Creativity, Agency and Democratic Research in Music Education (CADRE)

BACKGROUND AND GENERAL AIMS

The new phenomena, such as karaoke, Idols and choir competitions, or online music communities, express vast cultural changes in which people’s free participation, rather than passive consumption, is central. Ironically, the culture of participation is problematic for traditional music education. In the conservatory-based traditional practice, the starting point is the teacher’s authority and knowledge, and the basic requirements for creative musical activities are hard-earned technique and "natural" musical giftedness.

In this project, we aim to reconstruct theoretically music education by examining the field from the viewpoint of participatory democracy and to study the experiences and expressions of agency in both informal (ILEs) and formal learning environments (FLEs) in order to help the music education profession adapt and understand the rapid changes that are taking place in today's popular and more than ever participatory culture. (See Jenkins et al. 2006; Woo 2008).

While there is evidence that FLEs tend toward undemocratic practices, especially in their public festivities and music performances (Nikkanen & Westerlund, in press), there is no guarantee that ILEs serve as adequate substitutes for cultural access (Karlsen 2007) and democratic 'models' of education. Therefore, this proposal seeks to critically investigate the everyday experiences and praxes in ILEs and FLEs in which the learner must "get along with" social realities and conditions while navigating in the culture of education and musical schooling (Bruner 1996; Westerlund 2002, 2008). For creative democratic educational processes to flourish, access and opportunity should be offered to every learner, regardless of age, gender, race, or giftedness (Heimonen 2008).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1) Given our culture's new participatory ethos, how is creative agency constructed in out-of-school informal learning environments (ILEs)? In what ways might ILEs inform the reconstruction of formal learning environments (FLEs)?

2) How can music teacher education develop participatory democracy and creative agency? How can the culture of music education in other formal learning environments (FLEs) be changed based on learners’ own experiences of agency?

3) What kind of conceptual bases, understood as cultural critique, will support the development of creative agency and lifelong interest in music through participatory democracy in formal learning environments (FLEs) and professional learning communities?
RESEARCHERS

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STANCE & HYPOTHESIS

The stance is developed through pragmatist writers such as John Dewey and the critical theorist
Paulo Freire, both of whom promoted pluralistic, progressive, solidaristic, and egalitarian values
within participatory democracy. We wish to critically investigate informal (ILEs) and formal
learning environments FLEs and to explore pedagogical tools for developing creative agency in co-
constructed communities in which both teachers and students are positioned as learners.

Our hypothesis is that reconstruction of the traditional division of creative work and methods for the
dissemination of power in music education must be prerequisites for music to flourish in future
FLEs.

The project involves several interrelated subprojects that aim at fruitful cooperation of bottom-up
'empirical work' and theoretical development. This understanding influences the way in which the
research team has been formed, how the project combines theory and a variety of supporting cases
and the overall value-laden focus of the project (Biesta & Burbules 2003).
EXAMPLES OF SUB-PROJECTS

Heidi Partti: Express yourself: music as a medium in the construction of identity in the ‘digital world’.
Laura Pohjola: Idols singing contest as a cultural and ideological representation of singing and vocal pedagogy.
Nikkanen: Musical performance as a tool of power and empowerment in a school community: Musical performances as democratic 'school rituals'.
Muhonen: Pupils' experiences on song-crafting: developing creative music education practices in primary school.