Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education
October 2021. Vol 20 (3): 132–55. doi:10.22176/act20.3.132

MAYDAY GROUP

A Critical Assessment of Entrepreneurship in Music Higher Education

Katherine M. Sadler
Houston Botanic Garden

In this article, I critically assess the development and application of entrepreneurship education in the performing arts, specifically among performance students of Western European art music in the United States. I seek to locate this education in the sociocultural and economic context of neoliberal capitalism and to demonstrate that this education serves as a form of indoctrination in support of that system. Evidence collected from interviews of 18 staff, students, and alumni of music entrepreneurship programs from four institutions, as well as 32 hours of participant observation of entrepreneurship seminars at two institutions, are presented to further position this education in terms of equity and appropriateness for students in the arts.

Keywords: *entrepreneurship, neoliberal capitalism, hegemony, opportunity, indoctrination, equity*

I had the privilege of working as a career development administrator at a top music conservatory (2011–2017), and I have continued to work as a private consultant in the field since having left that position. Over those seven years, I witnessed firsthand the efforts of students transitioning from the conservatory environment to the professional arena. Students who attended this institution were already in a position of privilege, having gained admission to an educational program in a highly ranked school. While these students often expressed the feeling that they had benefited from the recognition of their individual talent and hard work, some of them expressed the belief that others among them would fare better in their careers over the long term because of social or economic advantage. Those students who communicated their sense of inequity knew that other students had received larger scholarships or more work opportunities or were better supported by family resources. They held an innate understanding that some of their peers were advantaged over others despite talent and the work ethic being equally high.

© Katherine M. Sadler. The content of this article is the sole responsibility of the author. The ACT Journal and the Mayday Group are not liable for any legal actions that may arise involving the article's content, including, but not limited to, copyright infringement.

In addition to an awareness of inequity, students also frequently expressed concern about post-graduation career prospects. Evidence suggests that many administrators and faculty within the institution they were attending would agree with them. Within the music higher education community, there is widespread conversation regarding insufficient support of traditional performance activities and, therefore, insufficient numbers of paid positions available to absorb all the graduates emerging from educational programs into the workforce (Devlin 2015, Skaggs 2017). In the interest of providing students with skills to develop other sources of employment, schools of music, departments of music, and conservatories across the United States have, in growing numbers, been creating entrepreneurship and career offices over the past ten years to offer such a curriculum (Kim 2018). I personally assisted in efforts to develop such a curriculum to educate students in the broad field of what has become widely termed "music entrepreneurship."

The term *entrepreneurship* is used in many higher education music institutions to cover a wide range of career activities, including but not limited to resume writing, personal branding, grant writing, fundraising, and website development (Devlin 2015, Skaggs 2017). These institutions also place emphasis on helping students acquire administrative and organizational skills necessary to found ensembles or create artistic enterprises, such as music festivals and other nonprofit organizations, as outlets for their talents. These career activities typically are seen by those who created them as self-sustaining means of generating income. Data from this research suggest that entrepreneurship, in its ideal form, is intended by educators to be a holistic practice, providing music students with a sense of agency as capital creators in the face of challenging career prospects.

According to some social science researchers and theorists, however, the socioeconomic construct of entrepreneurship is deeply dependent on a number of preexisting cultural factors that likely do not benefit all students (Wallen et al. 2017, Brooks et al. 2014). In and beyond my role at the conservatory, I frequently observed firsthand imbalances in the system of entrepreneurship education, and as a result, I developed concerns that it served largely as a panacea for a challenging postgraduation financial outlook. Recognizing an inequitable distribution of opportunity among the students there, I also began to question the premise of entrepreneurship and wonder about its connection to neoliberal capitalism. I have observed the negative emotional impact on students of their being pushed toward

Sadler, Katherine M. 2021. A critical assessment of entrepreneurship in music higher education. *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 20 (3): 132–55. https://doi.org/10.22176/act20.3.132

self-commodification. Negative emotional impact evolves from the belief that one is directly, even solely responsible for generating success, since the opportunity to succeed, as defined in entrepreneurship culture, is not equally accessible by all students.

Purpose

Music schools are offering music entrepreneurship education in greater numbers than ever before in response to the challenging economic realities now facing Western art music students (Devlin 2015, Kim 2018). However, having reviewed the literature in this area extensively, it seems to me that research into the impact of this education has yet to adequately take into account both the soundness of the curricula being developed and the impact those curricula have on students. Few, if any, researchers have positioned or critically examined music entrepreneurship education in sociocultural terms in their published work. Development of curricula in response to the present challenging economic circumstances has been deemed urgent, yet researchers have not examined the impact of these curricula on students' careers. As a result, the opportunity to educate differently and toward a potentially more supportive system has been missed. Questions of how music students experience music entrepreneurship education, what types of career activities result from this education, and whether these experiences are affected by circumstances such as socioeconomic status, gender, race, national origin, age, and sexual orientation are key. So, too, is whether music graduates have equal access to opportunity discovery and development in the current music economic and sociocultural context, and whether the absence of this equality makes entrepreneurship a potentially harmful model on which to base a career curriculum in music.

Neoliberalism, Entrepreneurship and Higher Education

Neoliberalism, in the context of this inquiry, is considered in its current dominant form in the United States, existing in a close relationship with free market capitalism and the tendency in capitalism to favor class division of economic power. Neoliberalism emerged in the 1970s in response to radicalized movements in primarily Western capitalist democracies as a means by which persons in positions of financial dominance could bring citizens of those democracies under stronger subjugation (Davies and Bansel 2007). Advocates of neoliberalism have developed

Sadler, Katherine M. 2021. A critical assessment of entrepreneurship in music higher education. *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 20 (3): 132–55. https://doi.org/10.22176/act20.3.132

political and social campaigns for its adoption in some form in countries around the world, from Chile to China and South Africa to Sweden, as the globalization of free market economies has enriched an oligarchy class the world over (Harvey 2007). Bourdieu (2001) described the neoliberal myth of the free market as "perfect competition or perfect equality of opportunity, a world without inertia, without accumulation, without heredity or acquired properties" (241). As a philosophy, neoliberalism operates as a tool for the protection of ruling class dominance through the indoctrination of participants at all class levels into an unjust and inequitable capitalist system by asserting that individuals are all playing an equal role in capitalizing equal opportunity.

> Neoliberalism has, in short, become hegemonic as a mode of discourse and has pervasive effects on ways of thought and political-economic practices to the point where it has become incorporated into the commonsense way we interpret, live in, and understand the world. (Harvey 2007, 23)

Entrepreneurship is a construct of this system, further codifying and providing a framework for the discourse of neoliberalism. Higher education has become yet another agent of this system, rewarding perceived merit, further indoctrinating participants into the concept of individual effort and success, yet it suffers from the same systemic inequalities and ultimately serves to protect the power of capitalist class structure. Classical music, or Western art music, is a third leg in a triad relevant to this study, borne out of aristocratic patronage and now reinforcing neoliberal mythologies of pure individual agency, especially in terms of the notion of talent, and preserving a classist, racist, and sexist form of culture. Drawn together, these three elements—entrepreneurship, higher education, and Western art music—represent Bourdieu's institutionalized state of cultural capital (2021). Within this framework, the conservatory or school of music system in the United States provides fertile ground for the development of curricula aimed at educating students in a system of neoliberal capitalist entrepreneurship.

It may be argued that the very nature of a high-level school of music is to reward individual talent. Individual talent and applied effort should, it may be said, naturally be rewarded. But not everyone can execute the performance of virtuosic music at the highest levels of artistry and technique. In terms of the arts as an area of individualism, Bourdieu (1993) writes "there are in fact few other areas in which the glorification of 'great individuals,' unique creators irreducible to any condition or conditioning, is more common and uncontroversial" (28). Modern American

Sadler, Katherine M. 2021. A critical assessment of entrepreneurship in music higher education. *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 20 (3): 132–55. https://doi.org/10.22176/act20.3.132

society is not equitable, however, and talent and hard work are not the only social factors that determine individual success or personal economic stability. The virtuosity and artistically expressive capabilities required to perform challenging works of music at high levels create a unique capital in this field. Talent, practice, dedication, and merit are held individually and generate a competition for recognition and opportunity. Rather than being set in a vacuum of pure competition, however, "the structure of the field, i.e. the space of positions, is nothing more than the distribution of the capital of specific properties which govern success in the field and the winning of the external or specific profits" (Bourdieu 2021). In my experience working with conservatory students and alumni, there were talented, hardworking musicians worried about making rent, uncertain about how to secure health insurance, and even on the verge of retirement with no safety net to speak of after a life spent successfully applying their talents to a performing arts career.

The burden of neoliberalism on individual actors is destructive to many individuals, while deliberately constructive for economic concentration of wealth and power for a few. Neoliberalism does not function as an ideal theory, nor was it necessarily intended to; it exists embedded in the social and cultural frameworks that preceded it, including colonialism, nationalism, sexism, racism, and classism (Davies and Bansel 2007, Cassel and Nelson 2013). These frameworks render the central tenet of neoliberalism—that the individual is a free agent—moot and instead convert neoliberal philosophy to a weapon of discourse aimed at collective adherence that functions in the interest of preserving class and capital in concentrations of power.

> The emergence of neoliberal states has been characterized by the transformation of the administrative state, one previously responsible for human well-being, as well as for the economy, into a state that gives power to global corporations and installs apparatuses and knowledges through which people are reconfigured as productive economic entrepreneurs of their own lives. (Davies and Bansel 2007, 248)

Entrepreneurship is a key tool of neoliberalism in that it further defines the role and responsibility of an individual in economic enterprise. Applied to music higher education, it is the pinnacle of neoliberal practice. It reinforces the myth of individual agency: hard work and merit applied to opportunity mean not just financial success, but the very fulfillment of an individual's purpose in society. Entrepreneurship education in higher music education deeply integrates art as a tool

Sadler, Katherine M. 2021. A critical assessment of entrepreneurship in music higher education. *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 20 (3): 132–55. https://doi.org/10.22176/act20.3.132

of expanding the philosophy, pushing art and artists beyond the realm of cultural capital and into the realm of economic capital in new ways (Bourdieu 2021).

Entrepreneurship develops a program of reproduction of neoliberal ideals in the arts while also reproducing the systemic inequalities of neoliberal capitalism.

Highlighting Opportunity

Capitalism thrives on a hierarchical ordering of society and social priorities, and neoliberalism couches these hierarchies in the discourse of freedom of the individual (Langman 2015). One area in which the inequitable function of neoliberal capitalism in action can be observed is in the intersection with opportunity in entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship is characterized by some theorists as directly dependent on the concept of opportunity, either the discovery or creation thereof by the entrepreneur, embedded in a social context (Shane and Venkataraman 2000). Opportunity can be defined as "the presence of a favorable combination of circumstances that makes a particular course of action possible" (McKendall and Wagner 1997, 627). In the neoliberal ideal, an individual entrepreneur sees opportunity and leverages resources to convert this opportunity to gain capital, thus achieving personal success and contributing value to the broader economy. Based on this conception, it is not difficult to identify scenarios in which given circumstances might not be equally favorable to all potential entrepreneurs. According to Bourdieu's (2021) description of capital,

> The structure of the distribution of the different types and subtypes of capital at a given moment in time represents the immanent structure of the social world, i.e., the set of constraints, inscribed in the very reality of that world, which govern its functioning in a durable way, determining the chances of success for practices. (15)

This conception of opportunity invites participants to reflect critically on their own interaction with entrepreneurship and with the opportunity-capital model.

A chief flaw in the neoliberal philosophy of individuated agents who subscribe to the necessity to take on all economic responsibility for themselves is the existence of myriad inequalities embedded in the American social system. While entrepreneurship relies heavily on the concept of capitalizing on opportunity, opportunity is not equitably distributed in society. Entrepreneurship education in the rarified world of music performance education further stratifies students in class hierarchies, which, despite apparently being talent-dependent, are actually

Sadler, Katherine M. 2021. A critical assessment of entrepreneurship in music higher education. *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 20 (3): 132–55. https://doi.org/10.22176/act20.3.132

deeply intertwined with the class hierarchies of capitalist society at large. This is not merely philosophical but practical, as students of this system, buoyed by the notion that talent and hard work will pay off, invest in expensive education that does not align with the flawed socioeconomic system of which it is a part.

Methods

My research examined the subject of entrepreneurship education in music at the university level as it relates to differences experienced within this system of education and subsequent career activities. The sample population for this research was drawn from graduate students and students who had completed graduate-level instruction at four schools of music or conservatories. The majority of the participants identified as women, including two administrators of entrepreneurship programs, three graduates of these programs, and eight current students who had graduated by the time a second interview was scheduled. In addition to these women, I interviewed two program administrators who identified as men, as well as three current students who identified as men. I recorded twenty-nine hours of one-on-one interview material and created written transcripts for further analysis. I conducted participant interviews by phone or via video chat software, at the preference of the interview participant. I provided copies of the typed transcripts to interview participants to be edited for content and meaning in order to ensure accuracy as well as to cede control of the content to participants.

The interview participants were recruited through a process of snowball sampling, in which I reached out to an acquaintance or administrator from an institution and requested additional potential participants' contact information, with the initial criterion being the type of school each of these participants attended, worked in, or graduated from. These institutions represent some of the top US conservatories and schools of music according to standard rankings in publications, including the US News and World Report. Geographically, the schools were distributed from the northeast through the Midwest, to the Pacific coast. The range of instruments represented among the participants included bassoon, flute, viola, voice, piano (both solo performance and accompaniment), baroque flute, and percussion. Only one participant self-identified as a person of color (i.e., Asian descent), while four identified as having moved to the United States from other countries, each from a different continent. In order to preserve the anonymity of

Sadler, Katherine M. 2021. A critical assessment of entrepreneurship in music higher education. *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 20 (3): 132–55. https://doi.org/10.22176/act20.3.132

the participants, demographics of each specific institution are averaged and the terminology for race and ethnicity are drawn from the reporting source and may not be representative of all identities. The average racial/ethnic representation of the schools selected for this study, and presented in alphabetical order, is 12% Asian, 6.5% Black or African American, 8% Hispanic, 21% International (though nations of origin were not indicated), 6.5% Multi-Racial, 4% Other, 42% White (College Factual 2021).

The relative lack of racial or ethnic diversity is a weakness of the study and may have been a result of the nature of the sampling method, recruiting from among a group of people who then suggested the next participants. This research would benefit from accessing a broader range of participant experiences. Students and graduates all were or had been participants in entrepreneurship offerings at their institutions, though some had attended only a few seminars while others were engaged in full certificate or degree programs. The study did not reach any students who had no experience with entrepreneurship, and there may be yet more important experiential information to gather from students who have either chosen not to or have been unable to engage with this education.

In order to develop the interview protocol used for this research, I drew upon ethnographic and qualitative research design methods (Maxwell 2013, LeCompte and Shensul 2010). For the development and subsequent analysis of participant interviews, I also utilized specific methods from interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) (Smith 2009). IPA procedures require the use of semi-structured interviews to elicit personal reflections. To compose the protocol for this series of interviews, I followed the outline of my primary research questions, which asked for a definition of entrepreneurship, for reflection on the programs in which participants had engaged, and for reflection on the application of these lessons in professional settings. I transcribed the interviews and analyzed the texts hermeneutically for recalled phenomena, based on my role as a participant in this education for over seven years, and I coded these into themes. Themes that emerged in more than one interview were grouped for further cross-case analysis. I scheduled follow-up interviews with participants based on emergent themes that were not a part of the original interviews—specifically the introduction of the concept of family planning and the function of attire in performing gender roles in professional settings. Of the original student and alumni participants, I conducted follow-up interviews with all but two.

Sadler, Katherine M. 2021. A critical assessment of entrepreneurship in music higher education. *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 20 (3): 132–55. https://doi.org/10.22176/act20.3.132

Based on my experience with the terminology of the field of entrepreneurship, I applied the process of thematic coding to analyze when participants were adopting this language to express themselves. I further analyzed where language changed to be more reflective of personal experiences relating to emotion, self-identity, and awareness of social phenomena that emerged through the process of interviewing. I utilized NVivo software to validate my manual analysis in order to observe additional textual patterns. I also engaged in a practice of member checking of the material to confirm that I was presenting the experiences of participants as they intended to communicate them (LeCompte and Shensul 2010, Maxwell 2013). The information for this research has been anonymized to the extent possible, so that participants were able to reflect on highly personal and at times traumatic experiences in their academic and professional careers.

While personal accounts are not meant to provide generalizable findings, they do support a rich, contextual understanding of the experiences of people exposed to given circumstances, in this case the experience of participating in and being educated toward this specific socioeconomic system (Maxwell 2013). Neoliberalism is concerned with the individualization of economic actors and the indoctrination of these individuals in seeking alternatives to collective action (Harvey 2007). Therefore, I found it appropriate to gather data on the individual experience of the phenomena generated through engagement with neoliberalism in the practice of entrepreneurship.

In addition to the one-on-one interviews conducted over the past two years, I also observed a number of entrepreneurship seminars for students of music, and based on field notes, constructed research data for coding using primarily descriptive and live utterances in a manner similar to the thematic coding applied to the interviews (Saldaña 2021). I applied discourse analysis to the discursive practices of classes and seminars, which I collected in the form of field notes during the course of participant observation. The function of these utterances in social settings introduced additional data for thematic exploration in terms of who said what in a given context. Neoliberal capitalism is a hierarchical phenomenon, and power is often discerned by who is represented and who has the privilege to speak in institutional settings.

Sadler, Katherine M. 2021. A critical assessment of entrepreneurship in music higher education. *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 20 (3): 132–55. https://doi.org/10.22176/act20.3.132

Findings

The majority of the interview participants expressed optimism and support for the entrepreneurship education they were developing or were exposed to in their music institutions. Whether crafting and leading the programs as administrators and educators or engaging in them as students, the participants in this research study were mindful that the education was intended to reach students equally. Institutions appeared to be developing this education as a means to improve career outcomes for all graduates, with the goal of improving alumni career statistics for the institutions (Skaggs 2017). According to the responses of the participants in this research, educators in the field of entrepreneurship are aiming toward an ideal of developing individual agency and empowerment among students. One administrator described the goal of entrepreneurship education in positive terms, saying, "You help the student reflect back on their own individual goals and desires and whatever those pieces are that they want and help them grow and develop in that way." The success and fulfillment of students seemed to be at the heart of the drive to educate and equip them for future careers. The themes that I coded based on the responses of the administrators of these programs demonstrated sincere concern for the emotional welfare of the students they were responsible for educating.

The term "leadership" emerged as a key theme in the discussion of entrepreneurship education. According to interview participants, student musicians were perceived by themselves and their educators as having an important role to play in the development of work that has an important role in society at large, and they saw participating in the commodification of their talent as a necessary way to assert leadership within the capital economy. One program leader said, "Where the entrepreneurship part comes in is where we start thinking kind of globally about what is the idea of the project, what's the message, what resources are available to you, and what can you tap into to bring that project to life." In order for musicians to have their artistic voices heard, educators placed importance on developing economic leadership skills among the students in these programs.

Educators and students, much like researchers, see entrepreneurship as opportunity-dependent. A leader of one long-standing program said, "I think part of being an entrepreneur, especially in music, in the arts, it's about seeing opportunities where they don't exist." A key interview question for administrators addressed whether there is a conscious effort to develop curriculum and provide

Sadler, Katherine M. 2021. A critical assessment of entrepreneurship in music higher education. *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 20 (3): 132–55. https://doi.org/10.22176/act20.3.132

opportunities that increase representation and access for a diverse range of students. According to one administrator of an entrepreneurship program, "There are always conversations around maintaining diversity. We do have to give some sort of deference to whether or not the applicant pool is also at least somewhat representative of what we're selecting."

In addition to expressing ideals of leadership and inclusion, the language of business, with an emphasis on capital creation, is very much a part of the education, as the use of the term "entrepreneurship" suggests. When asked about what administrators and educators are aiming to develop, one participant said that entrepreneurship education "is sort of an entry point into, you know, branding and to entrepreneurship [and] the business aspects of their career." A key interview question asked students to define entrepreneurship. Responses frequently included terms such as "branding," "advertising," "marketing" and "loyalty." When asked to highlight important elements that should be a part of music entrepreneurship education, one student answered that musicians should be taught that they will "need to put a certain amount of their capital towards the sort of advertising" that will increase their audience, a term widely used across interviews to represent customers paying for their product of art music performance. Conceptualizing one's self and one's artistic output as commodities is a clear trend in the entrepreneurship education of the participants of this study. One administrator who highlighted the ability to develop opportunity went on to say of entrepreneurship, "It's not always creating something new, but it's [asking] how can you provide value and use your music and your art to do that?" A participant in one program described the challenge of finding marketable value in one's musical ideas in this way:

> You know, everyone can have an idea for this really great ensemble that they want to start. … [But] it's another thing to make it something that could sustain you over the course of your career, [engaging in] entrepreneurship if you have an idea of why this is valuable to you or why you want to do it. But the key to being successful as an entrepreneur is: How do you make other people see the value in what you do with that idea?

Key to the way in which value is conceptualized and internalized is the idea that one's ideas and artistic output do not have value unless they can be sold to others. This relationship is the means by which an artist demonstrates economic value to society and is able to keep up with the basics of monetary self-sufficiency—the ultimate requirement of an individual in a neoliberal economy. One

participant, however, conceptualized value as a "spiritual quality," which drives her as a musician to pursue work that may not pay as well or may be fraught with inequality.

Leveraging one's network, or social capital, was also cited as important by several participants, with the family network occupying an important place in the hierarchy of financial support. Some students cited lack of access to capital as a barrier to launching their careers in the ways they had hoped. One student commented directly, "I do not have the kind of familial financial support to be able to do a lot of the same things my peers have." Familial entitlement to the means to be able to pursue an artistic career echoes Bourdieu's observation that accumulation and heredity (2021) play an important role. Despite students' clear awareness that some of them had greater financial support, the concepts of "competition" and self-reliance were nonetheless cited frequently. As one student put it, "I feel like I have to make my career, push it forward on my own." Another reflected, "It feels like the first one to the [top ensemble] wins, and otherwise no one cares about you." It became apparent to me that participants were acquiring views of a career landscape that commodified them and others and reinforced hierarchies of inherent personal value based on individual success, while they were also being conditioned to overlook or, at minimum, just accept that more well-off students would have an easier time.

Leadership was cited as an essential quality of successful entrepreneurs by administrators and students, but qualities generally considered to be indicative of good leadership are not possessed by all individuals equally (Thébaud 2015). On this point, one participant commented, "Any woman in leadership roles is usually portrayed sometimes as being bossy or pushy or demanding or something along those lines." Another participant described her related experience as a woman, when being hired by a male client:

> He's not a sexist person, but he's used to telling young women like us what to do. He directs them in young artist programs and stuff. So, he's used to telling us what to do, and suddenly it's kind of calm at the other end of the table and he's noncompliant.

While entrepreneurship programs inspire participants with affirmations that their work and ideas will be valued and create value, the majority of participants in this study seldom found this to be the case. They generally attributed the

Sadler, Katherine M. 2021. A critical assessment of entrepreneurship in music higher education. *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 20 (3): 132–55. https://doi.org/10.22176/act20.3.132

problem to personal characteristics and not to the quality of their ideas or the level of effort they applied to the work.

Despite evidence of awareness among educators that programs should encourage participation of diverse individuals, and a sense that access to opportunities should be equal for all students, reflections from interview participants and observations of seminars yielded evidence that hegemonic forces do still underpin entrepreneurship as a working construct. The current capitalist hierarchy largely privileges white men, a persistent holdover from the colonialism of Western Europe and the United States. In one seminar on public speaking hosted by the entrepreneurship department, the two presenters were white men, both successful in their fields. They had compiled a set of videos demonstrating examples of successful public speaking, a skill commonly deemed an essential part of the marketing of performing artists (Hipes 2017, Devlin 2015). Every video example featured a white male musician, yet the population of the classroom was far more diverse than the performers represented on the screen. Presenters at entrepreneurship seminars that I observed were majority male and majority white, even though a conscious effort had been made to program a diversity of presenters. One administrator admitted, “We keep trying to find new people to come in and speak for us. When we were looking for deans to come in and be our keynote speakers, there are fewer female deans than there are male.”

Another example of how subtly sociocultural privilege can influence opportunity came from a program participant who was preparing, with a team, to compile case studies of successful artistic ventures. The team leader was a woman to whom I posed a question about representation within her program; she was proud of the writing samples she had collected, but during the course of the interview, she realized that only two authors of the twenty-five collected case studies were women. She explained, “I wrote three, so that’s nice. But one other woman wrote one,” and then she noted the gender disparity, saying, “Then the rest of them were all by men. So that’s interesting. I have never thought about that. And we’re the ones bringing these people in.”

The participant began to see her unconscious participation in upholding an oppressive system, in this case the patriarchal hegemony which privileges male voices in academia. Research in this area may lead to uncovering uncomfortable dynamics between the oppressed and their roles within systems of oppression. Capitalist hegemony successfully engages willing participants in an unjust system

by virtue of the habitus developed from a lifetime within the system (Bourdieu 1993). Therefore, it is crucial that educators who wish to engage with these systems through a critical lens, engage in and consume research assessing the effects of these educational practices on students.

Open-mindedness was cited by several participants as a virtue of the entrepreneurial personality. Participants equated the ability to be creative in the economic realm with artistic creativity, linking the two qualities in a positive association. This association seemed to create conflict, which was self-directed, for one participant for whom Social Justice was a stated priority. She reflected, "It's my own weaknesses that I get defensive or shut down because I know that everything [the professor] is imagining is for a profit, and that is just not how I operate at all." Here I noted the term "weakness" in my analysis of the interview text. The participant accepted the premise that entrepreneurship and pursuing the creation of capital were worthwhile goals, and that falling short of these goals was due to a weakness on her part, not on the part of the system into which she was being inducted.

The three student participants who had come to the United States for the first time for college-level education expressed the sense that opportunities were likely different for them, because they were from other countries and routinely faced subtle and overt xenophobia. The participant from France reflected that many foreign students were perceived to have communities of support by virtue of their national origin. He expressed frustration because he felt this was perhaps true for people from some countries, but not for those from France in particular. At the same time, the perception of support outside of pure individual achievement was cause for disdain from American students and even faculty; one does not achieve authentic success if aided by social support. Another participant reflected on her status as an Asian woman and how it frequently resulted in her being thought of by teachers and other students as predestined for success in music, while at the same time less capable for leadership roles. Two participants reflected that age, often combined with gender, seemed to be a barrier to advancement in roles at new jobs.

Another participant noted that they felt safe in many areas of the performing arts because the arts include LGBTQ safe spaces, but that this didn't always equate to safety and support outside of those spaces. The participant identified as a lesbian and noted that her sense of self-worth was challenged because she was not wearing professional attire at her institution; thus, her true individuality was not actually valued. She expressed the feeling by saying, "You feel like [the cultural

Sadler, Katherine M. 2021. A critical assessment of entrepreneurship in music higher education. *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 20 (3): 132–55. https://doi.org/10.22176/act20.3.132

expectations] just center upon your shoulders, and the types of appearance, how you should dress, how you should present yourself, is there all of the time. It never goes away." On six occasions, participants referenced their cultural distaste for business in the arts field. Participants made comments such as, "I still say with hesitation that I'm an entrepreneur." No participant, however, articulated a clear reason for this distaste or advanced an alternative for how they might otherwise survive in a capitalist economy.

Discussion

Oppression depends on the compliance of those in the underclasses (Langman 2015). This compliance is not always conscious and may be developed in unconscious ways through social conditioning. From its inception as a mechanism intended for the social control of individuals (Davies and Bansel 2007), neoliberalism has successfully advanced the language of capitalist indoctrination to such an extent that the self-worth of the individual becomes deeply connected to his or her capability to work within the economic expectations of the system. This is the very intention of the neoliberal system of socioeconomics: individualization through indoctrination.

> Individual subjects have thus welcomed the increasing individualism as a sign of their freedom and, at the same time, institutions have increased competition, responsibilization, and the transfer of risk from the state to individuals at a heavy cost to many individuals. (Davies and Bansel 2007, 248)

The theoretical nature of this relationship was never directly acknowledged by participants in my research. The area in which participants most readily identified harmful hierarchies or access to economic capital was in the area of access to opportunity. This conception of potential capital awaiting the application of ingenuity and hard work appeared to be a concrete model from which participants could identify their own positionality within the neoliberal socioeconomic structure.

The findings reflect the personal identification that students and educators experience within the prioritization of the capital creation or "value" that entrepreneurship embodies. While all participants, both program administrators and students, spoke of entrepreneurship in positive terms as a means of improving individual economic outcomes and even benefiting music as a field and the wider society through music, further reflection on actual experiences within the

professional world were often marked by more negative language. Participants' frequent use of the language of mindset, open-mindedness, and core beliefs reveals their recognition that accepting, willingly supporting and participating in entrepreneurship would reflect their indoctrination.

As the interviews progressed beyond the definition of entrepreneurship, where idealistic language was most prevalent and most consistent across responses, participants frequently acknowledged systemic barriers to opportunity. The process of interviewing often elicited participants' reflections on their position within the sociocultural economic structure of neoliberal capitalism in a way that was not evident in their idealistic conceptions of entrepreneurship at the outset of the interview process. Furthermore, participants' optimism for entrepreneurship was not always borne out in the experiences of those who had recently entered the work force. Many who had already graduated described encountering barriers to opportunity once in the field. One participant expressed the feeling that even with the experience of entrepreneurship education, she did not actually feel valued for her ideas:

> I think that there [are] sometimes situations where, you know, people are posting a job but they kind of need a placeholder, someone that they think isn't going to make waves. I think it was more like they were looking for someone to just like be there and not really change anything, not really push any boundaries.

This experience belies the promise of entrepreneurship as an ideal and connects it to the purpose of neoliberal indoctrination. The goal of neoliberalism as it is currently applied to reinforce the hegemony of capitalist class hierarchy is not actually to create true individual successes for the greatest number of people; it is to ensure that those people believe that success is their responsibility alone and that those who have concentrated wealth and power have therefore earned their positions within that class structure (Davies and Bansel 2007). Additional individuals' experiences reinforce an interpretation of entrepreneurship and neoliberalism that does not value individuality. The pressure for conformity in dress, appearance, and behavior among interview participants reflects pressure that occurs when one is attempting to translate cultural or social capital into economic capital (Bourdieu 1993). Participants were aiming to generate economic capital within the narrow definitions of acceptable classical performance even while they spoke of adopting open-minded and creative attitudes. These attitudes take them

Sadler, Katherine M. 2021. A critical assessment of entrepreneurship in music higher education. *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 20 (3): 132–55. https://doi.org/10.22176/act20.3.132

only as far as those who control capital—those in the upper classes—will allow them to go.

Entrepreneurship education, according to the administrators I interviewed, is intended to educate students in leadership skills, and they expressed the presumption that anyone could learn these skills if they were "open-minded" enough to embrace them. Notably, some critics within the field of music are beginning to argue that entrepreneurship is a poor model on which to base music career education in general, because it does not match the actual functions engaged in by musicians, such as creating cooperative ensembles and relying on patronage rather than capital investment with an expected financial return (Moore 2016). Developing education based on an entrepreneurship model and using the terminology and techniques from that model presents a real potential for the introduction of individual biases which advantage some people over others (Terjesen, Bosma, and Stam 2015; Thébaud 2015; Ahl 2002). If "entrepreneurship," therefore, is offered to music students as a career-creating solution in a challenging economy, they should also be told that not all graduates have the same access to opportunity, despite the premise advanced within entrepreneurship education that creativity and hard work are the primary prerequisites for success. Whether entrepreneurship education successfully provides music students with skills that will enable them to successfully participate in the neoliberal capitalist society, however, is actually beside the larger point. The matter is actually one of reinforcing a harmful socioeconomic system by advancing the hierarchical mythologies of that system.

The neoliberal social order depends heavily on the image of "the symbolic capital of the entrepreneurial and individual self, exercised in an environment of free market capitalism" (Cassel and Nelson 2013, 250). Yet despite the persistent myth of the independent entrepreneur self-creating wealth on ingenuity and hard work alone, inequality is deeply embedded in the system. Cassel and Nelson (2013) write that "these ideological and mythological tenets and images work to obscure these dispositive structures, many of which revolve around the operative dynamics of social capital networks and the ability of persons across a class structure to create and or access such networks" (245). Research into an emerging version of this mythology reveals that the individualist economic actor has become melded, through the use of technology, into an idealized *prosumer*, a "person whose technology-mediated ingenuities would reach new heights of creativity and self-sufficiency, overcoming alienation and forging a better world" (Comor 2011, 310). The

prosumer identity is deeply intertwined with the activities promulgated in music entrepreneurship education.

In regard to the soundness of entrepreneurship as a model for music education in post-secondary institutions, it is necessary to examine the broader sociocultural positioning of students themselves. This leads me to question whether all students engaging in education in the performing arts possess the structural support they need to create and access the social capital networks referenced above. If this approach to education is predicated on the idea that all students have equal access to economic opportunity, it ignores the actual cultural assumptions held by those who hold power and capital. Evidence suggests that gatekeepers of the hierarchy of capitalist structures consistently make value judgments about the characteristics of men and women, people of color, people of differing abilities, and even about conventions of attractiveness and their worthiness to access such opportunities (Brooks et al. 2014).

More importantly, though, educational institutions' emphasis on entrepreneurship ignores the further damaging effect of advancing the belief in lone individual responsibility instead of making evident inherently limiting sociocultural factors and encouraging supportive, collective, and community-based action as an alternative. Neoliberalism as embodied in the application of entrepreneurship education at music conservatories and schools of music represents the apex of the process of developing students into adherents of a harmful philosophy. As Davies and Bansel (2007) observe, "It does so, in part, through the introduction/imposition of new discourses—new mentalities—through which subjects will take themselves up as the newly appropriate and appropriated subjects of the new social order" (247). I have sought, through my qualitative research, to learn from participants in this system how they experience this education and whether, for them, the promise of individual success is realized or whether there is any perception of the harm (Sadler 2021).

A Note on the Pandemic

Most of the data for this study were collected prior to the emergence of Covid-19. There were, however, three follow-up interviews that occurred following the onset of the pandemic. These interviews followed the original protocol established for other follow-up interviews, but each did include mention of the pandemic by

Sadler, Katherine M. 2021. A critical assessment of entrepreneurship in music higher education. *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 20 (3): 132–55. https://doi.org/10.22176/act20.3.132

participants. Those participants had moved what aspects of their work they could—mostly teaching and recording—to online platforms. It is hard to assess what the potential outcomes will be of the extraordinary economic stress put on performing artists. Almost all live performances were halted for a time to support social distancing efforts and are only now coming back with modifications to the number of artists employed.

Those who advocate for the neoliberal capitalist agenda may continue to use individualist propaganda, as the United States appears to be accepting certain losses rather than providing sufficient collective support. Some evidence of this attitude emerged in the 2020 "Try Something New" campaign from the office of Ivanka Trump, in the insufficient duration of unemployment aid, in eviction moratoriums, and in the fact that a certain number of illnesses among children and teachers were deemed acceptable for the sake of reopening schools. There may also be, however, a move toward greater collectivism. With the change of Presidential administration and the passage of additional legislation providing unemployment assistance as well as direct stimulus payments, I wonder whether the spirit of collectivism may have a resurgence, at least in terms of using collective tax revenue to support individuals in need. The spirit of individualism is still strong in the United States, however, and is being played out in the sphere of mask wearing and vaccination. The mythological nature of neoliberal individualism is revealed when individual actions alone cannot stem the tide of infection. The apparatus of the state as a social safety net has been mobilized to provide financial assistance, and, where it has fallen short, the failures of that apparatus have become all the more apparent. Social movements for racial justice have also emerged as a theme of collective action in recent months. If neoliberal indoctrination can be laid bare by the radical upheavals of these challenging times, there may yet be a move toward communal support that will enable artists to create and educate freely, without being tied to an economic system that is designed to concentrate wealth in an unequal way.

Conclusions

Without intervention, capital has a tendency to accumulate in vast quantities for a few, while the many are left to compete for the balance. The social and cultural capital of the underclasses are translated into economic capital, creating an internal struggle to emulate the dominant class. Neoliberal philosophy was deliberately

Sadler, Katherine M. 2021. A critical assessment of entrepreneurship in music higher education. *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 20 (3): 132–55. https://doi.org/10.22176/act20.3.132

crafted to provide a powerful tool of capitalist propaganda based in concepts of freedom and individuality to justify this class dynamic (Davies and Bansel 2007). Entrepreneurship is a mechanism of that philosophy that aims to provide a tangible program of capital-generating activity in order for individuals to participate in the neoliberal economy. That so many lack the means, socially or culturally, to participate successfully in the practice of entrepreneurship is interpreted as a personal failing by individuals and not as a systemic failure of a society to care for individuals through collective efforts. Looking to our own individual successes and failures distracts us from questioning the socio-political structures in which we participate which underpin exploitation and the hoarding of resources. Entrepreneurship as an educational concept engenders optimism and fosters a mind-set consistent with neoliberal philosophy, but simultaneously neglects to translate societal economic inequalities into practical issues to be addressed by group effort. Entrepreneurs may see a social problem, but the onus is on them to craft a marketable solution to that problem.

Education has the potential to support liberation, but it can also serve to reinforce structures of oppression if it does not engender critical examination of societal imbalances (Freire 1970). The research presented here is a start toward examining whether entrepreneurship education guides music students into an equitable system or further indoctrinates them as participants into a system that will not support them. Entrepreneurship education serves a deliberate function in a neoliberal capitalist system of reproduction: it develops subjects of the system who believe their very value to society is to generate capital self-sufficiently. This function continues to occur at the expense of creating a more equitable society or more just means of approaching art and education. The means of production, the keys of inclusion, are held largely, as in much of society, by white, male leaders with concentrated access to capital, and that class determines which individuals are worthy. The ways in which entrepreneurship was frequently described by participants from educators to students in my study included aspirational elements such as creative thinking, diplomacy, team building, and the sharing of goals, labor, and financial resources. The emphasis on the capitalist elements of entrepreneurship, however, seemed to be taking an emotional toll, in varying degrees, on every participant. Leadership, creativity, and cooperation are valuable skills for musicians to acquire, especially if they can apply those skills to increasing representation, access, and reform in education. The financial picture now facing many music

Sadler, Katherine M. 2021. A critical assessment of entrepreneurship in music higher education. *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 20 (3): 132–55. https://doi.org/10.22176/act20.3.132

graduates in the United States is untenable, and this is a feature of a neoliberal capitalist society in the ascendancy, in which schools of music and entrepreneurship programs play a role.

The area of entrepreneurship education for artists holds great potential as a topic for additional research, especially in terms of intersections of race, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, and other factors with the concepts of neoliberalism and the role of production of culture (Bourdieu 1993). This research challenges the assumption that performing arts students are best served when they are taught to adapt and conform to an inequitable and unjust economic system. Self-examination is an important first step in transformational learning, and this educational process is beneficial for examining one's position and potential power in society (Mezirow 2018). Eliciting first-person experiences in entrepreneurship education will help bring to light the actual effects of this education in the lives of students. Creating learning spaces that dismantle hegemonic structures and empower artists to advocate and agitate for social and economic change is essential, ongoing work. These alternatives may borrow from areas of social justice education and economic activism in terms of supporting the idea that individuals of all descriptions should be granted respect and autonomy within an economically collective environment.

By seeing the entrepreneurship terminology and agenda as the tools of neoliberal indoctrination they are, educators and artists who sense the underlying negativity of the association with for-profit business models might find a place in leading the dialogue about collective issues that could fundamentally change an economic landscape that currently necessitates a constant drive for securing income. These programs effectively elicit aspirational terminology and create the impression of individual agency for the students who engage with them. They could be inspiring future music leaders along a different philosophy of socioeconomic engagement. Such a philosophy will be well served by continuing research in the field of music entrepreneurship education and should be informed by the broadest range of stakeholders to represent diverse perspectives.

About the Author

Katherine M. Sadler recently completed the Doctor of Education program at Teachers College Columbia University in Music and Music Education. In June 2021, Dr. Sadler joined the new Houston Botanic Garden as the Director of Operations where she leads the data collection and analysis team. Dr. Sadler has worked in the field of Entrepreneurship Education in the cultural and artistic sector for eight years as an administrator and consultant, and her research has been focused on career development for artists who are preparing to leave higher education for the professional world. Dr. Sadler received the Master of Music degree in Vocal Performance from the San Francisco Conservatory of Music and the BA in Music from UC Berkeley, and she continues to perform, most recently as a Soprano with the Houston Symphony Chorus.

References

Ahl, Helene J. 2002. *The making of the female entrepreneur: A discourse analysis of research texts on women's entrepreneurship*. Jönköping: Jönköping International Business School.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1993. *The field of cultural production*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 2021. *Forms of capital*, translated by Peter Collier. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Brooks, Alison Wood, Laura Huang, Sarah Wood Kearney, and Fiona E. Murray. 2014. Investors prefer entrepreneurial ventures pitched by attractive men. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 111 (12): 4427–31.

Cassell, John A., and Thomas Nelson. 2013. Exposing the effects of the 'Invisible HAND' of the neoliberal agenda on institutionalized education and the process of sociocultural REPRODUCTION. *Interchange* 43 (3): 245–64.

College Factual. 2021. (July 28). https://www.collegefactual.com/

Comor, Edward. 2010. Contextualizing and critiquing the fantastic prosumer: Power, alienation and hegemony. *Critical Sociology* 37 (3): 309–27.

Davies, Bronwyn, and Peter Bansel. 2007. Neoliberalism and education. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 20 (3): 247–59.

Devlin, John. 2015. An introductory course in music entrepreneurship. DMA diss., University of Maryland.

Sadler, Katherine M. 2021. A critical assessment of entrepreneurship in music higher education. *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 20 (3): 132–55. https://doi.org/10.22176/act20.3.132

Freire, Paulo. 2018. *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Burnaby, B.C.: Simon Fraser University Library.

Harvey, David. 2007. Neoliberalism as creative destruction. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 610 (1): 21–44.

Hipes, Barrett J. 2017. The performance conversation: A pragmatic, curricular approach to speaking from the stage," DMA diss., City University of New York.

Kim, Theresa Ja-Young. 2018. The impacts of high-level training: Five musicians who transferred their skills to new professions. EdD diss., Teachers College Columbia University.

Langman, Lauren. 2015. An overview: Hegemony, ideology and the reproduction of domination. *Critical Sociology* 41 (3): 425–32.

LeCompte, Margaret Diane, and Jean J. Schensul. 2010. *Designing and conducting ethnographic research: An introduction*. AltaMira Press.

Maxwell, Joseph A. 2005. *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

McKendall, Marie A., and John A. Wagner. 1997. Motive, opportunity, choice, and corporate illegality. *Organization Science* 8 (6): 624–47.

Mezirow, Jack. 2008. Transformative learning theory. In *Contemporary theories of learning*, 2nd ed., edited by Knud Illeris, 114–28. Routledge.

Moore, Andrea. 2016. Neoliberalism and the musical entrepreneur. *Journal of the Society for American Music* 10 (1): 33–53.

Sadler, Katherine Marie. 2021. Equal opportunity: Female experiences in music entrepreneurship education. EdD diss., Teachers College Columbia University.

Saldaña Johnny. 2021. *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Los Angeles: SAGE.

Shane, Scott, and Sankaran Venkataraman. 2007. The promise of entrepreneurship as a field of research. In *Entrepreneurship*, edited by Álvaro Cuervo, Domingo Ribeiro, and Salvador Roig, 171–84. Springer.

Skaggs, Rachel. 2017. Career skills and entrepreneurship training for artists: Results of the 2015 SNAAP survey module. Special report. Strategic National Arts Alumni Project. Strategic National Arts Alumni Project. Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research.

Sadler, Katherine M. 2021. A critical assessment of entrepreneurship in music higher education. *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 20 (3): 132–55. https://doi.org/10.22176/act20.3.132

Smith, John. 2009. *Interpretive phenomenological analysis: Theory, method, and research*. London: Sage Publications.

Terjesen, Siri, Niels Bosma, and Erik Stam. 2015. Advancing public policy for high-growth, female, and social entrepreneurs. *Public Administration Review* 76 (2): 230–39. https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.12472

Thébaud, Sarah. 2015. Status beliefs and the spirit of capitalism: Accounting for gender biases in entrepreneurship and innovation. *Social Forces* 94 (1): 61–86.

Wallen, Aaron S., Michael W. Morris, Beth A. Devine, and Jackson G. Lu. 2017. Understanding the MBA gender gap: Women respond to gender norms by reducing public assertiveness but not private effort. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 43 (8): 1150–70.

Sadler, Katherine M. 2021. A critical assessment of entrepreneurship in music higher education. *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 20 (3): 132–55. https://doi.org/10.22176/act20.3.132