

Kicking the Habitus: Power, Culture and Pedagogy in the Secondary School Music Curriculum

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Abstract:

Within a theoretical framework drawn from sociologists of education Bourdieu and Bernstein, this paper will examine some of the findings of an ethnographic case study conducted with a secondary school music teacher and one class of her pupils in Wales. This teacher attracted 25% of Year 10 (14-year-old) pupils to study music as an optional subject against a national background of 8% average. The study attempted to examine the lived experiences of the participants in music at home and school. Teacher and pupils had much to say about music teaching and learning in the classroom and beyond. Much of the success of this particular music curriculum model appeared to stem from the teacher's ability to empathize with her pupils' musical interests and recontextualise the National Curriculum for music to reflect these. Pupil voice was instrumental in curriculum design and delivery and the teacher showed the empathy required to 'kick' her Western Art Music-informed habitus to enable her to enter her pupils' musical worlds. There were however points of tension between teacher and pupil evaluations of the curriculum reflecting differences of habitus and unequal distribution of power: the ultimate power over curriculum and pedagogy rested firmly with the teacher. Furthermore, in order to work with her pupils in the time allowed the teacher had to make compromises as to the instruments she could allow the majority of her pupils to play. For many of her pupils, this did not appear to present a problem but for a significant number it alienated them from their music education. 'Informal' pedagogy might offer a solution to these problems by locating the production and development of musical knowledge with the pupils themselves _ for the pupils at the research school this would mean, among other things, allowing groups of pupils opportunities to choose their own curriculum material, providing opportunities for pupils to work in groups Sharing knowledge of 'real' instruments and techniques and a substantial alteration of the balance of power in lessons, allowing pupils increased control over the pace and sequence of their learning. If such pedagogy is to become more widespread, there are big questions to be asked about the type of person suited to becoming a music teacher and the sort of music education and initial teacher education and training they require. How we as a profession respond to the challenges ahead may well be crucial to the future survival of music in schools.

Keywords: Habitus; Curriculum; Pupil voice; Informal pedagogy