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Critiquing the Critique: Postcolonialism, Moral Concerns, and Epistemology

An essay review of *The Routledge Handbook to Sociology of Music Education, Part I*

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Abstract

In this review essay response to Part 1 of *The Routledge Handbook to Sociology of Music Education*, I explore the entanglement of moral and epistemological concerns that surround the discourses of postcolonialism. Postcolonialism critiques Western hegemonies and raises questions not only about politics and morality but also ontology and epistemology that go to the very heart of the educational endeavour. I attempt to tease out some dimensions not often included in this literature—epistemological arguments about knowledge itself. I also raise the issue of how to ensure that criticality maintains a constant reflexive edge within the academic community to avoid simply utilising the moral high ground as justification for changes to education. I recount the principles of Social Realism as a possible means to resolve the vexed questions about what and whose knowledge counts in education.

Keywords

Post-colonialism, epistemology, knowledge, Social Realism, epistemic access, Bernstein

The brief for writing this ACT essay review invites authors to go beyond the typical conventions of a book review to explore issues and concerns the book raises. The aim is to stimulate discussion and to allow the reviewer to consider their own thinking as influenced by the book. While all the chapters in *The Routledge Handbook to Sociology of Music Education*, Part 1, are clearly worthy of their place in this significant volume, I focus on those that caused me to think again about some of the key arguments in my own work and about certain controversies currently simmering in my country—Aotearoa New Zealand—concerning the place and status of Indigenous knowledge within education. It is the concept of post-colonialism, then, that stood out as most significant for me in this part of the book, so I am choosing to engage with ideas and arguments raised in several of the chapters related to this matter.

Post-colonialism is a matter of great importance that permeates current thinking about education and music education. It critiques Western hegemonies and raises questions not only about politics and morality but also ontology and epistemology that go to the very heart of the educational endeavour. For example, the discourse of post-colonialism argues for the recognition of cultural ways of knowing largely silenced by Western colonization in countries such as New Zealand, Australia, Canada, and the USA. The particular issue I seek to explore in this essay is the entanglement of moral and epistemology concerns, and in doing so, I will attempt to tease out some dimensions not often included in this literature—that of knowledge itself.

It seems to me there is often a conflation of the moral with the epistemological that leads to what Kitching (2008) describes as "good causes and bad philosophy."[1] By moral, here I refer to the morality of inclusiveness and equality. This can be seen in comments such as Gilbert's (2005) plea for *a new theory of knowledge for education*, "one that allows us to decide what *good knowledge* is in a way that doesn't exclude people" (Gilbert 2005, 172, italics added). Gilbert appears to be calling for some sort of change to what knowledge is, as if it has no objective dimensions and can be changed at will. While readers might share the underlying sentiment, this seems to me to conflate moral ideals and epistemology, which may lead to confusion about the purpose of knowledge in education (Moore 2007, 2010). The moral question is "whose knowledge," whereas the epistemological question is "what knowledge"?

Gilbert's plea is typical of ideas within the general postmodern "cultural turn," the move from class and socio-economic explanations for education's failings to a focus on identity and culture through social constructivism. This

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shift in terms of ontology and epistemology suggests there is "no external epistemic authority, only different individual constructions of knowledge" (Golding 2011, 480) or knowledge relative to respective cultural groups. Most teachers want to provide more democratic and empowering learning experiences for students, and this is why teachers are concerned to make classrooms more inclusive, relevant, and culturally responsive. However, these ideals tend to be approached through moral and political lenses, rather than epistemological or ontological ones. By not considering the nature of knowledge itself—epistemological matters—marginalized students for whom such reforms are particularly aimed to benefit may inadvertently be further disadvantaged (Bernstein 1990; Delpit 1997; Barrett and McPhail 2022). We need to be open to a critique of the critique.

In the introduction to this part of the book, Patrick Schmidt (2021) notes that most of the chapters in Part 1 draw on two critical traditions, "those influenced by neo-Marxian thinking and Bourdieu's sociological theory, and those aligned with what might be called 'connected sociologies' (Bhambra 2014), associated with issues explored by post-colonial and decolonial theories" (21). As the editors' note in the Introduction (Wright et al., 2021), we would expect such criticality now within the sociology of music education, as there is "an increasingly obvious concern with issues of social critique and the uncovering of injustice, exclusion, and inequity in music education" (2). However, I suggest that as important as collective "deconstruction" of past approaches has been and continues to be, it leaves the question of "what next" mostly unanswered, or answered in predominantly aspirational, political, romanticized, or even contradictory terms (e.g., Allsup 2016).[2] It was with some anticipation, then, that I began to read this part of the book, hoping that the authors would take us beyond yet more deconstruction towards Wright's second and third "fundamental tasks" shared in the Introduction: "envisioning viable alternatives; and understanding the obstacles, possibilities, and dilemmas of transformation" (4).

On a related matter, Green (2021) warns readers in the book's Foreword, as do Hall, Crawford, and Jenkins (2021) in Chapter 8, that criticality in sociological thinking can, if academics are not careful, simply lead to the replacement of one hegemony with another. Once "the great reveal" of the false consciousness has been achieved, the job has been done. However, there is a danger that academic criticality claims for itself the moral high ground, and this is seen as sufficient to justify a position in itself (e.g., in identity politics). This is a

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problem for the progressive left that we need to consider and critique, as it can lead to the construction of a discursive echo chamber for virtue signalling, wokeism, and cancel culture. I argue that discussion about education needs also to be considered at ontological and epistemological levels, not only in relation to moral concerns. There is, I suggest, the potential for the concept of *epistemic access* to subsume many moral concerns if a curriculum is conceived as wide, deep, inclusive, and conceptual. Epistemic access means making sure that all students have access to knowledge that is powerful (see discussion below). As Young has noted, while the current orthodoxy is to ask, "is this curriculum meaningful to my students?" we need to also ask "what are the meanings that this curriculum gives my students *access to*?" (Young 2013, 106, italics added).

As is the fashion, some brief notes concerning my positionality are in order. Although I believe ideas in academic work should stand alone on their merits and not be primarily connected with political agendas or the identity of the author, some acknowledgement of professional context can be helpful and on occasion is vital. For example, as I have noted elsewhere (McPhail 2018), Randall Allsup's context—the USA—has led him to lament the state of music education in that country, which he describes as "narrowly focused [on] performance norms and closed standards of musical expertise" (Allsup 2016, 104). Allsup also laments a lack of *constructivism* to counter what he identifies as "the Law" of music education in the USA, whereas from my context in Aotearoa, New Zealand, constructivism has become the law, ideological and a "ruler of consciousness" (Bernstein 2000, 194). My key point here is that it is important to consider the logic and merits of critiques from within the context in which they emerge. It is only then that we may begin to make sense of arguments, be able to compare them with our own contexts and experiences, and move to more abstracted levels of understanding through comparison and the use of theoretical concepts.

My twenty years of teaching coincided with the advent of postmodernism and major changes in Aotearoa, New Zealand's cultural and educational landscape (McPhail, Thorpe, and Wise 2018), and by the time I had completed my twenty-one years as a secondary school teacher, I was teaching very little of the content that had been part of my education. A narrow Western art music agenda had been replaced with a focus on student's own music learning trajectories via performance and composition. Elliott's *Music Matters* (1995) was a revelatory influence for me at that time. I enacted an educational paradigm shift from knowledge to knower, with which I was zealously convinced—music as praxis.

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More recently, however, I have realised knowledge itself needs our careful consideration and examination in any exploration of education's emancipatory potential (Muller 2000; Lourie and McPhail 2021; Rata 2012; Young 2008; Wheelahan 2010). This has led to my interest and focus on knowledge as object of study within the sociology of education (McPhail 2023). By knowledge, *I am not* referring to approaches to curriculum and pedagogy populated by lists of facts delivered through didactic pedagogies, but rather a conceptual approach to design and a progressive praxial approach to pedagogy. By a conceptual approach, I mean students coming to know, understand, and utilise the affordances of the deeper conceptual structures that structure knowledge itself. Approaches to curriculum design that give primacy to concepts can lead to understanding knowledge at a deeper level, which in turn can assist cognitive development.[3] Students learn to think the unthinkable by learning to think abstractly (Bernstein 2000; Geary and Berch 2016; Sweller 2016; Vygotsky 1986)—Plato's emergence from "the cave" of everyday experience (Hugo 2013).

I have found Bernstein's concepts of *the pedagogic device and recontextualisation* very helpful in bringing theoretical understanding to what goes on in academic and educational fields. Bernstein's pedagogic device is a dense concept, theorised as an ensemble of principles and procedures linked to symbolic struggles over power and control in three educational knowledge "fields": production, recontextualisation, and reproduction. Each field has its own set of principles that effect "the production, reproduction and transformation of culture" (Bernstein 2000, 38). In sum, the pedagogic device acts as "a symbolic regulator of consciousness" (62) in a given society. Moreover, Bernstein suggests, "whoever appropriates the [pedagogic] device has the power to regulate consciousness. Whoever appropriates the device, appropriates the crucial site for symbolic control. The device itself creates an arena of struggle for those who are to appropriate it" (Bernstein 2000, 38). The central questions then become, "whose regulator, what consciousness, and for whom?" (37).

The "device" operates in the fields of knowledge production (universities, research institutes, journals, academic books), recontextualisation (usually in ministries of education and educational institutions), and reproduction (in lecture theatres and classrooms). Ideas from the fields of knowledge production are recontextualised (altered and reshaped) within the field of recontextualisation. These concepts associated with the pedagogic device can assist academics (as many others can) in stepping back to consider what discourses are dominating education's symbolic fields at given times and provide a means to

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conceptualise and enable critique. For example, in education generally, Wheelahan (2010) asserts that *instrumentalism* and *relevance* are the current dominant principles for curricular recontextualization (both linked to neoliberalism[4]) rather than "systematic access to structures of knowledge" (104). I referred earlier to Allsup's (2016) argument that constructivism needs to be more influential as a recontextualising principle in the music classrooms of North America. Decolonizing narratives are becoming a strong recontextualising principle, particularly in post-colonial contexts, at least in academia, as this book under review demonstrates. Later in this essay, I give an example of current struggles over who controls the pedagogic device in Aotearoa, New Zealand, as the place of Māori Indigenous knowledge within education, which is hotly debated. In the spirit critically invoked by Green (2021) in the introduction, if we are to be truly critical, then we also need to critique the critiques. Differentiating between political and moral concerns on the one hand, and epistemology on the other, provide the key way I attempt a respectful critique of the decolonising narratives that are so important to our times.

Where the Chapters Take the Readers

Progressive discourses for music education have recently begun to draw on the post-colonial literature (e.g., Philpott 2022), and the opening chapter in Part 1 of this book by Juliet Hess (2021) is an example of this approach. Hess's chapter is important, as it provides a theoretical and concise overview of the arguments used in favor of the postcolonial position in general, as well as an exploration of the role music education has played and continues to play in "the colonial project." I want to utilise some space in summarising the key ideas presented in Hess's chapter, as they provide the basis for further discussion below.

Hess explores post-colonialism, drawing on the related concepts of external and internal colonialism. While *external colonization* has explicit links to capitalism and the exploitation of people and resources, *internal colonization* is enacted at the symbolic level primarily through education. In Bernstein's language, modes of symbolic power and control are achieved through dominance of the pedagogic device (Bernstein 2000). Hess argues that colonization has been achieved through the ubiquitous teaching of Western classical music globally, which at a deeper level involves the imposition of Western epistemologies to all musics—a form of "cognitive imperialism" (internal colonialization).

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In the second part of the chapter, Hess shifts to an elaboration of the notion of *anticolonialism* and outlines how resistance to colonialism might be achieved within music education. This elaboration is particularly welcome since, as I mentioned above, many critical deconstructions of Western hegemonies remain abstract, taking the approach that once the hegemony has been revealed, the job is done. In Chapter 8, Hall, Crawford, and Jenkins note that it is insufficient to "focus on Western 'classical' music as music education's vice without reimagining the structures within which content is experienced" (129). Hess, however, does attempt to consider what might happen next.[5] Drawing on the concept of internal colonialism and a number of other ideas introduced in the first part of the chapter, she outlines five themes in *an anticolonial theoretical framework* for application to curriculum and pedagogy. These themes take us to the level of curriculum consideration, and in that regard, are particularly useful for those readers who are sympathetic to the analysis of colonialism but are usure what practical means might be applied to counter its effects.

The first of the five themes refers to Western music's *global reach*,[6] reminding readers that because of this ubiquity, Western classical music and its associated conceptual systems and values are hegemonic and often doxic. As a first step, Hess argues that we need to recognise that this hegemony raises the status of that knowledge over others, effecting knowledge production itself. Hess also asks "which musics best serve local students" and "what it might mean to provide ethical education in local communities" (34). However, the issue of localisation is a Janus-faced concept, where it could be argued a balance needs to be found between celebrating the local (the student's culture and identity) as well seeing education as a mechanism of interruption (Moore 2013b). Education may provide the means for students to move beyond the boundaries of family and culture to a chosen identity, even an academic identity (Barnett 2009; Siteine 2021).

The second theme in the *anticolonial theoretical framework* concerns Western ethnocentrism realised as *cognitive imperialism*. Hess is referring here to the dominance of Western epistemologies, for example, the dominance of notation over aurality and the foregrounding of formalised approaches to music understanding such as "the elements of music." Her argument appears to be that we shouldn't use "Western concepts" such as melody, texture, etc. in reference to non-Western music. However, we are left unsure what concepts might actually be available to us to enable the cross-cultural conversations required of education. It would be interesting to know if Hess regards concepts

higher up the abstraction chain than the elements of music as too Western and colonising; for example, Regelski's (2004) time, sound and silence, linearity, simultaneity, organization, expression, play, musical valuation, quality, and technique, or Stock's (2002) organization and subdivision of time, the construction of melody, modes, and musical space, the use of instruments and voice, and the place of musicking in context. I return to the problem of cognitive imperialism and concepts again later in the review. Another dimension of cognitive imperialism is the lack of recognition of students' funds of knowledge and alternative ways of knowing. Hess states we should aim for "multicentric classrooms."

Hess's third theme, music education as a *civilizing project*, refers to the idea of "installing hierarchies of the human." (27). In other words, the knowledge and values of the colonizing culture are considered superior to the colonized, and the civilizing project attempts to eradicate Indigenous bodies of knowledge and non-Western ways of knowing.

The fourth theme concerns *musical tourism*, the act of including selections of non-Western musics in the curriculum according to a logic of extraction (the utilisation of aspects of Indigenous bodies of knowledge as a resource for education) that not only keeps this music on the periphery of the curriculum but leaves students with the impression that non-Western musics are "simple and easily mastered" (35). Hess argues that this process of extraction leading to musical tourism results in *misrepresentation, dehumanization, and erasure*—the fifth and final theme. To counteract these outcomes of a colonial curriculum, citing Bradley (2003), Hess argues that teachers need to "purposefully push beyond stereotypes and resist practices that contribute to stereotyping such as performing musics without providing detailed contextualisation" (35).

Hess's chapter (Chapter 1) lays out the problem of colonialization for readers and provides valuable concepts to enable considered responses to the challenges of post-colonial thinking. Further into the book, in Chapter 3, Chen (2021) provides us with an empirical example of the challenges of post-colonialism at play in Hong Kong. With yet more useful concepts (decolonization, neocolonization, and recolonization) Chen assists readers with understanding the complexities of colonization in countries where there are layers of colonization, not only Western. Chen's descriptions of music education in Hong Kong indicate how music in education is often used as a vehicle for non-musical outcomes, such as communicating certain pre-determined values and political messages. The political uses of music and music education are highlighted in

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Chapter 6 as well, where Parkinson and Garner (2021) provide an historical account of the shifting influences on "what music counts" in relation to recreating and negotiating a national identity within the Turkish education systems.

Western symbolic hegemony on a more micro scale—in the tertiary music studio in Israel—is the site of investigation for Sagiv and Nativ's (2021) chapter (Chapter 4). They utilise Bourdieu's concept of habitus to explore aspects of teaching practices derived from the master-apprentice model still strongly prevalent in much tertiary music studio teaching, where a strong classification between "sacred" and "profane" spaces and identities is carefully maintained. Abstraction from the empirical case explored leads to insights into the way the requirement to develop a certain type of acceptable "gaze" is embodied (skills, dispositions, and knowledge) and linked to success in the field, to the concepts of high and low culture, and to the development of status within the profession. The critique provides a de-construction of hegemonic practices but also reveals many students want access to this particular music world.

In the decolonising narrative, Western music, particularly Western classical music, has become regarded by many as a form of symbolic violence because of its historical association with exclusion, power, and prestige. This is the moral and political argument that, important as it is, often ignores epistemological realities; for example, the possibility that there are inherent knowledge properties of value that can be separated from the use to which they may have been put politically. Alperson (2010) highlights this with the concept of *genetic fallacy* (a consequentialist logic)—judging something as either good or bad on the basis of where it comes from, or from whom it came, or its outcomes:

> That the conceptual apparatus of the modern system of the arts arose along with, and is in part a consequence of, the rise of the bourgeoisie in the 18th century, and that some of the associated practices arose in a context of social privilege, power, class, interest, and domination … does not negate the fact that there are genuine pleasures to be had in the aesthetic appreciation of music… To argue otherwise is akin to what logicians call the "genetic fallacy," arguing that the origin of a thing may be taken as sufficient grounds to discredit the thing itself. (Alperson 2010, 185–86)

More than pleasure is at stake here, as the "conceptual apparatus" is powerful knowledge for those who want to know more about that system of meaning and how it activates human creative interest and generates new knowledge (as seen in the continued innovative use of the principles of Western style tonality). A similar fallacious argument could also be made against popular music today. The fact that the driving factor behind the popular music industry is

commercial profit does not mean that there is no music or knowledge of value produced in that milieu.

For me, these chapters raise the question of how inter-cultural conversations might be approached in music education. It seems music educators and academics need (1) an understanding of worldviews (ontology) and (2) a lexicon of concepts (epistemology) to enable more music specific intercultural conversations.[7] Chapter 5 by Prest and Goble (2021) takes us further.

Beyond Critique of Western Hegemony to a Syncretic Understanding?

Chapter 5 by Prest and Goble takes readers beyond abstract critique and offers some specific examples of what a post-colonial approach to music education might look like. They draw attention to the fact that concepts lie at the heart of their proposition for a syncretic approach for music education. As if in response to my hypothetical questions about what concepts might be used in a decolonized music classroom, Prest and Goble focus on concepts, recognising them as the key mechanisms required for the development of any inter-cultural understanding. People think and talk in concepts, so they are fundamental to any educational undertaking (McPhail 2023). Most importantly, however, as Hess also does, Prest and Goble note the potential for concepts to be misapplied (cognitive imperialism), leading to misunderstandings about music's sociocultural meanings and structures, but they take us through a number of examples to shed light on this problem.

Firstly, they point out the importance of Western educators working with Indigenous communities to discover what is iconic, indexical, and symbolic in the non-Western worldview being investigated: "From a cultural sociological perspective, then, understanding the meanings ascribed to music by any given culture and how those meanings, in turn, help to shape the music of that culture is central to a comprehensive understanding of that music" (Prest and Goble 2021, 80). Concepts are the key to this understanding, and the authors firstly explore the quite abstract concepts of society, relationship, reciprocity, identity, and agency to make the cultural contextual meanings of these concepts clear before relating them to music. The discussion compares standard Western sociological meanings to some Canadian First Nations peoples' meanings. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of this discussion is the way in which all the First Nations concepts discussed are interconnected, reflecting a holistic ontology that is common to a number of Indigenous cultures. For example, a

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common First Nation's understanding of society suggests "*all* matter (e.g. humans, animals, plants, soil, rock) is sentient and interconnected" (83–84, italics in original), whereas in a Western definition, humans constitute society. This First Nations definition highlights the mutual interdependence and reciprocity of human with non-human, which in turn affect the meaning and realisation of certain forms of identity (particularly in relation to stewardship of the land) and agency (including agency of nonhuman things). In such an ontology, music and its instruments form a significant role in creating and sustaining such mutuality.

Most usefully, Prest and Goble conclude their chapter by drawing these quite abstract concepts (society, relationship, reciprocity, identity, and agency) closer to music education, noting that

> when we introduce local Indigenous musics to students, it is our responsibility to incorporate a place conscious or land-centred approach in order to introduce the values of sustainability and reciprocal accountability to one another that are at the core of the Indigenous musical expressions we encountered in our research. (91)

They also note that "excellence in music performance, in a Canadian Indigenous view, is determined largely by the degree to which students embody these values and the sincerity of their efforts" (91). But again, as with Hess's chapter, readers are left one step short of finding out what *music specific* concepts might be brought into play and what the music itself is like. In another paper from the same context, Prest, Goble, Vazquez-Cordoba, and Tuinstra (2021), again from the Canadian context, explain how music can act as a conduit for developing certain worthy moral and political outcomes—in particular, enhancing cross-cultural understanding and respect through affirming and recognising the culture of First Nations peoples. However, music's sonic characteristics take a back seat. There is mention of the importance of language, drum making, and dance and passing mention of songs set to Western melodies but we are left wondering about what music was made. For example, is there pre-colonial melodic/tonal music that were shared in the context of this research? If not, then is that an issue worthy of at least brief discussion? Does it exist? If so, what forms does it take? If it doesn't exist, is this a result of colonization? Even if publishing word counts influenced these omissions, I find it odd that music doesn't take the primary place in a music research paper.

Most interestingly in the Handbook chapter, Prest and Goble (2021) acknowledge that the ontological and epistemological dimensions of First

Nations and Western knowledge systems are fundamentally different. Unlike the Aotearoa, New Zealand story offered below, Prest and Goble do not discuss or even imply that Western and Indigenous knowledges are replaceable, one with another, but that education, particularly in sites of colonization, can be substantially enriched by the complementary presence of knowledges. Within education, this provides a window into human ontological and epistemological diversity, as well as answering strong moral discourses about inclusivity and plurality within education:

> We suggest how the two distinct knowledge systems might coexist and inform one another so that we might build "bridges of understanding"… Our intention is to illuminate the worldviews of those whose musics we research in order that music educators might include them in the classroom appropriately and respectfully. (83)

In Aotearoa, New Zealand, however, the idea of epistemological equivalence has recently been raised. This leads me to share a recent event that illustrates the complexity of post-colonial discourse wherein epistemology is not well understood, and where moral claims from the liberal academic left somewhat counter-intuitively encourage moral fervour rather than reasoned and informed debate. What is most interesting in the responses is the lack of awareness of many on the left of the play of ideology on their own perspectives. I touch on the problem of escape from ideology later in the essay.

A New Zealand Example: From Inclusion to Equivalence

In 2021, a New Zealand government working group report on the Māori[8] component of the national upper secondary school qualification (the *National Certificate of Educational Achievement* or NCEA) stated the aim of "parity for *mātauranga* Māori[9] with other bodies of knowledge credentialed by the NCEA (particularly Western/Pākeha[10] epistemologies… The Ministry is committed to ensuring mātauranga Māori is explicitly and equitably valued in NCEA…" (Ministry of Education 2021, 3). The report specifies that this parity should span English and Māori-medium settings.[11] The material that caused the most controversy concerned the school subject, science, and the idea implied in the Ministry document that science and mātauranga Māori were epistemologically equivalent in terms of their "truthfulness" about the world, and that "science is a Western European invention" (Ministry of Education 2021, 21).

In response to this call for knowledge parity between the Western curriculum and mātauranga Māori in the Ministry document, seven professors from

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The University of Auckland penned a letter to the national magazine, *The New Zealand Listener* (a copy of the letter is viewable here: https://www.fsu.nz/in_defence_of_science_article). In the letter, the professors raised concerns about the logic and implications of claiming epistemological parity between mātauranga Māori and modern science. What is most interesting, and the reason for sharing the controversy in this essay, is the swift and almost violent reaction to the professors' letter, mainly from fellow academics within New Zealand. The response took the form of a social media letter initiated by two University of Auckland academics, which generated around two thousand signatures of support against the sentiments expressed in the letter. However, the response included accusations of racism against the professors and suggested that students at the University of Auckland should avoid contact with these academics. Notable international scholars Richard Dawkins and Jerry Coyne have also entered into the debate on the side of "science."[12]

This event provides an example of the way in which the issues surrounding post-colonialism in education in Aotearoa, New Zealand are very "real" and driven by strong moral and political motivations, particularly by *Pākeha* academics. I suspect the original letter was not carefully read and considered by many of the two thousand signatories online who disparaged the academics and responded at the level of moral outrage to what appeared to be a group of privileged White people (mostly men) denigrating the worldview of Māori. More careful reading of the letter indicates this was not, in fact, the case. The issue was actually about the equivalence of aspects of mātauranga Māori and modern science, an issue that warrants considered and sensitive debate.

The move towards knowledge equivalence needs to be understood within the context of a gradual shift towards culturalism as a key recontextualising principle with the fields of the pedagogic device in Aotearoa, New Zealand. In attempting to rectify past injustices of colonialisation, one response has been to reframe the failings of education in terms of culture rather than in socioeconomic terms or in relation to epistemic access. Culturalism is an explanation which promotes the belief that individuals are first and foremost constructed within the social relations of their ethnic or racial group, the group to which they have an ancestral genetic connection (Rata 2017).

The effect of the discourse of culturalism on education in Aotearoa, New Zealand has been profound, to the extent of educational policy claiming a causal link between the recognition of students' sociocultural identity and their academic achievement.[13] This generally accepted idea—the importance of ethnicity

and culture—is part of a wider and deeper context strongly influenced by the moral desire of government and citizens to realise the ideal of a partnership between Māori and English colonizers that dates back to 1840 with the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi (Te Tiriti o Waitangi) between the British Crown and more than 500 Māori chiefs.[14] The response of the Ministry of Education needs to be seen in the context of the ongoing commitment of successive governments to realise an authentic partnership with Māori and to address the continued underachievement of Māori in the education system. For example, the successive government of the left and right continue to pay reparations through the Waitangi Tribunal,[15] and the recognition of the concept of partnership between Māori and the Crown is written into most government laws.[16] Most recent developments towards forms of co-governance include developments in the area of water resources[17] and Māori health.[18]

Since the letter controversy, there have been more rational responses (see for example https://www.nzcpr.com/the-matauranga-maori-science-debate/ and https://theplatform.kiwi/opinions/the-listener-professors-chalk-up-another-win) and the promise of a university led forum for discussion of the issues raised by the event. The question remains: is the Ministry of Education correct in its aim to secure parity for mātauranga Māori, and what exactly might that mean? If, as some have suggested, in the case of science this means teaching mātauranga Māori as equivalent to or in place of modern science, then Aotearoa, New Zealand's education system will be making a significant turn that may disadvantage rather than advantage students internationally. There are strong arguments to suggest both modern science and mātauranga Māori should have a place in the New Zealand curriculum, but from a realist perspective (see below), they would serve quite different purposes. They have different ontological and epistemological bases, but this does not mean knowledge of each might not be both powerful and mutually enriching in appropriate contexts. Perhaps within the arts and humanities, non-Western world views may take a less controversial place in the curriculum of Western multicultural societies. In Aotearoa, New Zealand, Māori cultural practices are a common presence in the regulative discourse of the school. For example, it is common practice to adopt Māori ceremonial practices on whole school occasions as a way of acknowledging the world view of the *tangata whenua* (Indigenous people of the land) of Aotearoa and the lands that New Zealanders from diverse ethnicities now inhabit.

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What Might the Solution Be?

I now return to the problem identified in the introduction of this essay review: how to ensure criticality maintains a constant reflexive edge to avoid simply utilising the moral high ground as justification for approaches to education, rather than reasoned argument where those who involve themselves in such discussion can also draw on awareness of epistemological dimensions. We can find ourselves in a pickle, as we cannot separate ourselves entirely from our enculturation and the play of ideology. For example, my call for "reasoned argument" likely calls into question my credentials for some readers who may consider such a phrase an imprint of Western modernism. But I think the challenge within critical sociology is to maintain a critique of the critique. How might this be possible? My suggestion is: (1) by acknowledging a realist ontology along with the differentiation between sociocultural and disciplinary knowledge, (2) a non-foundationalist or relativist epistemology constrained by the concepts of fallibilism and judgemental rationality, and (3) negative dialectics. I now briefly consider each aspect in turn and provide examples of the ways in which these concepts might provide a philosophical structure for thinking with and the means to conceptualise solutions to empirical educational problems such as "what should I teach" and "in what ways it might be possible to decolonise the curriculum." A realist approach provides us with a mechanism for distinguishing between the varied affordances of different types of knowledge and for drawing attention to how we balance those affordances in curriculum making.

A Realist Ontology

A realist approach is founded on the proposition that the world (natural and social) exists independently from our knowledge of it. Despite a number of forms of realism, for example, scientific realism (Chakravartty 2017), critical realism (Bhaskar 1998), and social realism (Moore 2013a; Maton and Moore 2010; Young 2008), realism is typified by "an epistemologically positive attitude to the outputs of scientific investigation, regarding both observable and unobservable aspects of the world" (Chakravartty 2017, n.p.). Knowledge about this real world comprises the products of academic investigation: in critical realism, *transitive knowledge* is constructed in interacting socio-epistemic communities; for example, the knowledge we have about acoustics and the various

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systems humans have invented to create sound organised as music for various cultural purposes.

In contrast to positivism and constructivism, realism locates knowledge "at the level of intellectual fields rather than within the consciousness of the knowing subject" (Moore 2007, 36). This provides the means for knowledge produced in this way to be both generalisable and revisable through the processes of peer critique and falsification. But unlike knowledge production in the hard sciences, which is largely produced in closed-systems, transitive knowledge developed in the social sciences, humanities, and arts relies on "the systematic production of explanations of events in open systems and a concern with retrodiction (making senses of happenings in open systems) rather than prediction" (Moore 2013a, 344). For example, the concepts from mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge systems) that I share below are part of the transitive knowledge of that oral culture as it now exists in written form.

Using a realist ontology allows readers to distinguish, as Durkheim did, between sociocultural and epistemic knowledge[19] and the different purposes, structures, and affordances that each type of knowledge has. What is most significant about epistemic knowledge compared to socio-cultural knowledge is its emergent nature, its inferential epistemic structure, fallibility, and systemised openness to revision. Moore (2013a) notes that traditional belief systems and world views are *not* usually open to the institutionalised doubt and critique that is so important in the modern Western disciplines. This is not to assert that some knowledge is axiomatically or axiologically better than others, but to recognise that knowledge is produced in different ways, for different purposes and functions. Both types of knowledge have a place in the curricula of modern, pluralistic societies, but as outlined above in the Aotearoa, New Zealand case, to regard them as ontologically and epistemologically equivalent in terms of scientific truthfulness can be problematic.[20]

Finally, because the world is "real," it follows that there are limits to the way we can know it, describe it, and understand it. This enables us to say with some certainty, as Hugo (2013) so nicely puts it: "a polygon is not a sad tale about a missing parrot" (2). Nevertheless, all knowledge begins life in the sociocultural realm before it becomes systemised into what Bernstein (1999) calls "vertical discourse." Moreover, certain forms of sociocultural knowledge contain within them concepts, structures, and practices that can be more readily conceptualised and that enable the transition of this knowledge towards disciplinarity: a structure comprised of interrelating concepts. Jazz, popular music, Hip-Hip,

and many non-Western musics are examples of sociocultural practices that have been recontextualised and have made their way into the realms of the Western academy. We may come to know more about these practices and understand them more deeply because of this; for example, by enlisting concepts from musicology or sociology. On the other hand, this movement of sociocultural knowledge into the academy may be a continued form of colonialisation.

A Non-Foundationalist Epistemology Constrained by the Concepts of Fallibilism and Judgemental Rationality

This ontologically realist proposition leads to a non-foundationalist, relativist epistemology where, in alignment with theories of constructivism, knowledge is acknowledged as humanly produced, and therefore, it reflects the conditions under which it is produced. However, this does not mean that knowledge can only be subjectively known as in the idealism of constructivism. Knowledge can, and does, often transcend the context in which it was produced (Moore 2013a). This transitive knowledge becomes separated from the socio-historical context of its production and becomes available as "knowledge objects" or "thought products" (e.g., theories, procedures, works of art) that are attempts to understand and explain the world (Popper 1978). Often this knowledge acts back on the real world (i.e., in the way composers take on creative practices made by others), and therefore, one can consider these theories, ideas, and concepts as real, as they have effects in the world.

Ontological realism can accommodate epistemological relativism but invokes judgemental rationality and fallibilism—the acceptance that some knowledge is regarded as more truthful in a realist sense or more valuable for certain ideals for learning—but that knowledge is always provisional. Judgemental rationality involves testing our ideas in extended disciplinary communities and in the "real world" (e.g., testing vaccines, being able to compare the music of Bach and Beyoncé). As Maton and Moore (2010) suggest, "epistemological relativism does not imply judgemental relativism … rather, *judgemental rationality* holds that there are rational, intersubjective bases for determining the relative merits of competing knowledge claims" (4, italics in original), and this is the best option for keeping a check on the play of ideology in knowledge production, recontextualisation, and reproduction. A cycle of productive critique might assist educators to understand knowledge more fully and to utilize reasoned argument in their position taking, particularly by acknowledging that

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any knowledge claim involves some appeal to "truth" that is truth in a realist sense: truth as "a stable relationship between the objects of study and an informed community of practitioners" (Young and Muller 2010, 21).

So, realists suggest there are limits to what can be claimed about the world and the social practices and interactions within it and that scientific claims are quite different from the rich stories that belief cultures create, e.g., Christianity. In response to the Aotearoa example explained above, Lillis and Schwerdtfeger (2021) suggest "such myths are fascinating and enriching stories … but to teach them in science class may lead to confusion" (n.p.).[21] But this does not mean that an education system should not include the study of Indigenous world views and musics. Such knowledge enriches the dominant world view and makes the limits and affordances of all world views clearer. For example, Lillis and Schwerdtfeger (2021) suggest a Māori worldview may be less reductionist than a Western capitalist worldview and may provide a more holistic perspective "on people, nature and critical issues, and their holistic views can be reflected in their approaches to research; for example, in protecting our environment, ensuring sustainable resource management and in *manaakitanga* (caring for others) (n.p.).[22]

Living with Negative Dialectics

Louth's (2012) work, drawing on Adorno's negative dialectics and immanent critique, provides a number of concepts to assist with the critique of the critique I have suggested that is needed post deconstruction. Louth uses Adorno's negative dialectical thinking to theorise an approach he applies to terminology in structural listening but which can be applied at a higher level of abstraction to the curriculum choices we make as music educators. Louth's key point is that music educators need to constantly draw attention to the tendency for propositions to become naturalized into accepted knowledge (130). Moreover, we need to surface the implicit and taken for granted values potentially embedded in the concepts and language we use, to consider them afresh, not necessarily to discard them but to "expose their apparent solidity, so as to avoid applying them in all situations" (130). For example, I would argue that the concept of a musical canon remains a relevant and important concept for music education as, post-deconstruction, I am able to deconstruct the concept's original meanings and use and re-recognise a canon as an integral social practice musicians and others use to make judgements about what they value (Jones 2008; Moore 2010). This type of reconstruction is like C. Wright Mills' "sociological imagination,"

wherein one makes the familiar "unfamiliar" in order to look at concepts with new (sociological) eyes.

A canon need not be a static, restrictive structure containing only artefacts from a particular past, as "the postmodern state of coexisting possibilities allows canons to exist but denies them a degree of their former authority" (Jones 2008, 139). I argue what is required is a flexibly evolving "canon" that scholars, musicians, and teachers generate and use to guide students to a critical awareness of the musicking judged most compelling within given musical practices and genres. The sociological process of legitimation in forming a canon can be shared with students by investigating contrasting perspectives (Louth 2012). For example, a traditional 19th century "heroic" analysis of a Beethoven symphony could be compared to McClary's (2002) feminist perspective, to develop students' understanding of how knowledge is socially produced and contested. In fact, students can be encouraged to create their own canon if they have the concepts to think with to justify their choices, the difference between preferences and judgements (Moore 2010). As Frith (1996) says,

> Part of the pleasure of popular culture is talking about it … talk which is run through with value judgments. To be engaged with popular culture is to be discriminating … value arguments aren't simply rituals of "I like/you like" … they are based in reason, evidence, persuasion. (4)

The approach I have been arguing for here—to enable a critique of critique—invokes the notion of a dialectic in a perpetual cycle of critique, a micro level version of the critique applied to knowledge production in a realist sense outlined above. The possibility of a dialectical approach for our curriculum-making decisions as music educators, now possible with our enhanced understandings of music's varied sources of power (political, economic, epistemic) as a result of postmodern deconstruction, combined with an ontologically realist understanding of knowledge, should assist us to avoid replacing one hegemony with another in the name of some moral progress—a new ideology.

What Should I Teach?

In one word—concepts. Many writers argue (e.g. Bowman 1998; Church 2015; Green 2005; Hijleh 2012; Swanwick 1988) that there are multiple commonalities across human cultures, and our only way of developing common understanding is to use concepts that take us beyond the specific and back again. Moreover, concepts are the core mechanism for human thought and

abstraction, and therefore, they are universal to human cognition (Cassirer 1979). While much of the transitive knowledge utilised in education may have been developed in the West, this does not make the knowledge only Western. In a realist sense, this is transitive knowledge of the world, available to anyone who wishes to make use of it. For example, in a music classroom, we could begin the musicking journey with quite abstract concepts in mind, such as "organization and subdivision of time," "the construction of melody, modes, and musical space," "the use of instruments and voice," and "the place of musicking in context" (Stock 2002). These abstractions provide the means to "touch down" in the classroom with various types of music and to consider if such concepts could be applied in a culturally appropriate and productive way. The point of using concepts is not to make a value judgement on the music or cultural practices but to attempt to assist with explaining experience and to come to understand music more fully as a diverse human practice. We may find some of the concepts we initially rely on are insufficient to encapsulate certain cultural practices or sonic characteristics, so new concepts will need to be developed or old ones expanded, as Prest and Goble (2021) argue in Chapter 5. For example, in the study of pre-colonial Māori music, Māori concepts such as *whakapapa*, *tikanga*, and *wairua*,[23] need to be utilized so examples of Māori music can be understood in relation to its cultural function and genesis.

Social Realism

Some of the ideas I have drawn on in this essay are part of an approach within the sociology of education known as social realism (see Moore 2013a; Maton and Moore 2010). At the heart of this approach is the aim of resolving "the epistemological dilemma"—the "stark choice between epistemological foundationalism and epistemological relativism" (Moore 2013a, 338) and the educational form of this dichotomy; either the curriculum is conceptualised as given (e.g., Western cognitive imperialism) or entirely the result "of power struggles between groups with competing claims for including and legitimising their knowledge and excluding others" (Moore and Young 2001, 453). A social realist approach has as its underlying aim a social justice agenda centred on students' rights of access to "powerful knowledge" (Young and Muller 2013, 2019). Young's (2008) concept of powerful knowledge was coined to distinguish between two ways of thinking about knowledge in relation to curricula: knowledge as a reflection of political power in society ("knowledge of the powerful") and

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knowledge as a means of acquiring the powers of criticality—epistemically structured knowledge that provides students with new ways of thinking about the world ("powerful knowledge").

To interpret powerful knowledge as only concerned with Western languages and literatures, as Wright (2021) notes (see Chapter 22, 319), is in my view a reductive reading of the concept, particularly in music's case. It is also overstating the case to say that Western musical systems always act as forms of symbolic violence. It all depends on how such knowledge is made available for students and for what purpose. Young and Muller (2019) note their under-theorisation of powerful knowledge in relation to the arts ("we risked leaving the Humanities and the Arts out of the reckoning" (198), so the concept is open to further development. For example, there are many ways in which non-Western and non-classical music can be regarded as powerful knowledge. The key point in my argument is not necessarily where the knowledge originates but the power of concepts and epistemic structures of meaning to develop in students the powers of criticality. This is what I call a *praxis of conceptualisation* (McPhail 2023), an approach to music education that is praxial, in the sense of being ethically sound and based in the world of musicking, but one that aims for the united operations of applied subject specific competencies ("know-how-to") and conceptual knowledge ("knowledge-that") (McPhail 2023). My argument is that conceptualisation enables students to be able to ask and answer questions to enhance their musicking, such as "how can I play or compose music more effectively," "what is it about this music I find so compelling," or "how can I communicate with others about this music so that it draws them towards its power?" Powerful knowledge is knowledge that assists in taking students beyond what they already know—if they want to—to potentially see their musical world in new or in deepened ways. This, I regard, is one of the key purposes of education as distinct from musicking in everyday contexts. I recognise this as an argument in a rationalist tradition but remain convinced by this very old insight from Kant:

> Thoughts without content are empty; intuitions without concepts, blind. Hence it is necessary for the mind to make its concepts sensible (that is, to join to them the object in intuition), as to make its intuitions intelligible (that is, to bring them under concepts). Neither of these faculties can exchange its proper function. Understanding cannot intuit, and the sensible faculty cannot think. In no other way than from the united operation of both, can knowledge arise (Kant:1781/1993, 69).

In Chapter 7, Narita and Feichas (2021) draw on a number of concepts from social realism (Young 2014a, 2014b) to support their exploration of "unbalanced power relations" in higher music education courses, in search for what they describe as a humanist approach for music education. Drawing first on Freire's concepts of banking and dialogic education, they suggest that Young's concept of powerful knowledge (see Young and Muller 2013, 2019) as a key element in realising a potentially more humanising music education. They describe a humanist approach to education as a holistic one that acknowledges and values not only the cognitive dimensions of learning but the affective, developing Young's emphasis in powerful knowledge on the cognitive. The authors suggest an active role for both the learner and the teacher in moving beyond what is already known to the "yet to be thought" as a source of symbolic freedom. The authors attempt to bridge a theoretical gap between Young's emphasis on epistemically structured knowledge as more powerful than everyday cultural knowledge by focusing on pedagogy rather than knowledge differentiation. The authors share empirical data to demonstrate a dialogic approach to pedagogy that recognises both the role of the teacher and student and their prior knowledge in exploring new knowledge and knowing together; however, Narita and Feichas also recognise that reliance on student knowledge alone is unlikely to exhaust an educational encounter. The role of the teacher is likely to be pivotal in bridging any gap between everyday conceptualisations and experiences and knowledge (conceptual, procedural, and applied) that is new to the student. Narita and Feichas (2021) provide a pedagogic framework comprising three domains of teacher knowledge: "teachers' practical musicianship, their authority and theoretical knowledge, and their relationship with learners' musical worlds" (116). In this way the importance of both knowledge and knowers is acknowledged and accommodated.

Final Thoughts

In Chapter 5, Anna, a participant in Prest and Goble's (2021) research, conceptualizes music making as follows: "In Indigenous culture, it's not music making. It's a way of passing on culture from generation to generation… It's a part of who we are; it's not something that's separate… True understanding only comes when there is an emotional response…" (91). I would argue that in Western culture, too, music, at its deeper level, is not only about the music and musicking but also about passing on culture from one generation to the next. It is one of

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the ways in which societies create "collective representations" about themselves (Durkheim 2001). Many Westerners are quite disconnected from the deeper and more demanding aspects of their own culture, and when confronted with alternative world views, are often captivated by them because they are at a loss to identify and describe their own culture.[24] Westerners may need to find out more about the deeper aspects of their own culture before decolonising education completely. My growing understanding of some aspects of Māori culture has reminded me to value my heritage—my *whakapapa*—despite its constant repudiation at large. The challenge of increasingly diverse societies is to find the mechanism for discussions about our collective imaginaries for the future. In this regard, Prest and Goble's syncretic approach seems a good one. Educators cannot leave it to politicians to lead us, so education remains one of the most fundamental sites where a collective consciousness can be developed. Hopefully, this collective consciousness will be one of balance, with an understanding of the difference between inclusive moral aims and epistemology, as well as developing understanding supported by continual, productive critique about what knowledge counts in education. Part 1 of this book provides ample material for developing critical thinking, as long as we remember to critique the critique.

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Notes

[1] By moral I am referring to the morality of inclusiveness and equality, and by epistemological I am referring to knowledge differentiation, knowledge structures, the potential "truth" of knowledge and the impact of epistemically structured knowledge on learning of (see McPhail 2020; Rata, McPhail, and Barrett 2019).

[2] Bowman (2017) describes Allsup's 2016 book as "a 'muddle' … a 'mashup' of rhetorical questions, undefined terms, dubious assertions, oxymorons, and straw men, all wrapped in slippery, postmodern double-speak" (12).

[3] For an excellent example of a teacher working with concepts in the context of composition see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OQ57dB3-VOI

[4] See, for example, McPhail and McNeill (2021).

[5] In researching this review, I also came across a paper by Hess (2015) in which she outlines in more detail a Comparative Musics Model.

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[6] See also Chapters 3, 4, 6, and 9 where the reach of Western music epistemologies and practices are discussed from the contexts of Hong Kong, Israel, Turkey, and Brazil.

[7] Many "real-world" musicians are ahead of academic theorising here in terms of intercultural conversations. One needs only to explore the internet or attend a WOMAD festival to hear that these conversations are well-advanced outside education in the varied acts of hybrid musicking.

[8] Māori is the term used to refer to Indigenous inhabitants of Aotearoa New Zealand.

[9] Māori knowledge derived from a Māori worldview.

[10] New Zealanders of European descent—probably originally applied to English-speaking Europeans living in Aotearoa New Zealand.

[11] New Zealand's National Curriculum comprises the New Zealand Curriculum and *Te Marautanga o Aotearoa*—the curriculum for Māori immersion education. There are (approximately) 300 Māori Medium primary and secondary schools.

[12] See for example https://www.stuff.co.nz/science/300475046/richard-dawkins-foray-into-the-nz-science-curriculum-isnt-helpful and https://whyevolutionistrue.com/2021/12/03/ways-of-knowing-new-zealand-pushes-to-have-indigenous-knowledge-mythology-taught-on-parity-with-modern-science-in-science-class/

[13] For example, Edwards, Lambert, and Tauroa (2007) argue that the current disparities in education can be largely explained by the school curriculum failing to recognise Māori world views, and this view is also reflected in policy documents guiding the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogies.

[14] See https://teara.govt.nz/en/treaty-of-waitangi for a fuller explanation.

[15] See https://teara.govt.nz/en/waitangi-tribunal-te-ropu-whakamana

[16] See https://teara.govt.nz/en/principles-of-the-treaty-of-waitangi-nga-matapono-o-te-tiriti

[17] See https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/political/468837/minister-nanaia-mahuta-offers-three-waters-co-governance-defence

[18] See https://www.newsroom.co.nz/next-steps-for-maori-co-governance-revealed

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[19] Durkheim's terms were sacred and profane. By epistemic knowledge, I mean knowledge that is systematically structured as webs of interrelated concepts. Epistemic knowledge is usually developed within the disciplines.

[20] See the example provided by Kitching (2008, 122) and the philosophical challenges that occur where two apparent truths bump up against each other.

[21] See the section *Indigenous Knowledge in the School Curriculum*

[22] See the section *Our Perspectives on the Letter*

[23] These are three concepts of fundamental significance in Mātauranga Māori that indicate particular cultural purposes, which are fulfilled by the music of this culture. In a music context, *whakapapa* refers to the function of *waiata* (songs) in communicating historical stories and genealogy; *tikanga* refers to the right or particular way of doing things, in this case where and how a waiata might be sung; and *wairua* refers to the spiritual components carried by the language and meaning of the waiata (Kapa, personal communication).

[24] See, for example, Judd's problem of defining his Western culture in https://www.ted.com/talks/andrew_judd_lessons_from_a_recovering_racist

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