to these intrinsically rewarding experiences simply as "fun" or as "play."

In this final section, I will briefly compare and contrast play with alienated and exploited labor, and pose, as antidotes to the latter, aspects of play in music teaching and learning. I will start by sharing some characteristics of play outlined by play theorist Stuart Brown (2009).

> *Play is done for its own sake*. That's why some people think of it as a waste of time. It is also voluntary—it is not obligatory or required by duty. Play also has inherent attraction. It's fun. It makes you feel good. It is a cure for boredom.
>
> *Play provides freedom from time*. When we are fully engaged in play, we lose a sense of the passage of time. We also experience diminished consciousness of self. We stop worrying about whether we look good or awkward, smart or stupid.... We are fully in the moment, in the zone.
>
> Another hallmark of play is that *it has improvisational potential*. We aren't locked into a rigid way of doing things. We are open to serendipity, to chance. We are willing to include seemingly irrelevant elements into our play.
>
> Last, *play provides a continuation desire*. We desire to keep doing it, and the pleasure of the experience drives that desire. We find ways to keep it going. (Brown 2009, 17–18)

Brown's definition coincides with the aforementioned aspects of non-alienated labor, "linked to individual enjoyment and the value attributed to the production activity itself" (Hascher and Hadjar 2018, 173) and is characterized by "creative self-realization in the realm of social freedom" (Noonan 2019, 300). It is especially noteworthy, relative to the correspondences between Brown's definition of play and music education as praxis, that Ferguson (2017) identifies the purposes of play as "praxic," set against alienated labor; it is not merely a consumerist escape as so often happens with commodified leisure, but is personally and socially fulfilling. Further, Brown (2009) writes: “The truth is that play seems to be one of the most advanced methods nature has invented to allow a complex brain to create itself” (40).

These perceptions regarding the value of play continue to be influential in the field of education as an alternative to prevailing work-related ideals. In a follow-up to his popular book, *Finnish Lessons 2.0* (2015), Pasi Sahlberg, with William Doyle, has written another: *Let the Children Play: How More Play Will Save Our Schools and Help Children Thrive* (2019). These educational theorists, one from the United States and the other from Finland, acknowledge that school can be serious business involving plenty of work, but they also argue that play should be a primary element. They see their approach as "a better way than overworking and overstressing children, a way that creates better outcomes by channeling joy and well-being” (76). Although there does appear to be a degree of instrumentality in their reasoning—that play can be “channeled” in the service of work—the bottom line of capitalist production appears to give way considerably to “joy and well-being,” intrinsic motivation, creativity, and freedom.

This vision contrasts significantly with what is encountered in the United States, especially in low-income schools, where joy and wellbeing are often put to the side (along with music and the arts) as ancillary to practices and domains aimed directly at enhancing the bottom line. To put a human face on this point, I will share the following vignette: Recently I convened a focus group with teachers in an urban, low-income, primarily Latinx school. In the United States, this type of school is classified as a Title I school (a designation originating during the War on Poverty in the 1960s) due to the high poverty rates that warrant targeted federal funding. The conversation we had about engagement felt as disheartening as it was enlightening.

> Facilitator: Are your administrators ever concerned about whether your students are enjoying your classes or not?
>
> Teacher 1: They’re concerned about whether they’re *engaged*.
>
> Teacher 2: Their data point for engagement was down this year. So, they will walk into your room and they look at one student at a time and they have a grid and mark a plus if the kid is looking … has eye contact …

> Teacher 1: They have to be looking at you or looking at the board or whatever, or doing the work or whatever they're supposed to be doing.
>
> Teacher 2: … and a minus if they're looking elsewhere.
>
> Facilitator: So, by engaged they mean "attentive"?
>
> All: Yeah.
>
> Teacher 4: Answering your question, talking to a partner about said question, interactively doing something, that was actively engaged. Passively engaged was you teaching, you talking, and them listening and still paying attention. Not engaged was looking down or doing something else.
>
> Teacher 1: Tying their shoes. One of my kids was tying his shoe one day, so he got a minus.
>
> Facilitator: Okay, so I associate the word "joy" with engagement, but that wouldn't be…
>
> All: (Laughing) No.

I would like to suggest that this approach to "engagement," whereby generalist teachers are led to emphasize strict attention more than to accentuate the joy and fun in learning, actually places music specialists in a somewhat unique position to resist neoliberal rationalities. Music teachers, I submit, are not under the same level of scrutiny as STEM and language arts teachers; music performance pressures do not always entail the same degrees of surveillance, manipulation, and control as do high-stakes, standardized tests. Consequently, this could afford music teachers (along with arts, PE, and social studies teachers) opportunities to step outside of neoliberal one-dimensional rationalities, and to shape their teaching around enhancing wellbeing now and long-term. Of course, this might mean replacing one bottom-line with another (Bates 2013). The difference is that wellbeing, by focusing on the current and long-term needs of students, is qualitative and thereby runs counter to what I have been discussing in this essay as alienation and exploitation. That being said, music educators and policy-makers may still feel hesitant to shift the bottom line in the direction of play for fear that such a radical departure from neoliberal rationality will further marginalize music in the school curriculum, reinforcing the neoliberal notion that music education is frivolous. However, the price of their capitulation to neoliberal rationalities is that, by reifying those rationalities for the sake of self-preservation, music education runs the real risk of "selling its soul" by suppressing rather than amplifying the personally fulfilling potential of musical play.

But maybe there is a way through this troublesome binary, discernable by blurring traditional distinctions between the freedom of play and the necessity of work. Among Marxian theorists, including some play theorists, there seem to be two schools of thought, or at least a continuum between freedom/play and necessity/work. On one side are authors who argue that Marx promoted the freedom embodied in play or leisure primarily as the antithesis of work. Emancipatory struggles relative to this standpoint center on reducing the amount of labor required to earn a "decent living" and, at the same time, increasing the amount of time available for leisure. In fact, as play theorist Michael Roberts (2018) notes, May Day or International Workers' Day commemorates the dramatic gains united workers have made on this front. In his well-respected and definitive book, *Homo Ludens*: *A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (1955), Johan Huizinga posits play as distinct from other activities, including work; he asserts that "play is not 'ordinary' or 'real' life. It is rather a stepping out of 'real' life into a temporary sphere of activity with a disposition all of its own" (8; see also Roberts 2018). Music educators working against the current of neoliberalism and ascribing to this view might focus their pedagogy primarily on optimizing the standard aspects of autotelic experience or play outlined earlier (i.e., freedom, creativity, intrinsic motivation). One could argue that some elementary music education approaches, with their emphasis on singing games (Kodály) and improvisation (Orff–Schulwerk), tip the scale toward play and freedom, as might a group of young musicians playing together in a garage band.

On the other side of the issue are those who interpret Marx as having theorized that alienation and exploitation can be overcome only when labor is no longer alienated or, in other words, when it becomes personally fulfilling (Roberts 2018). This non-alienation and non-exploitation, I have suggested, hinges on whether or not these experiences are recognized as satisfying basic psychological needs. Insights from the ongoing development of Self-Determination Theory (SDT), led by Richard Ryan and Edward Deci, can be helpful for highlighting the kinds of musical experiences that support needs fulfillment and, hence, wellbeing: "SDT argues that need supports enhance intrinsic motivation and internalization, resulting in higher achievement, whereas, paradoxically, attempting to control achievement outcomes directly through extrinsic rewards, sanctions, and evaluation generally backfires, leading to lower-quality motivation and performance" (Ryan and Deci 2020, section 1.1). Music educators working against the grain of alienation and exploitation will work to enhance students' sense of autonomy by providing "meaningful choices and tasks that can engage their interest" (Ryan and Deci 2020, section 3.2). And to be truly meaningful and engaging, it almost goes without saying, school music must also be culturally responsive (see Lind and McCoy 2016)

On the far end of the necessity/freedom or labor/play continuum, Jan Kandiyali interprets Marx as suggesting that true freedom—arising from non-alienating and personally fulfilling work—comes in the realization that one's productive labor has satisfied the needs of others (2017). One might imagine a craftsperson, finding interest and meaning in their work while also producing a high-quality product for the market, or a musician preparing a piece for public performance, working diligently to make the performance meaningful for others, but also enjoying and finding meaning in the process of learning new or refining previous repertoire. In both instances, the process can become an end in itself—an autotelic experience. The sense of meaning, however, is heightened when one's work has made real contributions in the world. Moreover, directing attention to the wellbeing of others in this way can erode neoliberal rationalizations that condemn the poor for their poverty and uphold an unequal, alienating, exploitive social order. Music teachers working from this perspective, in addition to fostering autotelic experience, might also focus on the social and environmental (see Shevock and Bates 2019) justice aspects of musicking.

As I wrap up this essay (and on a lighter note), I offer an illustration from a popular animated icon, Lisa Simpson, in an effort to "bring home" the contrast between school music as alienated labor and the potential of school music as personally and socially emancipatory. The Simpsons episode, "Moaning Lisa" (Jean and Reiss 1990), includes a scene that opens with the band director rapping his baton on his music stand and shouting over the sound of Lisa jamming out on her saxophone.

> "Lisa! Lisa Simpson!!!"
>
> Lisa abruptly stops playing.
>
> "Lisa, there's no room for crazy bebop in *My Country 'Tis of Thee.*"
>
> "But, Mr. Largo, that's what my country is all about."
>
> "What?"

> “I’m wailing out for the homeless family living out of its car, the Iowa farmer whose land has been taken away by unfeeling bureaucrats, the West Virginia coal miner coughing up…”
>
> “Yeah, well, that’s all fine and good, but Lisa, none of those unpleasant people are going to be at the recital next week. Now, class, from the top. Five, six, seven…”

Like Lisa Simpson, music teachers can find a variety of possibilities for resisting or disrupting neoliberal rationalities. In the above clip, Lisa Simpson ends up joining the rest of the students as they slog their way through *My Country ‘Tis of Thee*. In the standard opening credits for other episodes of The Simpsons, on the other hand, it appears that Lisa is getting kicked out of class for her musical “misbehavior.” Along these lines is the potential for music teachers to fully embrace play in all of its autotelic, needs-fulfilling, non-alienated, and non-exploited splendor; eschewing and fully rejecting extrinsic and competitive motivators such as grades, contests, auditions, awards, and practice cards; and letting students choose the musical styles and songs with which they will engage in schools. Every single class period could focus on joyful musicking rather than standard rehearsal strategies or music theory drills. Intrinsic motivation would be the key, and enhanced wellbeing through music would serve as the bottom line. I can see this as a real possibility, especially for elementary music, music technology, and popular music courses. Such a radical departure from neoliberal norms, however, might get other music teachers “kicked out of class” so to speak. Sometimes a more pragmatic approach may be warranted, especially where authoritarian management, heightened levels of surveillance, and professional policing are the norm. In these instances, music teachers might be able to work within extant social structures to reduce student alienation and enhance opportunities for autotelic experience and self-determination. And, finally, at any point on the continuum from a radical embrace of play to seeking opportunities for reducing alienation within existing structures, an added degree of meaning can also be found in the sense that one’s efforts, in addition to being personally fulfilling, will bring about good results for others.

About the Author

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