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Perspectives on Social Realism within North American Higher Music Education

ABSTRACT

This article critically examines the suitability of Social Realist perspectives within North American higher music education, with a particular focus on its relationship with jazz musical knowledges. Social Realist scholarship continues to emerge within the field of education sociology, driven by claims to contribute to student access and opportunity. In spite of this, scholars have continued to critique Social Realist perspectives for various reasons including maintaining an ideological status quo and devaluing the experiences of students, going as far as argue that Social Realist frameworks may in fact limit the access and opportunity espoused by its proponents. Drawing upon past music education literature surrounding Social Realism, this article focuses particularly on the concepts of ‘powerful knowledge,’ ‘generative knowledge,’ and ‘reliablism’ to explore how Social Realism may be ill-positioned to meet its alleged goals of access and opportunity within the North American higher music institution.

Keywords

Education Sociology, Social Realism, Powerful Knowledge, Reliablism, Access, Opportunity, Higher Education.

This paper explores emerging Social Realist (SR) perspectives and key concepts in relation to North American university music education with a particular focus on jazz. With a continued focus on redressing issues of social exclusion and inequality within education, proponents of SR theory argue that curricular focus on certain “powerful” knowledges may afford students greater access and opportunity both to compulsory education and to further study (Maton, 2014; Wheelahan, 2010; Young, 2008). This paper examines the foundations and central tenets of Social Realism, what “powerful” musical knowledges may look like and how these concepts are applied to the field of higher music education, critically examining notions that such knowledges may afford a more socially just, inclusive education for all.

Issues of access and opportunity within education have long remained prominent in sociological literature, tracing back to Durkheim’s writings on the transmission of

social values in education (Durkheim, 1956). Educational sociologists have explored the ways education may unequally distribute resources, exclude certain students, and reproduce ideologies which tend to benefit dominant groups (Bernstein, 2000; Halsey et al., 1980). Within the field of music education specifically, issues of access and opportunity in the school of music have been addressed by many scholars (Green, 2014; G. Moore, 2013; Powell et al., 2020; Wright, 2010; 2017).

Recently, SR has emerged as a potential sociological theory providing solutions to issues of access and opportunity within education; in particular, education scholar Rob Moore (2013) argued that “the most fundamental inequality in education is that of access to the best knowledge” (p. 336). What a SR lens looks like and how this “best” knowledge—which Social Realist scholars refer to as “powerful knowledge”—may be operationalized within the field of music education is a topic explored previously in both secondary (McPhail, 2017; McPhail et al., 2018; Moore, 2014) and tertiary contexts (G. Moore, 2013). Within this writing, referring to education in countries including New Zealand and Ireland, there is a particular focus upon the principles which hierarchize and categorize this knowledge as powerful, how this knowledge may lead to educational access and opportunity, and examinations of who may be included (and necessarily excluded) by the foregrounding of this knowledge.

This article draws upon examples of what such knowledge may look like within the North American university school of music, in particular those which offer both Western art and jazz as legitimate knowledges worthy of study. I begin with the rationale and background of this examination, a brief introduction to Social Realism, and then a critical examination of key concepts of Social Realist scholarship within this context, with a focus on the concepts of powerful knowledge and reliablism, and argue that such perspectives when applied to curriculum content may not necessarily provide the access and opportunity within the field of music education that they espouse.

RATIONALE FOR THIS EXAMINATION

This examination emerged as I began exploring the sociological rationales which have led to the inclusion of musics beyond Western art music within the North American university school of music. While many musics and their practices have begun to find a home in the North American higher music institution (including, although not limited to, popular, rock, and the musics of the world and its cultures), their inclusion in tertiary contexts has been relatively recent (Nettl, 1995; Roberts, 1991). Jazz in particular has enjoyed growing popularity within the North American school of music, due in part to a shift in the perception of jazz from low-brow to “elite,” “art” music (Gelbart, 2007; Levine, 1988). For this reason, this article places particular focus on the inclusion of jazz within the school of music and its forms of knowledge.

There was a change in the mid-1950s which saw the inclusion of jazz as “legitimate” musical knowledge¹ within the North American music institution (Gandre, 2013; Murphy, 1994; Porter, 2012; Prouty, 2002, 2005; Whyton, 2006). Today, over five hundred colleges within North America offer jazz as a program of study (Hinkle, 2011;

Murphy, 1994; Wilf, 2014). Such trends are not limited to institutions within the United States. Canadian institutions have followed the increased trend of jazz popularity as well, albeit as Gilmore (1988) noted, “generally at a cautious distance” (p. 114; as cited in Witmer, 1989, p. 158). Roberts—writing in 1991—revealed that already within Canada, these programs were increasing in popularity. Such popularity comes in part, as mentioned above, from a rethinking of jazz as art music, the development of a jazz canon and tradition, as well as a shift in discourses surrounding jazz’s “impolite origins” (Reimer, 1989, p. 43). Gelbart (2007) explained,

Jazz’s rise to the highest social respectability has been partly based on its shifting alignment with the different categories: first, mainstream cultural arbiters stopped denigrating jazz as dangerous, popular, commercial craft (Adorno’s vision) and rebranded it as an indigenous and “pure” Americanism (i.e. a form of folk music); and then, in the postwar decades, contemporary jazz further remade its own image as a kind of art music—forming its own avant-garde and canon. (Charles Mingus’s term was “Black classical music.”). (p. 277)

This move to include jazz within the North American school of music had far-reaching impacts on school policies, including the renegotiation of program requirements, hiring practices, and more (Murphy, 1994; Prouty, 2005). In addition, such a move has implications for those knowledges included within the curriculum, as previously excluded knowledges such as jazz become legitimate this is the one to move earlier—or worthy of inclusion—within the social arena of the school of music (Green, 2014). As Bernstein (2000) argued, the transmission of knowledge plays an important role in the regulation of students’ pedagogic identities and consciousness within this social arena. Which knowledges are included, he argues, points to ‘who’ felt they were included within this space (xxi). Because of the interest in this article on particular forms of knowledge and the processes of their legitimation, an education sociology lens provides means to examine the processes by which knowledges are legitimated and the impact these have on students’ identity and consciousness.

RATIONALE FOR EDUCATION SOCIOLOGY

Over the past decades, there has been a shift in the field of education sociology to critically re-examine the role knowledge plays in affording access and opportunity, sparking a swell in researchers who align themselves with a movement termed the New Sociology of Education (NSOE) (Karabel & Halsey, 1976; Young, 1971). Emerging largely out of the work of Marx, Durkheim and Weber, scholars began to re-examine the ways the school acts to reproduce social and class hierarchies through the content of education (Saha, 1978). Research among NSOE scholars has enjoyed growing popularity globally with particular uptake in countries who are members of the Commonwealth of Nations (notably Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and the United Kingdom). Saha (1978) noted this trend may be due in part to its initial membership being much more active in Britain than other countries such as the United States. More recently, SR has emerged from this scholarship, claiming to afford a

foundation through which access and opportunities of students may be enhanced, which they see as a form of social justice (Wheelahan, 2010; Young, 2008).

PERSONAL RATIONALE

The impetus for exploring the suitability of SR within the North American school of music can be traced from my experiences as both neophyte sociologist and self-identified member of the school of music. As I began to explore my own context sociologically, I became aware of the role knowledge transmission plays on the construction and regulation of my own pedagogic identity and that of my students. I began to see perceived dissonances between the beliefs of students from different departments, in particular those of Western art and jazz. At times, I perceived a relative silence between these departments and their agents. My experiences as a student, and subsequent instructor and ensemble director (largely within Western art and jazz performance departments) have led me to become interested in whether there were processes within the school of music which maintain categorization and division between students within this arena.

As I began to explore potential theoretical frameworks for my doctoral research, I became drawn to theories of education sociology which focused on how knowledges are classified and how identities are maintained and reproduced through the institution. Among the theories I encountered as potential frameworks for my research was SR, which has emerged in large part from the work of education sociologists Young (2008) and Bernstein (1999). As I began to conceptualize what a socially “powerful” music education might look like through the lens of SR, I became conscious of tensions and issues between my experiences of the field of music education and the central tenets of SR scholarship. Thus, this article may be seen as a confluence of my interests as both researcher and as member of the school of music, where both aspects of my pedagogic identity have come together, each influencing the other.

WHAT IS SOCIAL REALISM?

There are a number of movements and thinkers which could be identified or self-identify as Social Realist (Alderson, 2020; Maton, 2014). Maton (2014) described the SR oeuvre within which this article operates as a “coalition of minds” which emerged in the late twentieth century (p. 9). While there is no single school of thought within which all SR work could seamlessly fit, there is a consensus among these scholars to see knowledge “to be not only social but also real...in the sense of possessing properties, powers and tendencies that have effects” (pp. 9–10). Scholars working within the SR field propose that the subjectivist paradigm that has come with the postmodern shift has led to knowledge relativism, leading to a reduction of knowledge to its ‘knower’ (Maton, 2014; Moore, 2013; Wheelahan, 2010). Such a reduction, Maton (2014) argued, effectively obfuscates our understanding of the “object” of knowledge, leading to what he describes as a “knowledge-blindness” (p. 3). Three philosophical principles are central to the Social Realist movement, which have developed out of Roy

Bhaskar's (1997) Critical Realism framework, which Hartvig termed the "holy trinity": *ontological realism*, *epistemological relativism*, and *judgemental rationalism* (Bhaskar, 2008, p. xix). For the purposes of understanding how these principles relate to music education, we will explore these concepts briefly.

THE PHILOSOPHICAL PRINCIPLES OF CRITICAL REALISM

The title "Critical Realism" was not initially coined by Bhaskar; it emerged from the confluence of two of Bhaskar's theories—that of transcendental realism and critical naturalism (Bhaskar, 2010). The first of Bhaskar's (2008) philosophical principles is that of ontological realism, which suggests that while humans construct all *transitive* knowledges through our perceptions and experiences, there additionally exists *intransitive* knowledge, highlighting that "knowledge is *of* things which are not produced by men at all" (p. 11, original emphasis). Bhaskar explained this using the example of the specific gravity of Mercury, noting that this "object of knowledge" is not produced by humans at all, although we have produced *transitive* knowledge of it. Thus, because this *intransitive* knowledge would not cease to exist even with the absence of humans, there are forms of knowledge which are not necessarily humanly constructed, perceived, or regulated.

In the case of the fields of Music and Music education, sound can be (although is not exclusively relegated to) the intransitive dimension (ID), as it can still exist apart from human perception (think of the tree falling in a forest). Music, however, must be inherently embedded within the transitive dimension (TD), as by definition it is organized, patterned, and importantly, meaning is ascribed to it (both by the transmitter and its acquirer). In this way, scholars within the fields of Music and Music education presuppose inquiry and engagement (with very little exception) within the transitive dimension.

The second principle is epistemological relativism, wherein Bhaskar (2008) argued that all perceived knowledge is humanly created based upon phenomena, and thus this knowledge and the theories we construct of this knowledge are therefore fallible (p. 53). Expanding upon this, he wrote:

whenever we speak of things or of events etc. in science we must always speak of them and know them under particular descriptions, descriptions which will always be to a greater or lesser extent theoretically determined, which are not neutral reflections of a given world. (p. 241)

In this, Maton (2014) highlighted that all knowledge is fallible and therefore capital "T" Truth has not been (and may perhaps never be) attained (p. 10). Whereas the concept of ontological realism is met with varying degrees of aversion by many in the academic community due to its perceived roots in positivism, epistemological relativism largely aligns with the dominant paradigm, including the academic community in Music education. It is worth noting that SR scholars consider this framework to integrate aspects of both positivism and subjectivism while being reducible to neither. This integration leads to the third principle, judgmental rationalism.

Judgmental rationalism highlights that some theories—or descriptive terms, as Bhaskar (2009) noted—have stronger connection to their objects’ meaning by virtue of their construction (p. 47). In this way, they provide a greater potential for meaning generation. In other words, judgmental rationalism highlights that despite all transitive knowledge being fallible, there still exist some intersubjective bases by which the relative merits of different knowledges can be judged and found to be more “rational” (Maton, 2014, p. 10), or as Rob Moore (2013) described, produced more “reliably” (p. 345). Moore suggested that we can—and indeed, must—judge the ways knowledge has been produced in order to determine what knowledges we can be more secure in believing. As Maton (2014) succinctly described, “together, these ideas highlight that we construct knowledge of the world but not just as we please (or at least not free of worldly consequences), not perfectly, and not simply by ourselves” (p. 10). Bhaskar (2009) painted an image of how this looks, writing:

We now have a picture of a traveller on a particular epistemic world-line, marshalling and transforming the historical materials and media at its disposal, aspiring to assess and express claims in the only way open to it, that is, using these historically generated, transmitted and transformable (so transient) materials and media, about how the world is, independently of these claims (and the materials and media and more generally the conditions that make these claims possible), in a continually iterative process of the identification, description, explanation and redescription of deeper strata of reality. In the ongoing process of science, as deeper levels and wider shores of reality come to be known and reknown, historically *situated subjects* make *ontic* (being-expressive) *claims* about a reality which transcends their situation, in a dialectic which affords *objective grounds* for their inevitably *local choices*. (p. 62, original emphasis)

Bhaskar (2009) highlighted that this rationality is key for knowledges to have emancipatory potential (p. 115). Madill (2008) explained, “social science theories, developed through empirical investigation, can show certain beliefs, or ideologies, to be false and can demonstrate how they have been generated within transitory, and hence changeable, social relations and structures” (p. 734). However, Bhaskar (2009) importantly highlighted that explanatory knowledges themselves only have transformative emancipatory power *within their practice*; he writes, “although the knowledge generated by explanatory critical science is necessary for freedom, it is insufficient, for to be free is not only to know one’s real interests but to possess the means, opportunity and disposition to realise them” (p. xxviii).

Social Realists have adapted these tenets of Critical Realism within the field of sociology of education to explore how the transmission of certain ‘powerful’ knowledges can be considered to have more potential for social justice, with particular emphasis on their potential for further access and opportunity. This is perhaps best seen in Young’s (2008) conception of “powerful knowledge,” which we will now explore.

POWERFUL KNOWLEDGE VS. KNOWLEDGE OF THE POWERFUL

Muller & Young (2019) distinguished between two conceptions of the power of knowledge. “Knowledge of the powerful” relates to thinking about knowledge as “a handmaiden to power” (Muller & Young, 2019, p. 2), whereas “powerful knowledge” holds epistemic characteristics of knowledges, and that different knowledges have different capabilities to alter the “potentials of our environment” (p. 3). Many proponents of SR argued that this powerful knowledge is a means by which students may have further educational access and opportunity; in this way, music education scholars working with a Social Realist perspective necessarily see foregrounding ‘powerful musical knowledge’ as an issue of social justice (G. Moore, 2013).

Much SR literature draws upon the delineation of two distinct forms of knowledge, whose foundation is rooted in Durkheim’s (1912/1995) examination of the role and function of religion in regulating society. In this examination, Durkheim (1912/1995) distinguished between two genera through which humans distinguish: that which is “sacred and profane” (p. 34). Bernstein (2000) identified that as Western society has shifted towards a much more complex division of labor, education has replaced religion as the primary regulator of social functions within Western society (p. 29). He developed Durkheim’s conception of the sacred and profane, attributing the sacred to a *vertical discourse* which is abstract, theoretical, and conceptual, and the profane to *horizontal discourse*, that of the everyday (p. 157). Horizontal discourses constitute common-sense, “everyday” knowledge; Bernstein (2000) noted “[they are] likely to be oral, local, context dependent and specific, tacit, multi-layered and contradictory across but not within contexts” (p. 157). By comparison, vertical discourses are coherent and systematically principled, constituting either a hierarchical or horizontal structure. Bernstein (2000) noted that the hierarchical structure integrates knowledge (and has a strong epistemic relation to knowledge) and includes fields such as the natural sciences (p. 161). A horizontal structure specializes knowledge (and has relatively weaker epistemic relations to knowledge) and includes fields such as the social sciences. This classification has become foundational to SR critiques of segmental, context-dependent discourses in education, as they argue that context-independent discourses provide the means for students to see beyond their own every day and imagine new possibilities. For example, Wheelahan (2010) noted that Australian vocational education and training (VET) programs which claim to offer access and opportunity through competency-based training (CBT) limit students’ potential as they do not transmit the “right” kinds of knowledge to make informed choices, effectively reproducing social hierarchies (p. 129). In this way, Wheelahan argued that because CBT privileges segmented, horizontal discourse, it is “complicit in locking VET students out of access of disciplinary knowledge” (p. 144).

CRITIQUES OF SOCIAL REALISM

Because SR scholarship values knowledge integration and generation, it is the hierarchical structure of the natural sciences which Social Realists tend to see as of

higher value (Alderson, 2020, p. 27). Muller and Young (2019) addressed a growing body of criticism of their work, admitting that their original system of valuing powerful knowledge (based on its epistemic relation) “risked leaving the Humanities and the Arts out of the reckoning” (p. 3). However, their most recent work to account for the power of knowledge in the fields of the social sciences still largely focuses on developing linear, systematic curricula through which to teach increasingly abstract concepts, a process which is criticized for its efficacy in the Humanities and beyond (Alderson, 2020). Moreover, Alderson reminded that abstract and generalizable concepts are still understood within the social contexts of a student’s everyday life, noting “PK [powerful knowledge] has no relation to power unless it works through real daily life” (p. 33), a concept which some SR scholars have tended to avoid in their conceptualizations in favor of more abstract defenses of the object of knowledge itself (see Maton, 2014). Wright (2021) seconded this within the field of music education, suggesting:

“knowledge” holds no power at all if it holds no cultural resonance with the majority of the intended recipients or that they know very well that they lack the classed and cultured advantages requisite to achieving success, or educational mobility, within this sphere. (p. 322)

Reay (2020) further argued that as the field of sociology of education promotes the idea of “knowledge as power,” it “contribute[s] to a muted form of social justice rather than paying attention to forms of oppression and exploitation” (p. 821). In this way, she argued that SR scholarship and “powerful knowledge” maintain a status quo, instead of challenging social order (p. 825).

MUSICAL KNOWLEDGES AND THEIR “POWER”

One of the first articles I encountered pertaining to SR in music education was McPhail’s (2017) article “Powerful knowledge: Insights from music’s case,” in which McPhail explored what might constitute “powerful musical knowledges” with a particular focus on primary and secondary music curricula. McPhail suggested that it may be in “music’s collectively evolved *generative concepts*, those concepts that generate new knowledge” that we can locate the “power” of musical knowledge (p. 527, original emphasis). While McPhail highlighted that “these concepts [are] necessarily limited to the consideration of only Western classical music” (p. 527), he caveated that this is not necessarily to contradict or undermine the movement in music education in which we have begun to challenge “the hegemony of classical music and its associated pedagogies” (p. 530). Rather, this is to ensure that the school system functions to give access to knowledge that students may not otherwise gain elsewhere. In this model, McPhail wrote that “concepts drive the educative encounter” (p. 530), and argued that:

what is special about educational contexts is the aim of developing deeper understanding about what we do, through conceptualizing (which relies on language). This is what is so special about schools and universities, otherwise we would not need them. (p. 532)

In other words, McPhail suggested that if we are not teaching these specialized, codified knowledges within education, then what we are teaching is of less value and may lead to less access and opportunity for students. We can turn McPhail's argument towards the context of consideration to ask: within a school of music which offers both jazz and Western art programs, what do epistemically-situated knowledges look like? What are the characteristics of "powerful musical knowledge"? Are they the same within and between departments? What does access look like?

Gwen Moore's (2013) dissertation, which examined Western classical and popular musics within Irish Higher education, offers insights into what might constitute powerful knowledge. She noted:

the strong classification of Western classical music symbolized powerful epistemic knowledge. Knowledge associated with the history and tradition of institutions, as well as the valued knowledge of those in positions of power, affected students and lecturers as agents *of and for* change. (p. 200, original emphasis)

While this is a necessarily broad description, McPhail (2017) offered a more micro-look at how these knowledges may present; he identified that powerful, generative knowledges may include "conceptualization of musical elements, structures, and processes such as the organization and subdivision of time, the construction of melody, modes, and musical space, the use of instruments, and the place of musicians in context" (p. 527).

Wright (2021) highlighted that the privileging of such "powerful" epistemically-centered musical knowledges and undervaluing of social contexts represent a form of what Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) term symbolic violence, whereby students *misrecognize* the causes of social hierarchization. Such symbolic violence, Wright (2021) contended, may lead to further marginalization and social isolation for those in lower class strata, instead of the access and opportunity Social Realists espouse.

ISSUES WITH "POWERFUL" JAZZ KNOWLEDGE AND ACCESS

While Moore and McPhail have identified that it is Western classical music which includes this powerful, generative knowledge, in many ways jazz music education in the institution has similarly begun to take this turn; thus I argue that this offers a worthwhile perspective for examination. Wilf (2014), in his anthropological examination of jazz within American schools of music, for example, indicated that jazz education has increasingly become focused on "mathematical," "chord-scale" theory (p. 142), closely aligning to the characteristics McPhail (2017) attributed to "powerful" Western art musical knowledge. The issue this creates within the field of jazz music, Wilf identified, is that it is exactly this focus that "many critics have targeted...as a key factor in the presumed detrimental effects that academic jazz education has had on the improvisational skills of their students" (p. 144). As improvisation is a key component of significant jazz performance (Berliner, 1994; Prouty, 2002), this is an important consideration for institutions. One of the primary criticisms of such specialized, conceptual knowledge structures in jazz education is the output. Wilf (2014) cited an

interview with a Berklee instructor, who noted, “Today more and more cookie-cutter players come out. They learn from their teachers to become teachers, and they kind of sound like teachers. Berklee—they call it ‘the factory’ for a reason. It sounds like a factory” (p. 11).

Within the field of jazz performance, legitimacy, and authenticity are largely tied to the development of the individual “voice” of the student, and thus it is important to consider the school of music’s role in developing and/or inhibiting this voice. It is here that we must consider what exactly we mean when we speak about access and opportunity, as these concepts may dilute social justice and render it “emptied out of all meaning” (Reay, 2020, p. 817). What counts as access and opportunity will necessarily differ from student to student. Bernstein (2000) suggested that for students to feel they have a stake in society (and in schools), three interrelated conditions must be embedded in education: enhancement, inclusion, and participation (p. xx). Social Realists tend to privilege the concept of enhancement—that is, “experiencing boundaries as tension points between the past and possible futures” (p. xx)—above the others, which is what they argue powerful musical knowledges afford by virtue of their abstract, ‘esoteric,’ and epistemically-situated properties (McPhail et al., 2018). However, as previously stated, explanatory knowledge is not sufficient for emancipation, there must also be *practice* (Bhaskar, 2009). Students must feel they have a stake in their education, that they can “participate in the construction, maintenance and transformation of order” (Bernstein, 2000, p. xxi). Social Realists tend to undervalue the *practice* in favor of examinations of the “object” of knowledge itself. Further, as McPhail (2017) suggested, conceptualization towards knowledge generation is the express purpose of education as it leads to access and opportunity. This makes us ask: access to what? Opportunity in what sense? The goals of a democratic, emancipatory music education pedagogy may not align with those of SR scholars who see further specialization as socially powerful. McPhail et al. (2018) disclosed:

Our argument appears to go against current trends in that we argue that schools are *not* primarily places concerned with encouraging students to become more of who they are but with providing access to a discursive gap—an interruption in the life trajectory—that points to possible futures, possibly unimagined. (p. 87, original emphasis)

Such thinking, Reay (2020) argued, sees students as ‘empty vessels’ and does not sufficiently account for the importance of knowledge drawn from their everyday experiences. Even at the level of higher education, this powerful knowledge may not lead to the realization of the pedagogic rights Bernstein (2000) suggested.

Extending this argument further, is it possible that this highly specialized, generative, and conceptual “powerful knowledge” may actually serve to limit the access and opportunity of those students within their respective musical fields, both within and outside of the institution? An overemphasis on such enhancement at the expense of Bernstein’s other rights of inclusion and participation, I argue, may not be as meaningful to students, their experiences, and their future access and opportunity as

powerful knowledge theory claims. Many students come to the tertiary school of music with extensive musical experiences, including knowledge of musical styles, abstract theoretical concepts, their own constructed and established canons, and more (Bradley & Hess, 2021; Hess, 2019). With the understanding that students come to the institution with different experiences and different aspirations, I suggest it unwise to assume a particular kind of “powerful musical knowledge” would be able to afford all students equal access and opportunity.

This is not to argue against the value of teaching specialized, conceptual musical knowledges. Rather, this article engages with the way these knowledges are transmitted within the school of music. PK theory suggests that students should learn these knowledges in a linear, systematic way, leading towards “knowledge growth” (Young & Muller, 2016, p. 14). However, the belief that the acquisition of certain conceptual musical knowledges is a necessary prerequisite before the creation of new knowledges (and thus development) may lead to the development of reified canonical traditions and may not adequately account for the experiences of the students. Within the particular fields of Music and Music Education, such conceptualization may actually work counter to its aims.

Muller and Young (2019) clarified this very notion in their proposal of powerful knowledge within the social sciences and humanities, using the field of History as their example. After all, musical styles and their knowledges are not understood or developed linearly, and the ability to understand and conceptualize them in deeper, more meaningful ways are not limited to the verticality of student knowledge. Drawing upon Bernstein’s (2000) distinctions of hierarchical and horizontal knowledge structures, SR scholars have noted that fields such as the natural sciences follow a hierarchical knowledge structure, whereas fields within the Humanities (such as History) develop through horizontal knowledge structures. In this way, the linear, systematic sequence and structure which leads to integration—the model which fits so well into fields such as the natural sciences—tends to crumble, and different ways of organizing, specializing and thus hierarchizing knowledges need to be established. Muller and Young (2019) suggested instead that the “power” in powerful knowledge within fields such as the Humanities is determined by the ways this knowledge opens the potential for subjects to realize their pursuits of truth (p. 12). The kinds of “truth” they are describing are necessarily vague; Bernstein (2000) suggested that horizontal knowledge structures specialized knowledges instead of integrate them (as done by their hierarchical counterparts), which means this truth may vary from field to field, and from subfield to subfield. Such considerations lead us to ask: what specialized knowledges both afford this potential for the realization of truth within the field while simultaneously affording access and opportunity to the acquirer? From where is this truth established?

RELIABLISM

Rob Moore (2013) suggested that the “power” of powerful knowledge is tied to the reliability of how the knowledge is produced. He uses the concept of reliablism to

judge knowledge claims, noting that while all knowledge is fallible, the positive power of the knowledge is in part characterized by the means in which it was produced (p. 345). Moore (2013) argued that this judgmental rationalism has social justice implications, writing “because SR begins from a strong defence of knowledge and proposes this as the grounds for a model of the curriculum, the key issue is that of *access* to such a curriculum and this translates into issues of pedagogy” (p. 347, original emphasis). From the points made above by McPhail and Moore, powerful musical knowledge should be taught because it is *generative*, it is conceptual, and it is “reliable.”

RELIABLISM AND CANONS

What does “reliably” produced knowledge look like within the school of music? One source of reliability is the tradition from which much of institutional knowledge is drawn; I once again draw on Moore’s (2013) argument that “knowledge associated with the history and tradition of institutions, as well as the valued knowledge of those in positions of power, affected students and lecturers as agents *of* and *for* change” (p. 200, original emphasis). The established Western Art tradition and its theoretical concepts have become so ingrained and ubiquitous within music education that their inevitability and normality may appear ‘guaranteed.’ Such reification, Green (2014) wrote, “involves suggesting that [an] abstract concept *exists*, like a thing in the world, and that it is unchangeable, universal, eternal, natural, or absolute” (p. 18, original emphasis). My own personal music education has been rife with educators presenting linear, natural, immutable progressions of styles through delineated musical eras. While each time the details or density of information may vary slightly, this progression is taught as “obvious,” and each of these eras are treated, as Green (2014) highlighted, as objects with particular “thing-like properties” (p. 18). Likewise, as jazz has entered the academic sphere, a similar agreed-upon and linear organization has taken place, what DeVeaux (1991) called the “official history of jazz” (p. 525). DeVeaux argued that the establishment of such a jazz tradition offers ‘pedigree’ and is the means by which jazz could be seen as an “autonomous art” which secures its claim as legitimate knowledge (p. 526).

We see this reproduction at another level. If the aforementioned “official histories” can be thought of as a macro tradition, Kingsbury (1984) revealed that universities are also culpable for the reproduction of lineages beyond this official narrative, what one may term ‘micro’ tradition. Many North American schools of music have developed from a European conservatory model, implementing what Kingsbury referred to in his examination of the conservatory as a “master-apprentice” model of music education (Jones, 2017). In this model, capital is granted to students who study with the established “masters” within the faculty. Kingsbury highlighted that often the determination of value and legitimacy for musical knowledge within the institution is based on the values and beliefs of the private instructor. Certainly, the biographies of performance faculty within either Western art or jazz departments tend to read like a who’s who of master musicians within their respective fields, and it is common to find

concert programs which connect performers to lineages, establishing the authenticity of a musician by whom they have studied and / or shared the stage (Kingsbury, 1984). These traditions, whether at a macro or micro scale, are means by which reliability of knowledge of these faculty members (and thus the institution) can be assured.

I submit that the school of music uses these canons (both through Western art and jazz) as a primary means by which knowledges are judged as being produced “reliably,” and thus determining the “thinkability” and “power” of such knowledges (Bernstein, 2000; Moore, 2013). The difficulty here, of course, is that these canons are not a referent to objective reality (what Bhaskar would term *intransitive*); they are humanly-produced discourses which have been codified and reproduced within the institution and beyond to maintain particular ideological interests. In this way, the “power” that these knowledges have is largely reduced to reproducing an ideological *status quo* (Alderson, 2020). They may much more closely be associated to Muller and Young’s (2019) conception of “knowledge of the powerful” than to the “powerful knowledge” that Social Realists argue we should be teaching.

I argue that given the jazz tradition’s recent organization and legitimation, as well as its relatively recent academization within the institution (Wilf, 2014), the jazz tradition may be an ideal vehicle for music canon critique, including “the defining features of each style, the pantheon of great innovators, and the canon of recorded masterpieces” (DeVeaux, 1991, p. 525). I am reminded of Green’s (2014) warning against a simplified conceptualization of ideology as “being a falsehood cynically constructed by a powerful group of people and imposed upon an unsuspecting subservient group” (p. 18). These canons were not designed explicitly for the purpose of social control, although it is important to recognize that “ideology tends to work for the advantage of those groups of people who are better off ‘as they already are’” (p. 19). It may be difficult for the departments of a school of music to critically engage with the canons and traditions which have in many ways benefited them and the agents within that socio-epistemic space. Doing so may be likened to destroying the foundation upon which their house is built. Given the primary focus of SR towards the transmission of specialized, reliably-produced knowledges which grant access and opportunity to acquirers, this reproduction within the institution may be the very means by which the ‘possibilities’ this knowledge affords may be limited. In this way, the potential for access and opportunity Muller and Young (2019) claimed this knowledge affords may also be limited.

CONCLUSION

Social Realist scholarship has produced interesting debates about what and how knowledge should be taught at all levels of education. This article serves to offer an examination into a music education context and the ways SR scholarship may in fact work counter to its espoused aims. In particular, this article critically examines what musical knowledges proponents of SR categorize as “generative,” and the problematic ways musical knowledges are legitimated through the processes of judgmental

rationalism and reliablism. I argue that if SR perspectives continue to permeate the music education landscape, we as educators and researchers have a responsibility to examine what knowledges are included within this oeuvre and who stands to truly benefit from these frameworks. In other words, access and opportunity for whom? I suggest that SR discourses which advocate to foreground powerful musical knowledges within our higher music education spaces may be offering ‘access’ and ‘opportunity’ to certain students, and only in certain forms, which function instead to maintain an institutional status quo. Our students are entering into higher music education spaces with a wide array of skills, knowledges, and experiences, and we should consider how our institutions might afford an array of ‘access’ and ‘opportunities’ which meaningfully serve them. This might very well include the epistemically-oriented, conceptual knowledges which SR proponents advocate; however, we should consider that these knowledges alone may not be sufficient to afford students the access and opportunities they seek.

ENDNOTE

¹ I draw upon Green’s (2014) processes of legitimation: “Through the processes of *legitimation*, the social practices which are built up around the greatness of classical music, the effort and resources that go into it, and the high status attached to classical music, seem to be justifiable—or legitimate—and indeed necessary, because the greatness of the music inevitably *demand*s them, and it would be morally *wrong* for a society to ignore this music” (p. 7, original emphasis). However, I argue that with its inclusion, such processes have become present within the social practices of jazz as well.

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