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## **Fighting a Resurgent Hyper-Positivism In Education is Music to My Ears**

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## Fighting a Resurgent Hyper-Positivism in Education is Music to My Ears<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

*In this article, I argue that one of the gifts of the Age of Enlightenment, the ability to measure, to experiment, to predict—turned rancid by hyper-positivism—is re-asserting itself globally in the field of education (including music education). I see a neoliberal, neocolonial connection—in terms of the ideologies that fuel them—between some of the homogenizing, epistemologically/culturally imperialist aspects of globalization and this resurgent hyper-positivism that has been accompanied by a corporatization of education. I posit that critical education, including critical music education, is an essential component of a necessary—if rancorous—dialogue in maintaining a definition of education that is as varied and diverse as those students we wish to educate. In essence, I argue that critical education is one of many tools to help us fight a ‘re-colonization’ by this resurgent hyper-positivism in education.*

*Keywords: positivism, epistemological colonialism/neocolonialism, corporatization of education, educational standardization, peace education, globalization, Trinidad, Brazil, steel pan, critical education, critical music education*

**I** come to you not as a music educator.<sup>2</sup> In fact, I cannot read music. I sang in choirs, but the other parts and voices often sidetracked me, luring me by their harmonies and distracting me with their occasional discordance. I would stop singing, in part out of fear and part out of curiosity, so that my ears could hover over the choir and apprehend the melded masterpiece coming together. By then I had already lost my place and a strange mélange of frustration and fascination ensued. So now I stick to being just an educator who happens to love music.

I come to you as a son of Laventille, my community in Trinidad & Tobago (TT), a place that is considered one of the most violent areas there; a place, like the

favelas of Tabajaras, Cabritos, and Complexo do Alemão in Rio De Janeiro in Brazil, where I visited (in May 2014) for a 10-day course on social justice and community development and the impact that the preparations for the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Olympics were/are having on these poor communities. While in Brazil, I saw immediate historical and contemporary parallels between the favelas of Complexo do Alemão and my hometown of Laventille, globalized and globalizing sinews that connect distant lands and peoples – sinews of rather similar dispossession, resistance, historical repression, and historical amnesia. This is the larger point of this article: to connect some dots on a global level. I see a certain (hyper-)positivism attempting to ‘re-colonize’ the field of education and, in this article, I draw parallels between globalizing forces of colonialism/neocolonialism and repression and that of positivism’s re-colonizing attempts in education.

Although one can trace historical repression and see the contemporary markers of it in Laventille and Brazil, both locales still throb resiliently with music, with rhythm, pulsations that say ‘we are yet still alive and we refuse to die.’ Laventille, this decried place of violence, of neglect, upon which decrepitude is projected, is a place that birthed the steel pan—an instrument made out of discarded oil drums, tinkered and tuned to produce a sweet sound that echoes something that is uniquely Trinbago.<sup>3</sup>

The steel pan, according to noted Caribbean intellectual Lloyd Best (2001), represents the innovativeness of a people: “pan is making music wherever you go and whatever you find ... of ingenuity, of imagination, of software to make the system work” (19). Limbo, along with steel pan, also emerged in Trinidad. Of limbo, Lloyd Best states that

it is about making space where before there was none. Wilson Harris argues that when slaves came into the Middle Passage from the very first day, in those holes where they were tied and chained down, there was no space. Figuratively, they already had to make space as a key adjustment. Even if it was physically impossible, they had to create a world of mind—so that the software is what we have always developed, not the hardware, we couldn’t have the hardware—what we had were the resources of imagination (19).

The steel pan, emerged out of the carnivalesque, a space where slaves could imitate and mock their slave masters who threw extravagant balls (see Anthony 2011, for an exhaustive discussion of Carnival in TT). Slave masters had tried repeatedly to ban/suppress African religion, dance and song; they wished to separate a people from their roots and in so doing alienate them from their histories, disconnect them from self-recognition and render them docile, baffled, without compass, direction, motive, and ultimately, without self-actualization. The slaves thus hid their traditions and in the middle of the night, they limboed, they beat old biscuit drums and oil drums, they sang, they danced, they worshipped, all in defiance. The steel pan thus arose out of a spirit to deny, defy, and remember. Innovation leapt from the bowels of repression. Against the dehumanizing inner logic of *la mission civilisatrice*, a people found their own ways, however small, to register a resounding “No!”

The colonial apparatus, one launched on the back of presumed superiority of thought and action, has not been fully dismantled. Colonialism was not just about encounters and conquests but about impositions, assimilations, co-optations, control, and dominance. This colonizing zeal lives on in our educational battles, here in the United States and abroad. Mass education emerged out of a perceived need to provide society with skilled workers but also to ‘edify’ a widely illiterate and ‘uncivilized’ body politic. In this article, I argue that one of the gifts of the Age of Enlightenment—the ability to measure, to experiment, to predict—turned rancid by hyper-positivism, is re-asserting itself in the face of a fast changing global terrain, in a neocolonial fashion. I see a neoliberal connection—in terms of the ideologies that fuel them—between some of the homogenizing, epistemologically/culturally imperialist aspects of globalization and this resurgent hyper-positivism that has been accompanied by a corporatization of education. This connection is a colonizing ethic.

Subsequently, I argue that critical education,<sup>4</sup> including critical music education (in both praxial and aesthetic conceptualizations/incarnations), is an essential component of a necessary —if rancorous—dialogue in order to maintain a definition of education that is as varied and diverse as those students we wish to educate. In essence, I argue that critical education is one of many tools to help us fight a ‘re-colonization’<sup>5</sup> by this resurgent hyper-positivism<sup>6</sup> in education.

I shall not fully recount the rise of positivism here<sup>7</sup>; but permit me a partial recounting.<sup>8</sup> According to Regelski (2005),

The rationalism stemming from Descartes' dictum "I think therefore I am", and Francis Bacon's scientific method resulted in two incompatible views of reason. The first was the use of reason in transcending time and space, so called transcendental reason. Such rationalism made true knowledge independent of the sensory world. The second was a mechanistic science of physical and human nature rooted in sensory observation and governed by laws of cause and effect. The resulting tension between the first, philosophical idealism—or rationalism—and the second, scientific materialism—or empiricism—remains unresolved in the modern world (3).

This is but one take on positivism, its rise and its subsequent trajectory. There are those who offer a revisitation and defense of positivism. Matthews (2004), from within science education, argues that:

'Positivist' has become a term of extreme scholarly abuse ... Once some position is identified as 'positivist', then it can be dismissed; such identification is basically the end of any argument. It is difficult to think of any term in the educational lexicon so laden with negative connotations as 'positivism'. 'Positivist' is to education, what 'terrorist' is to geo-politics (7).

Matthews adds that, "'positivism' is often just a catch-all for 'anything we do not like'" (2004, 10). To some, this claim may seem hyperbolic, but it cannot be denied that there exists quite a bit of critique of positivism. What Matthews (2004) denounces as a "tabloid view of positivism" (13) is more than likely a catch-all phrase for many types of critiques, perhaps even those from critical theorists and researchers. However, the kind of positivism that I wish to interrogate here is what I call 'positivism on ideological speed', in my view, akin to what Freire (2003) characterized as 'scientism'.

The Enlightenment era dismantled claims of truth from a traditional, religious, or metaphysical basis. To test and experiment sharpened the human mind and fostered an ethic of questioning. Hardly anything thereafter would be immune from the deconstructive gaze. This bequest is an absolute gift, undeniably so! Positivism is part of this bequest. Floden (2009) states, "positivism holds that epistemic certainty can be attained by basing all claims to knowledge on observation"

(488); Roebuck and Phifer (1999) add that “Positivism...is also a philosophy of science with a particular epistemology of verification, confirmation, and falsification; an objectivist foundation.” (445). With this focus on ‘objective truth’, there has been a “long reign of positivist hegemony since the mid-nineteenth century” (Jordan and Yeomans 1995, 389), a veritable epistemic stranglehold. It is this larger-than-life space that positivism occupies with which I am concerned.

Some theorists and researchers have challenged the notion of objectivity. As Usher (1996) argues, science is conducted in a particular social context; it is thus a social practice. Objectivity requires a neutral standing above or away from the object of study. This putatively healthy distance of researcher from object has been so avidly postulated that a falsehood has emerged about the nature of objectivity; there is an ardent belief that subjectivity can be surgically removed from the zone of research and omitted for the duration of data collection or experimentation.

One can understand this perhaps in the natural sciences, but the social sciences, in what is akin to intellectual rigor envy, have adopted and internalized the inner logic of the positivism of the natural sciences—trying to predict, to make generalizations, to control. Part of the fallacy of objectivity is the belief that positivist approaches are ‘value free’. However, “all epistemic stances are mediated” (Hyslop-Margison 2010, 820), and “evidence is never morally or ethically neutral” (Denzin 2009, 142).<sup>9</sup> Abraham (1996) boldly asserts, “this desire to expunge values from (social) scientific research has been encouraged by elements of positivistic thinking”<sup>10</sup> (93). A derivative of this is a fact/value binary, which Howe (2009) avers is “actually shorthand for a long list of dichotomies that includes the known versus felt, the cognitive versus noncognitive, the objective versus subjective, the rational versus emotional, the descriptive versus prescriptive, and the scientific versus political”<sup>11</sup> (771).<sup>12</sup> These dichotomies are thus imposed onto spaces that are, ontologically speaking, not as clearly demarcated.

But perhaps the most deleterious of their effects is the concealment of power relations.

Denzin (2009) elaborates:

It is rather a question of who has the power to control the definition of evidence, who defines the kinds of materials that count as evidence,

who determines what methods best produce the best forms of evidence, whose criteria and standards are used to evaluate quality evidence (142).<sup>13</sup>

Broadly speaking, I am concerned with positivism's epistemic colonialism; that is to say, the space for varied and diverse ways of knowing (and being) has been restricted and therefore colonized by the unchecked influence of positivism.<sup>14</sup>

### **Hyper-Positivism's Effect on Education**

Positivism has definitely influenced the field of education (and its various sub-fields). However, I characterize its resurgent or colonizing incarnation<sup>15</sup> as hyper-positivism (i.e. 'positivism on ideological speed'<sup>16</sup>); indeed "all the paraphernalia of positivist research has resurfaced" (Thomas 1998, 144). Usher (1996) expands on the problem of positivistic approaches to educational research:

The problem with social and educational research based on a positivist/empiricist epistemology with its emphasis on the natural sciences as the model is that its ontological assumptions about the nature of the world, i.e. that it is orderly, lawful and hence predictable, are highly problematic. Social events, processes and phenomena are more usefully seen as open and indeterminate. Predictive generalisations are only possible if this openness is closed. Closure is only possible if a determinate world is assumed and so the closure that is necessary can only be imposed. But if it is imposed then that very status of the knowledge generated (i.e. the predictive generalisations) itself becomes questionable. Thus it is not so much that closure is impossible (since we do this all the time) but rather that if it is done then the imposed closure must inevitably raise questions of power, which in turn raises questions about the 'objectivity' of the research process and the resulting knowledge claims (14).

Usher (1996) points out the potentially significant differences between the natural and social sciences. Some researchers suggest that "focusing on empirical research as the primary mechanism to develop educational policy is [a] diversion...from engaging questions about educational purposes" (Hyslop-Margison 2010, 817)<sup>17</sup>. More specifically, "it has been the inappropriateness of assuming that the social world is reducible to the kind of laws which explain the physical world and the inappropriateness of assuming that the set of methods for finding out about those laws is good for education" (Thomas 1998, 143–4). The central concern regarding

positivism's colonizing forays into the sphere of education is that it forecloses options, possibilities and diversity. As Lees (2007) explains, "many educational policy discourses are still dominated by... paradigms that provide only a partial impression of human realities and which thus limits one's ability to address diverse human needs" (55).

Hyper-positivism in education is manifest in the recent wave of (both global and local) managerialism and neoliberalism (Atkinson 2004). Leading educational institutions, organizations, and national policies represent this new orthodoxy (which Howe calls "a throwback to positivist reductionism" 2009, 766). Such organizations include the American Educational Research Association (AERA), the National Research Council (NRC), the World Bank (WB), and policies such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Race To The Top (RTTT) (Atkinson 2004; Howe 2009; Perrine 2013; Radford 2008; Torres 2002).<sup>18</sup>

A heightened focus on standardized tests (Atkinson 2004) and accountability in schools—a measure borrowed from the business world (Perrine 2013)—has been promulgated by these organizations and policies. The proliferate use of standardized tests to measure student, teacher and school performance renders an impact similar to the effect that positivism has on educational research; it demarcates 'performance' in very rigid, narrow ways. When educational research, teaching, and practice conform to such "technical rationality" that is undergirded by a "search for universal 'silver bullets'" (Hyslop-Margison 2010, 828), they may very well reproduce the inequalities they seek to disrupt (Nygreen 2006).

Despite such recent "simplistic, standardised and large-scale approaches to schooling and educational research" (Lees 2007, 48), some researchers contend that since "inconsistency is the hallmark of the human worlds in which educationists are interested" (Thomas 1998, 143), we should view schools and education, not as "sets of inputs and output variables which can be quantitatively characterised" (Radford 2008, 509), but as complex systems, that are non-linear and dynamic, and therefore "resistant to reductive analysis and predictability...and the generation of systematic and universalisable propositions" (507). Moreover, because "positivism does not recognise the importance of non-linear events or the profound discontinuities of real



life phenomena” (Torres 2002, 373), then, just perhaps, an increasing number of researchers in the field of education will recognize the deeply profound incommensurability between the foundational, epistemic components of positivism and the constitution of schools and education as complex, non-linear systems.<sup>19</sup>

### **Music Education, Not Immune**

Music education has not been immune to the points I have discussed thus far. However, the field has had to reckon with its own historical demons and colonizing elements. Talbot (2013) elaborates:

When we speak and write about music education, we often restrict the kinds of music, ways of music transmission, and spaces for music education that we consider. We engage in a process of legitimating music education: we privilege particular musics, such as those of bands, orchestras and choirs, along with one approach to knowing music; Western notation. Other kinds of music, such as dance, ritual, and popular music are limited or non-existent in discussions, and the value of aural transmission and embodied ways of knowing is often diminished. Effects of this legitimation on music makers, whether they are teachers or students, can include alienation from music, and from others in social relationships of music making (47).<sup>20</sup>

Bradley (2006) reinforces my point about ‘colonizing,’ arguing, “a great deal of thought in music education also remains under the influence of lingering colonialism” (2), and “music education has its own history of exclusion, a history that continues to self-perpetuate in part due to the imposition of colonial value judgments upon musical genres and practices” (24). Herein lies the neocolonial apparatus of domination, control, marginalization, and impositions.<sup>21</sup> Ironically, despite music education’s colonizing elements, it is also affected by larger forces of marginalization, especially during tough economic times. Both the colonizing tendencies still inhabiting some aspects of music education *and* music education’s own general marginalization within the corporatized hierarchy of disciplines are characterized by a hyper-positivism concerning truth claims and canonical purity that often drives these processes and effectuates the aforementioned outcomes.

This resurgent, colonizing hyper-positivism, which has fueled an intense instrumentalization (and corporatization) of education, and which views “the

arts...as dispensable subjects” in times of fiscal austerity (Shorner-Johnson 2013, 55; Hodges and Luehrsen 2010), has partially contributed to a ‘siege mentality’ within music education (Gould 2012, 82). In music education, Prest (2013) interrogates the standardization craze that, in her view, represents an increasing level of corporatization in the realm of education. For her, this conception of education is one premised on private enterprise and competition; she states, “in this conception, standardized test scores are the sole determinant of a school’s level of success” (31). In this corporatized model of education, failing schools lose funding but ultimately this “social polarization...contributes to the destruction of the public sphere” (Fineman 2012, as cited in Prest 2013, 32). Prest argues further that there are several elements of this corporatization of schooling: elitism, rugged individualism, utilitarianism and the quest for certainty, all qualities I deem as central to neocolonial apparatuses/processes.

The starvation of public school education for the sake of competition (re: the proliferation of charter schools), and the rising costs of private education reveal elitism regarding educational access. The colonial apparatus (e.g. in the Caribbean), so evident in nineteenth-century imperialist practices, prided itself on keeping its subjects uneducated and plucking a few token persons to receive higher education so that they could help staff the local bureaucracy. It is ironic that the public good/square in the US, once lauded by de Tocqueville, has been relegated to the background by this ethic of rugged individualism that was once a constitutive element of the United States in its nascent years. The colonial seed of divide and conquer lingers on. With regards to the utilitarian aspects/conceptions of corporatized schooling, examples run the gamut: from the baby Ivy-league race<sup>22</sup>, and the United States’ obsession with international country-to-country comparative math and science scores, to when parents ask their college-aged children, “What kind of job can you get if you study such and such?” In this utilitarian conception of corporatized schooling, arts education has been rendered irrelevant. Benedict (2006) makes the following claim:

The reasons for music not being regarded as high status knowledge might have to do with deep assumptions that permeate society, and that influence how knowledge and skills are legitimized .... For music,

those reasons for not being considered a basic, or high status knowledge, can be traced to structural and cultural relationships that exist not only between general education and music education, but the larger relationships that exist in the context of education and society that are lived daily and taken for granted (20–1).

Even in higher education, Schmidt and Benedict (2012) aver that these discourses within education “have forced critical educators in music and otherwise to become more savvy regarding the new instrumentalism [they] now face” (5). Certain subjects/disciplines are unquestionably enshrined as integral to national interest and well-being, and others seem to be mere intellectual appendages, embellishments, subject to the financial guillotine when austerity beckons. The colonial order as well had a utilitarian calculus—the domination and exploitation of slaves toward the great accumulation of wealth and profit—and this same script is at play today.

As regards a quest for certainty, this is part of the inner logic of positivism: a rabid pursuit of ‘objective truth’. Prest (2013) argues that this quest for certainty is demonstrated in corporatized models of schooling by obsessive foci on standardized tests, statistics and rankings, and their “reductive approach to the complexity of the classroom” (36). Ironically, this quest for certainty ends up narrowing and ‘colonizing’ the realm of possibilities, in terms of diversity of approaches, and ways of being and thinking.

Music education, a field under persistent threat, strives constantly for self-legitimation. Music researchers and theorists, in encouraging offense over defense, have made calls for increased music education advocacy (Shorner-Johnson 2013), and for more involvement in policy issues (Hodges and Luehrsen 2010; Hunter 2011). However, in this era of educational hyper-instrumentality, some argue that “caution must be taken not to distort the aesthetic nature of music education through abuses of utilitarian arguments” and that if music educators “transcend the limits of [their] discipline too much, [they] may not be able to find [their] way back” (Shorner-Johnson 2013, 54).

I perceive the aesthetic and the utilitarian not as oppositional binaries, but as potentially synergistic. I see an analog for the wider field of music education, in the tension between the need for discipline/structure and the necessity of

improvisational freedom in jazz pedagogy (Louth 2012), similar to the tension between the aesthetic and praxial camps. Balance is key in finding compromise between these seemingly antagonistic poles. In a utilitarian fashion, music education can and should tout its actual and perceived benefits<sup>23</sup>, but can and should simultaneously challenge its colonizing aspects, while recognizing and celebrating its uniqueness. While Bradley (2006) states, “for those in critical education...we [need] to ‘decolonize’ our speech, our thought, our methodologies, and our pedagogies” (2) by “mov[ing] beyond thinking about music hierarchically and Eurocentrically” (24), Jorgensen (2009) insists that “music education researchers need to attend to the claims of an interdisciplinary field with its own particular constraints, problems, challenges and features” (408). Herein lie tensions but also opportunities; they are not mutually exclusive and they ought not gratuitously foster hard-and-fast divisions among music educators, especially in the face of the superordinate threat of a de-legitimizing hyper-positivism.

Part of music education’s meta-cognition of its unique sphere is challenging the positivist paradigm of trying to use standardized tests in evaluating learning across all domains.<sup>24</sup> Arostegui (2003) elucidates this point best:

Current objective tests are unable to measure the holistic learning emerging from content and interpretation...The centrality of technical skills in *classical* music, belonging to the same Western minds that deemed positivist knowledge superior in Modernity, have led music education to be focused on the teaching of rhythm, melody, texture, timber, and formal structure. When that focus on technical skills happens, music education forgets to develop the aesthetic comprehension of music. Our tests are meant to measure what is least essential in the arts (111–2).

Jorgensen (2009) more tersely states, “expecting empirical research alone to generate theory in music education is too narrow an approach” (408).<sup>25</sup> These ever-narrowing approaches must compel us to “begin reasking the difficult normative questions about appropriate educational ends” (Hyslop-Margison 2010, 830), because “an unconditional reliance on these methods or scripts to train students and teachers to produce particular kinds of learners and learning denies and prevents engagement with critical or transformative literacies” (Benedict 2012, 155).<sup>26</sup>

Benedict (2012) touches on what I perceive to be another reason for music education's (and especially critical music education's) marginalization. Similar to the ways in which social justice approaches to education have never been the dominant discourse (Hyttén 2006), critical music education (CME) co-inhabits this space on the margins. CME is, to use Atkinson's (2004) phrase, 'an exercise in heresy'; it is indeed a threat! Music education, and the larger umbrella of arts education, has the capacity to raise consciousness, and set ablaze the imagination. Simply put, revolution rests in the imagination.<sup>27</sup> Neocolonial apparatuses are well served when the mind is endulled. Endullment here means, "the dulling of students' minds as a result of their nonparticipation" (Shor 1992, 20), in other words, "not encouraging students to question knowledge, society, and experience tacitly endorses and supports the status quo" (12). A critical education can lead to the questioning of authority and is inherently antagonistic to authoritarianism. Neocolonial apparatuses, upheld by vested interests, wish not to be questioned or challenged. The status quo thus rests on acriticality. The call is therefore not for mere music education but for *critical* music education.

Here, I turn my attention to Maxine Greene, the educational philosopher, teacher and intellectual insurgent. Her philosophy provides a perspective to consider art not as a private space but as a public domain for social transformation (Moon et al. 2013). She delves into the world of the incomplete. She is opposed to fixities, finalities, and closed systems (Greene 2010). Music is part of the aesthetic experience, and therefore, part of the social imagination. In turn, the social imagination is a requisite component of the democratic enterprise.<sup>28</sup> For it is about dreaming of alternatives, of progressions and progressiveness, of driving varied, constructive agendas forward. And for this, Greene (2010) says, a radical imagination is needed.

Imagination, intention: Neither is sufficient. There must be a transmutation of good will, of what I call *wide-awakeness* into action...Both demand reflection and praxis, which are inseparable from each other. Both not only imagine things as if they could be otherwise, but move persons to begin on their own initiatives, to begin to make them so...In what we choose to imagine as a democratic school, there must be restlessness in the face of the given, a reaching beyond the taken for granted...The arts can move the young to see what they have

never seen, to view unexpected possibilities. They are always there on the margins to refuse the indecent, the unjust, to awaken the critical and committed to visions of things being otherwise. There can be no final solution; but there is time--always time--to reject somnolence, to choose to begin (webpage).

Prest (2013) states that if “we regard the arts as having the capacity to unleash the imagination, then we might begin to understand why those business and government leaders who hold elitist and utilitarian values...might consider the arts irrelevant and even counterproductive to their worldview” (38). Imagination “enables citizens to engage in the complexity of issues, rejecting the simplistic, rigid dualities promoted by some elitist leaders to minimize options and engender obedience” (38). Docility and dullness, therefore, cannot cohabit with imagination.

The aesthetic view of arts education, about which Greene waxes ever so poignantly, must be merged with ethics (Jourdan 2012).<sup>29</sup> A critically-minded ethics of insurgency that permits a “breaking open [of] reduced, impoverished and oversimplified models of knowledge” (Jourdan 2012, 396) enables us to see the world more comprehensively. To view our milieu more holistically and more connected to other milieu is an arrant threat. I return to the example outlined in the introduction of this paper to illustrate my point. Criticality enables us to apprehend the historical and contemporary sinews that connect, for example, the drug trade in South America running through places like Complexo do Alemão and Laventille on its way to the extremely lucrative consumer market, the United States. Such thinking may be a threat to the status quo. When the music teacher anchors her critical pedagogy in the student’s lived experiences and employs it in a problem-posing way (Freire 2003), then that child may also become a threat because he (or I) can possibly envision radically different alternatives from the existing state of affairs.

But I go a step further, and ask, is this pursuit of wide-awakeness, for which Greene advocates, also threatened by a hyper-instrumentality, a discursively technicized formula toward social change? In other words, can wide-awakeness in itself become an empty positivism? We, the self-professedly critical lot, lobbying challenges from the margins against canonical centers wherever they exist, we too must guard against that ever-creeping complacency. There is no automatic victory in

our criticality. There is no automatic moral ground in our positionality. Our struggle is always in the making, always in the art of persuasion. For vested interests, with their amalgamated powers, never surrender easily, never rest, are always on the hunt, accumulating more power, decimating dissidence, shifting silhouettes so as to co-opt pointed and sharp critiques.

This critical, ethical-aesthetic perspective in education is about posing open-ended questions and cultivating a disposition of being comfortable with discomfort. The lived experience does matter. For if it is left at the door, outside the classroom, so as to engage the in-class text (or canonical knowledge), then we re-inscribe the colonialism of hyper-rationality and faux objectivity, widening the distances between the object and the study, teacher and the student, and therefore, resurrecting alienation and risking a familiar estrangement.

I think of Greene's fascination with and commitment to 'unfinished-ness', with incompleteness. Such a notion invites a world of possibilities. In a world of dynamical systems, how do we educate people to be comfortable with discomfort, with incompleteness without surrender, nihilism or paralysis? Coming from the fields of peace education and conflict transformation, some research indicates that small, piecemeal efforts do not connive to engender macro change and sustainable peace (Ricigliano 2013). How do critical music educators respond to this? How can CME be part of macro ruptures, where it feels the tectonic plates shifting beneath its feet without those plates settling back into their previous patterns and positions? How do critical music educators artfully dodge the co-optive attempts and skills of neocolonial apparatuses?<sup>30</sup> How do critical educationalists (writ large) stay ahead, and stop playing catch up? How do we stop reacting and start 'proactivating'?

I see CME as part and parcel of critical peace education: the field that uses education, constituted by conscientized and conscientizing<sup>31</sup> content and form, to dismantle structural violence. In returning to my introductory discussions, I see teaching steel pan with its history of anti-colonial resistance as an example of a very practical strategy for critical music educators interested in topics of resistance, colonialism and revolution. The steel pan (and its music), alongside other instruments and music from other cultures, can and should be taught not as

appendages to any Western canon(s), but as part of an inclusive, planetary musicking.

The idea of macro revolution looks fancy and seems edgy when emblazoned in graffiti ink on abandoned lofts and warehouses. But in practice, it sometimes means lots of violence and pain and trauma. I much prefer the micro-revolutionary work that critical educators do on a day-to-day basis; the steady, consistent erosions of the foundation on which the status quo rests. For sustainable peace, in my estimation, is more about process than destination. Granted, I want to feel the immediate gratification of arriving at the destinations of equal pay for equal work, the end of structural racism, etc., in the here and now, but if we want our youth to sustain a world of non-violence, then we must treat them with non-violence, and such a world must be ushered in *with* non-violence. That, in a world steeped myopically in realism, requires daring dreamers and doers fueled by a daring imagination; this requires a mind adequately nimble to navigate an increasingly complex world. Such a mind must be adept at saying a resounding “No!” to both recolonization, and simplistic standardizations.<sup>32</sup> As Denzin (2009) asserts “we cannot let one group define the key terms in the conversation [because] too much is at stake” (152, 155)<sup>33</sup>. There is no formula for this, except through arduous, respectful, but persistent dialogue *and* action. As Frank Abrahams (2006) says, “music education is a conversation” (2). May we have the fortitude, come what may, to keep on conversing and doing, even as bombs fall and the seas threaten to drown the very edifices that we hold dear. A different world *is* possible. And critical music education can play a vital role. It must. For we need “[a] peaceable art ... [a] peaceable creativity...flowing out of ... [a] peaceable imagination” (Best 1994, 9).

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from keynote address given at the 2014 MayDay Colloquium.

<sup>2</sup> I am in the field of education, but not music education. In this article, I discuss what I see as a threat to education writ large, and not just music education. While I do cover quite a bit of terrain here, I do not pretend to know the rich and diverse field of music education very well. I do however see the utility in listening to perspectives from outside my immediate sphere of expertise; sometimes we see ideas, practices or our fields themselves, all afresh. It is in this spirit that I wrote this article.

<sup>3</sup> Trinbago is a colloquial shorthand for Trinidad and Tobago.

<sup>4</sup> In the conclusion, I anchor critical education (including critical music education) within a peace education framework. Peace education is concerned with dismantling structural violence; it is about boldly re-envisioning the present times and envisioning radically different, and more sustainable, futures. It is using education to convey and foster the knowledges, skills, and attitudes needed to create a global culture of sustainable peace, from the intra- and inter-personal to the global level (Bajaj 2008, Bajaj & Brantmeier 2011).

<sup>5</sup> In this article, my use of ‘colonialism’ may seem outdated. However, my arguments rest on the premise that colonialism, as an earlier form of globalization, perhaps never truly ended, but lingered on, in albeit different configurations.

<sup>6</sup> Lather (2006) speaks of a ‘resurgent positivism’ or ‘neo-positivism’.

<sup>7</sup> Kilbourne (1992) states that positivism comes in many ‘guises’, and MacKenzie (2001) argues that “a technical term which was once fairly clear and well-understood has come to be used to mean the precise opposite of what it used to mean” (534). However, I am concerned with positivism’s fundamentalist, extremist ‘guise’ and application in the field of education, which I will discuss in this article.

<sup>8</sup> See Kilbourne (1992) for a discussion of the epistemological positions of positivism, and Lather (1986, 1992) for critiques of positivism in education.

<sup>9</sup> In resurrecting a similar but older critique, Garrison (2009) states, “For Dewey all inquiry is theory and value-laden” (18).

<sup>10</sup> In citing Bernard Williams, Davis states, “if there are many and competing genuine values, then the greater extent to which a society tends to be single-valued,

the more genuine values it neglects or suppresses” (Williams 1980, xix, as cited in Davis 2006, 499).

<sup>11</sup> Regarding this air of seeming apoliticism that positivistic science emits, Dantley (2002) argues that “the penchant for rationality, order and empiricism that inspires these positivist abstractions is hardly crafted in a frictionless social or ideological environment, although their maxims would lead one to believe that they have been birthed from an ahistorical and apolitical context” (336).

<sup>12</sup> As regards critical music education, it is a terrain that has its particular values and these values are integral to its operationalization, both the quotidian and the conceptual. What some conservation biologists assert, I believe applies to critical music education as well, that “values and valuations are an important part of conservation biology, affecting more than just the advocacy role conservation biologists play in public policy. Conservation biologists should explicitly acknowledge the importance of norms and values in their theoretical formulations, methods, and goals. Values form an integral part of our research, teaching, and community involvement; they can not be separated from our practice of science and relegated merely to shaping our advocacy responsibilities” (Roebuck & Phifer 1999, 444).

<sup>13</sup> Denzin (2009) denounces this aggregate as “a hegemonic politics of evidence” (155).

<sup>14</sup> An analog to this colonial imagery is Torres’ reference to “the authoritarianism of certain positivistic perspectives” (2002, 378). Thomas (1998) adds that “it sets certain kinds of thinking on a pedestal and it eschews other kinds of thinking” (150).

<sup>15</sup> Calling it ‘colonizing’ is meant to convey its capacity to control and subjugate: “it is vitally important to see how the tenet of control within the positivist frame crafts the cultural thought. Control, domination, and subjugation systematically establish boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. Control propagates a cataloguing of acceptable behaviors as well as acceptable people whose nature is to demonstrate these honored behaviors” (Dantley 2002, 341).

<sup>16</sup> Hyper-positivism in education seems to be driven by the ideology behind global neoliberalism.

<sup>17</sup> This ought not to be taken to mean that there is not any place for empirical research in education. However, some argue that by “promot[ing] the notion that certain rationalistic ingredients are obligatory in research: a technology of inquiry is thus constructed and maintained” and that “inquiry [becomes] formulaic; . . . follow[ing] predictable ruts and lead[ing] often to uninteresting findings” (Thomas 1998, 141).

<sup>18</sup> See Branscome (2012) for a discussion of how NCLB and other elements of the standards movement had negative impacts on music education.

<sup>19</sup> Radford (2008) concludes that “we cannot drive complex systems, rather we can be more or less successful in surviving within them” (516). This of course does not preclude the possibility and actuality of our interventions within systems—micro, meso, macro, and combinations thereof—altering the constitution and/or trajectory of said systems.

<sup>20</sup> See also Benedict (2012) and Kindall-Smith, McKoy & Mills (2011) for similar critiques.

<sup>21</sup> Gould (2012) affirms that, “the historical legacy of music education in Canada and the US is one of social control” (75).

<sup>22</sup> Referring to the race to get one’s Pre-K children into ‘fancy’ junior Ivy-league type schools so that they can get a leg up in the increasingly competitive world of education.

<sup>23</sup> These are some actual and perceived benefits of music education. Music education 1) helps to engage in broader ethical and moral questions (Rimmer 2013); 2) is a potent tool for social change/transformation (Abrahams, Rowland, and Kohler 2012); 3) can foster reflective thinking and a willingness to change (Thorgersen 2014); 4) is positively associated with academic achievement (Rickard and McFerran 2012); 5) is used as an instrument to foster student social competencies (Topoğlu 2014); 6) “improves self esteem in primary school children” (Rickard, Appelman, James, Murphy, Gill and Bambrick 2013, 305); and 7) “has the power to liberate students and teachers from their current, sometimes negative, stereotypes about certain music and musicians” (Abrahams 2005, 3). See Biasutti and Concina (2013) for a range of additional studies on the benefits/claims of music education.

<sup>24</sup> In Williams (in press 2015), a book chapter on the challenges of evaluation in the field of peace education, I argue: “an obvious conundrum for peace education: its concern for structural violence complicates its evaluability, and in attempts to become more evaluable, it may end up reductionistically aiming for short-term interventions that may not contribute to a sustainable peace” (10). This concern is relevant for critical music education, a subfield that asks itself, “how our own praxis might serve to identify and dismantle not only racism but the intersecting oppressions of sexism, heterosexism, and ableism as well” (Bradley 2006, 13). Critical music education has a lofty reach, like peace education; their common challenge is to demonstrate their efficacy without muting their radical, revolutionary clarion call.

<sup>25</sup> Perrine (2013) states, “Foremost is the question of whether a standardized test is an appropriate form of assessment for the performing arts. A standardized test might



indicate that a student understands music conceptually but can say nothing about whether a student can actually *make* music. By extension, such a test cannot reveal whether teachers are being successful in educating their students in how to produce high-quality music together” (43). More broadly, music education has to insist on its own ways of knowing. For example, an inquiry under the auspices of music education philosophy can be considered as research (Silverman, Davis, & Elliott 2014); the point is to have at one’s disposal a diverse array of tools in a world teeming with a diverse array of issues. As Miksza (2013) states, “we need to consider a variety of pedagogical approaches if we wish to meet the needs of the wide variety of learners in our classrooms. It may be more likely that a combination of traditional and innovative approaches to music education would be better for building music understanding than would relying on one or the other exclusively” (6).

<sup>26</sup> In a move toward critical and transformative literacies, music education has to interrogate these prevailing discourses, both micro and macro. As Talbot (2010) states, “adopting a research approach that critically analyzes D/discourses in the context of globalization assists researchers and practitioners in creating transformative learning settings” (92).

<sup>27</sup> And as Miksza (2013) argues: “students need exposure to music that stretches their imagination” (4). In the face of epistemic colonialism, this is thus an imperative!

<sup>28</sup> There has been a long tradition of recognizing the nexus of music education, citizenship, and the democratic impulse (see Woodford 2005, for a comprehensive discussion on this theme of democracy and music education). As far back as in 1947, Sommers wrote, “music teachers have the responsibility to teach the conception of world citizenship” (17). More recently, Jourdan (2012) has affirmed, “music education...has a significant role to play in allowing pupils to acquire and exercise skills required for active, democratic citizenship” (383). All of this paints “a picture of music as being ‘public property’...that all people should be able to access through a music education built on inclusion” (Georgii-Hemming & Westvall 2010, 364).

<sup>29</sup> Lien (2012) contends, “ethics education of any standardized or formalized nature is virtually nonexistent in music education” (81).

<sup>30</sup> Some have been mentioned before, but some examples of neocolonial apparatuses in education today are: 1) private corporations funding studies on national standards to promote more accountability, 2) hierarchies within schools/districts that alienate or exclude teachers, students and parents from decision making, 3) extreme pressures exerted by districts/city councils/government that seem more punitive than restorative, 4) increasingly segregated school systems by race/ethnicity and class, 5) ballooning tuition prices for college, contrasted with diminishing state spending on education, and 6) teaching to the test’s reliance on memorization and less on reflective, critical and creative thinking. These are just a few examples of neocolonial apparatuses; they are concerned with (or foster) exclusion,

control/dominance, hierarchy/classification, punishment, docility/obedience, all of which generates/feeds power, which is at the heart of any colonizing ethic.

<sup>31</sup> Conscientization, a term promulgated by Paulo Freire (2003), means ‘consciousness raising’. Freire believed that the content of education has to be consciousness raising, as well as its form (which includes pedagogy, the teacher him/herself, etc.). Therefore, when I say a tool/space/person is ‘conscientizing’, I mean ‘having the capacity to foster conscientization, and when I say a tool/space/person is ‘conscientized’, I mean ‘conscientization dwells therein as a model for the student’. The latter term should not convey conscientization as a finality, for I view it as a process. However, I do acknowledge that some tools/spaces/persons are far more amenable (or better suited) to the difficult work of fostering sustainable peace.

<sup>32</sup> As regards music education, one way in which this can be done is by “challeng[ing] students with problems that have multiple solutions and demand more from them than rote performance or the application of technique” (Johnson 2004, 1166).

<sup>33</sup> An example of ‘one group’ with outsized influence, would be corporations that lobby in Washington or (as mentioned before) fund studies on Common Core, etc.

## About the Author

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