

MUSIC LISTENING CIRCLES: CONTRIBUTIONS FROM DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION TO DEMOCRATISING CLASSICAL MUSIC

Development education (DE) has made and continues to make a significant contribution to music education. Specifically, Freire's culture circles have evolved into two musical and literacy education approaches towards dialogic learning in Spain. Through the work of many scholars these Freirean circles have now morphed into two new categories: a) 'tertulias dialógicas literarias' or 'dialogical literacy circles' reflecting the literacy approach; and b) 'tertulias dialógicas musicales' or 'dialogical music listening circles', reflecting the musical education approach. In this article, **Danilo Martins de Castro Chaib** examines how the theory underlining the practice of the music circle impacts and alters our understanding of how Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital relates to Iris Young's cultural imperialism. It will look at the social groups that support these circles such as the federations and confederations created by the participant groups. It will also examine how particular practices coming from the field of development education assist these culture circles in achieving their key objective, i.e. the wider appreciation of music and literature by facilitating the creation of new interpretations and developing tastes born of the particular cultural background of each participant.

Introduction: The Freirean culture circles

The Brazilian philosopher, educator and activist Paulo Freire has both historical and present day significance for development education in Brazil as well as many countries around the world (Freire, 1969; 1970; 1993; 1997; 1997a; 1997b; 1998; 2001). His work has influenced various educations, including peace education (Atack, 2009) and music education (Chaib, 2006b). This article focuses on how practices formed in development education in Barcelona can change the perspective and approach of musical education as a whole.

Freirean liberation theory underpins development education (Hogan & Tormey, 2008), promoting problem-based learning, dialogue and participation within a co-operative learning environment where the teacher engages in learning with the student, and the student engages with other students in addition to learning with the teacher. Similar practices exist in music education, and this article examines music circles based on Freirean culture circles in Barcelona, which demonstrate how an educator's approach can facilitate the demystification of classical music, and turn the music as a tool to understand others' cultures and perspectives.

The 'dialogical action' written about in Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1970), years before Habermas published his *Theory of Communication Action* (2004a; 2004b - originally published in 1981), was based on years of Freire's practice of teaching illiterate people in Brazil in the 1950s and 1960s. The axis of his practice was what he called 'culture circle', which is basically Habermas' theory of free speech put into action. This action through dialogue has had great relevance for development education, becoming a cornerstone of its pedagogical philosophy. The culture circles, organised by Freire and his followers in Brazil in the 1950s, are now being developed for other fields of education, for example music circles as a new approach to music education since 2003 in Barcelona. I will consider how those culture circles are organised, and then look at their implications towards social theories and concepts linked to DE such as cultural capital and cultural imperialism.

The organisation of a culture circle (Bahruth & Steiner, 2000) requires constant reflection and criticism of one's own pedagogy. A circle is created in an attempt to provide pedagogical spaces in which students can develop their voices in a human environment of respect and affirmation. However, other changes must accompany this rearrangement if a culture circle is to evolve. Eye contact among the learners is important, as it can capture the curiosity and imagination of students. The teacher must also consider a change in discourse patterns and views of authority, knowledge, curriculum, and learning. A culture circle does not evolve simply by having students sit in a circle. The challenge for the educator is to provide a focus without dismissing the voices of participants in the dialogue. Teachers must recognise both conscious and unconscious attempts to derail the discourse. The focus can be maintained by asking follow-up questions. Knowing absolutely where a circle is headed would be antithetical to critical pedagogy and would exclude the teacher as a participant-learner in the circle; in essence, this practice promotes the notion that the curriculum should be dynamic, always in construction, and responding to the needs of the learners. Rather than dismissing the life experiences of each student, the teacher recognises that students can only make new meanings based upon prior understandings anchored in the organic nature of their knowing.

This type of knowing has been labelled by Ramon Flecha as 'cultural intelligence'. Cultural intelligence is a crucial principle of dialogic learning, and for this it is imperative that the teacher provide a space in which all views can be voiced freely and safely. Only when all views are heard can we claim that the heterogeneous nature of our culture (Bahruth & Steiner, 2000) is most widely represented in the circle. Flecha (2000) calls this heterogeneous nature of our

culture an 'equality of differences' when describing how dialogic learning can awaken the meaning of learning among students as a way of being recognised positively and respected by others. Culture circles, as such, deconstruct prior mainstream school experiences (Bahruth & Steiner, 2000).

Culture circles in Spain: The dialogic 'tertulias'

The culture circles were further developed in the 1980s and are currently used in several Spanish schools for adult education in a type of reading group called 'tertulia literaria' (Aubert & Soler, 2001; Flecha, 2000). These 'reading circles' target adult literacy learners with no academic background, i.e., those who attend adult basic education, and they focus on reading literary classics. As part of this experience, adults come to read, discuss, and enjoy what are generally regarded as classic works of literature by authors that they would not have read up to that point such as Franz Kafka, James Joyce, Émile Zola, and Federico García Lorca (Soler, 2001). These tertulias literarias are defined by three main characteristics (Puigvert, et al., 2000):

- a) The programme targets adult learners with low literacy skills;
- b) The readings are widely regarded as literary classics; and
- c) The process is based on dialogic learning.

Both tertulia literaria and tertulia musical are models of cultural circles derived from the field of development education. Using these approaches it has been possible to extend these techniques to areas such as professional training (Soler, 2004; Chaib 2006a), prison rehabilitation programmes (Loza Aguirre, 2004), and music education (Chaib, 2006b).

Following the example of the tertulias literarias in Barcelona, this pedagogical approach was applied to music education and implemented in 2004 (Chaib, 2006b) at the education centre Escola de Persones Adultes La Verneda-Sant Martí (Sánchez Aroca, 1999; Valls, 2000). The music listening circles approach changed focus from reading to listening to classical music. Participants listen, discuss and enjoy classical music compositions they had not heard before such as Haydn's Quartets, Beethoven's Symphonies, Bach's Suites, and Stravinsky's Symphonic Poems and Ballets, i.e. music that is regarded as 'erudite' and generally falling into the 'snobbish' category of the type of music more commonly associated to people with a certain level of academic background. With the same characteristics as tertulia literarias, but in the field of music, the programme targets adult learners with very low standards of

‘academic listening skills’ e.g. people who have never attended an orchestral performance or possibly even seen instruments like cellos or oboes. This pedagogical model focuses on listening to Western classical music, from Gregorian chant to contemporary classical, and has been developed on the basis of dialogic learning principles.

Similar to the Freirean culture circles, each music listening circle has a co-ordinator who attempts to maintain the egalitarian nature of the dialogue both among the participants and between the participants and him/herself. A selected piece of music is played and ideally each participant will have also listened to it independently prior to the session and have a comment prepared. Each comment becomes a ‘contribution’ to the dialogic process and all contributions must be equally listened to and considered (Puigvert, et al., 2000). In dialogic learning, the co-ordinator’s opinion is only as valid as the participants’ opinions and not accorded a higher value (Gomez, 2000). Ideas and contributions made by people, whether in class or in the management and decision-making bodies, are valued according to the validity of the arguments made rather than to the position of power of the person who makes them (Habermas, 1987; 2004a; 2004b). These communicative skills of dialogue are inherent in all people and are optimised through the interaction among equals with the common purpose of expanding knowledge (Fisas, et al., 2000). The act of sharing previously unfamiliar knowledge transforms it into a new democratic knowledge, with the help of teachers who practice Freire’s ideas. These educators are referred to as ‘transformative intellectuals’, a term meaning educationalists who render curricula and schooling problematical in the minds of their students, interrogating the ideologies, values and interests at work in education, with a view to raising the political consciousness of students and students’ insights into their own life situations (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1986).

Classical music as cultural capital

Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron (1977) have written extensively about how the relatively autonomous character of a school conceals its function as the most effective means for the cultural reproduction of the privileges of the dominant class. The formalised character of the school, such as its fixed curriculum, syllabi, examinations and school regulations, authorises it to transmit selected middle-class knowledge to all pupils.

Music classrooms are no exception to this socio-cultural school rule (Koizumi, 2002). Formal features include: being under constant surveillance by adults; being under pressure from others' evaluations; playing and listening to music not for the primary purpose of enjoyment but rather of becoming 'educated'; and acquiring musical cultural capital through systematic and scholastic means (Bourdieu, 1984:63–83). This cultural capital is being neglected by both the mass media as well as the sectors that educate the working class. It creates two types of knowledge and musical taste, i.e. that which belongs to those who are 'educated' (in music schools and familiar with orchestras and classical music) and those who are less 'educated' i.e. do not possess the tools to decode the language of classical music and extract their own interpretations from the many possible meanings available within the music.

Cultural capital is identified by Bourdieu (1986) as existing in three different states:

“First, it exists in the ensemble of cultivated dispositions that are internalized by the individual through socialization and that constitute schemes of appreciation and understanding. Second, Cultural Capital exists in the objectified form of objects, such as books, works of art, and scientific instruments, which require specialized cultural abilities to use and understand. Third, Cultural Capital exists in an institutionalized form, by which Bourdieu means the educational credential system” (Swartz, 1997).

Classical music assumes the form of cultural capital in all those states, as the appreciation and understanding require specialised cultural abilities to use musical instruments and understand musical phrases and meanings. Classical music assumes many institutionalised forms such as symphonic orchestras for performing and producing music commodities and conservatoires for music education. Classical music as cultural capital displays a fetishist behaviour (Adorno, 1983) inasmuch as the values inherent in the music are intrinsically impregnated with the idea of class stratification. It is regarded as the music of the élite, and it is ideologically understood that only a few can understand its language.

We can understand that music education rooted in development education, specifically Paulo Freire's work, can become a site for resistance. Such a form of music education has the potential to make classical music more democratic, a site of praxis where classical music can be

reinterpreted through dialogue, with each piece listened to by students juxtaposed with their reality. From this perspective, the heretofore hidden codes of this type of cultural capital start to become clearer/more explicit or simply vanish to give way to codes that make more sense to the reality of the listener.

Transforming cultural capital and overcoming cultural imperialism

The theory developed by Paulo Freire (1970) relates the reality of the reader/listener to the object of study and engages the commitment of communities to education developed in their geographical environment (Elboj, et al., 2002). Participants are re-interpreting and, through dialogue, changing the dominant meanings of cultural imperialism. According to Young (1990) cultural imperialism involves the universalisation of a dominant group's experience and culture, and its establishment as the norm. Because the values and perspectives of dominant groups permeate cultural and institutional norms, members of oppressed groups have their lives interpreted through the lens of the dominant group, defined as 'common sense'. Furthermore, oppressed groups often internalise the negative stereotypes to which their group is subjected (Baker, et al., 2004; Bell, 1997; Freire 1997a; 1997b). The focus of the music circles is on listening to what would be regarded by the dominant groups as the pinnacles of musical achievement, and to act as a culture study (Giroux, 1986). The procedure followed within these circles tries to change the meaning of those cultural products which express the dominant group's perspective on and interpretation of events and elements in society, including other groups in society, insofar as they attain cultural status at all (Young, 1990). Thus the challenge of these circles is, through dialogue, to change the cultural status and meaning of those products.

A significant consequence of the establishment of these circles has been the formation of social organisations, such as the Catalan FACEPA (Federació d' Associacions Culturals de Persones Adultes), the Catalan federation of participant associations, which began in 1996 with four participants based in adult school associations. By 2005 there were fourteen federated associations plus other non-federated ones participating in FACEPA's activities (FACEPA 1998, 2005). Another example is the Spanish CONFAPEA (2005) (Confederation of participants in adult education and democratic cultural federations and associations), where participants from all schools can share their experiences and promote local and national activities. This democratic approach is evident from the preamble of CONFAPEA Participants' Bill of Rights:

“Education, an inalienable right of adults, has to serve as an instrument for emancipation, which makes possible the overcoming of social inequalities and power relations” (FACEPA, 1998).

In the academic field, there is CREA (the Centre of Research for Education of Adults in theories and practice that overcome inequalities) located in the University of Barcelona which conducts research rooted in Freirean principles (CREA, 1992, 1993, 1994a, 1994b, 1995-98). These culturally specific networks and organisations (FACEPA, CONFAPEA and CREA) demonstrate the benefits of experiences and affirmations gained through practices as a cumulatively progressive movement where the five different modalities of oppression proposed by Young (violence, cultural imperialism, exploitation, marginalisation and powerlessness) are recognised (1990). Music listening circles challenge cultural imperialism principally through one of CREA’s principles: cultural intelligence (Aubert, et al., 2004; Flecha, 2000).

According to Baker, et al., 2004, the idea of interculturalism involves critical dialogue among people with different cultural commitments in which participants try to engage constructively in challenging each others’ prejudices and develop a truly egalitarian ethos. Within musical circles, every person becomes more consciously aware of their own cultural intelligence, present at any age and regardless of his or her prior practical or academic experience (CREA, 1995-98).

Through the practice of egalitarian dialogue within the music circles, participants can overcome the oppression exercised by cultural imperialism through its marginalisation of certain groups toward an awareness of the historical repertoire of music of the Western world. In this way, Freire’s model of education can help challenge social-class based on inequalities in education, transforming oppressive limits and expanding frontiers to acquire knowledge formerly restricted to cultural capital.

Acknowledging cultural intelligence

Cultural intelligence takes effect when people use the knowledge gained as cultural capital and relate it to their own reality. This results in individuals gaining new meaning, comparing different point of views and creating new solutions defying the logic imposed by the academy and the standard knowledge. This means that when working class meets cultural capital, it

manifests itself in the form of a critical encounter which transforms and incorporates this cultural capital into its own cultural intelligence. This is not an easy task, as the working class has to emancipate itself from the ideological notion that certain knowledge is too ‘complicated’ or ‘impossible’ for the working classes to understand. As Freire comments:

“(Literacy circles in poor areas) only make sense in the context of a humanising process. In other words, they should open up conjointly the possibility of a socio-historical and political equivalent of psychoanalysis whereby the sense of self-blame that has been falsely interjected can be cast out. This expulsion of self-blame corresponds to the expulsion of the invasive shadow of the oppressor that inhabits the psyche of the oppressed” (Freire, 1998:78).

This self-blame that Freire refers to in *Pedagogy of Freedom* leads people to use power claims to hide behind ideological values for fear of confronting another opinion, for fear of the possibility of dialogue. Dialogue helps us better understand the music we are listening to. People realise that there is no shame in not being familiar with the work of Cervantes, Joyce, Bach or Beethoven, and instead bring them to their realities. Below are quotes from literacy and music circle participants:

“I had never gone to school... and when they decided to start the literacy circle they told me ‘why don’t you come?’ and I had never been in such a thing, and I said, ‘I don’t even know what this is!’ and we started with a book, and in so little time, I say ‘my God!’ I had never thought I would be able to read something like that!” (Reme, participant, in Soler, 2001).

“If it was to only listen to music, I would decide to stay at home. What brings me here to this school is my opportunity to share my impressions and listen to other opinions, to appreciate more the music that I am listening to” (Julia, participant of Music Circle, La Verneda, Barcelona, 2008).

“In my house music was nothing but noise – then my wife insisted for me to come and now I can understand more about the music she used to listen to. I feel now part of it” (Juán, participant of Music Circle, La Verneda, Barcelona, 2008).

“I love to hear what the others have to say about the music we are listening to. There are always times when I say to myself ‘I never thought to listen with that point of view’ – and then you realise the real value of the tertulias” (Adelaida, participant of Music Circle, La Verneda, Barcelona, 2008).

Cultural intelligence is closely linked with two concepts: competency and skills (De Botton, et al., 2005). This means it acknowledges the universal status of learning (competency), i.e., the capacity that everyone has for acting in the world, and the potential for creativity and cultural creation (skills), i.e., the several forms of knowledge that one can develop in a dialogic society. This concept of intelligence is associated with Habermas’s procedural concept of communicative rationality (Habermas, 2004a) in which participants use knowledge to reach understanding and co-ordinate their actions. Concepts of practical and academic intelligence, although useful, are limited to what Habermas calls ‘teleological action’ (i.e. targeted to achieving personal goals).

Communicative action takes us to a broader concept of intelligence, cultural intelligence, which considers the possibility of people using communicative competencies and developing learning strategies through dialogue and co-operation with others, rather than by using academic or practical skills (Gomez, 2000). Habermas states that the critique of cultural capital (‘value standards’) will emancipate the cultural value so important to cultural intelligence:

“Cultural values do not count as universal; they are, as the name indicates, located within the horizon of the lifeworld of a specific group or culture. And values can be made plausible only in the context of a particular form of life. Thus the critique of value standards presupposes a shared pre-understanding among participants in the argument, a pre-understanding that is not at their disposal but constitutes and at the same time circumscribes the domain of the thematized validity claims.

Only the truth of propositions and the rightness of moral norms and the comprehensibility or well-formedness of symbolic expressions are, by their very meaning, universal validity claims that can be tested in discourse” (Habermas, 2004a:42).

Cultural intelligence has three fundamental elements: interactive self-confidence, cultural transference and dialogic creativity, all present within the practices conducted in the music circles:

- *Interactive self-confidence*, or recognition of important skills possessed in other areas. Within the literary and musical circles, the members talk about how well they can make deals at the market, resolve a family conflict and return to harmonious coexistence, organise a search for a job, etc. (De Botton, et al., 2005);
- *Cultural transference* can manifest itself as the discovery of possibilities for demonstrating cultural intelligence in the new academic context (Flecha, 2000). The oral cultural practices of singing, listening to the radio or even listening to birds' song prove their 'transferability' to the process of listening to classical music, creating in the process deeper music and poetry analyses. Such cultural intelligence is also transferable to an academic context;
- *Dialogic creativity* is related to the confirmation of learning generated by participants' contributions. The various interpretations given can vary from that which has been previously written on the topic, a result of the sharing of experiences, ideas and feelings. The teleological action is put into question with communicative action, sharing the cultural intelligence through egalitarian dialogue. The intelligence of all participants of the dialogic group moves beyond each individual member and 'transfers' to other members of the group.

This creativity is stimulated by a structured curiosity, and the fact that all this material is received through the act of dialogue makes it subject to critical action, transforming its meaning into a coherent epistemological knowledge to the reality of the listener. As Freire said:

“There could be no creativity without the curiosity that moves us and sets us patiently impatient before a world that we did not make, to add to it something of our own making...One of the fundamental types of knowledge in my critical-educative practice is that which stresses the need for spontaneous curiosity to develop into epistemological curiosity” (Freire, 1998:83).

Education is human service work. It is based on a dialogue between students and teachers and amongst students. By listening to classical music, dialoguing and reflecting together, students overcome barriers that have been traditionally excluding them from education and social participation, providing them with valuable tools for developing educational alternatives. These alternatives can include, for example attending a concert and confidently commenting on it; discussing the lives of composers; or learning a musical

instrument to gain more perspective about the music universe. These are experiences that enrich the new democratic and communicative perspective for music education curricula (Arostegui, 2004).

Classical music assumes other meanings with cultural intelligence, putting in question all fetishism impregnated previously as cultural capital. As cultural capital, classical music is alienated from the working class, and only through dialogic learning, where the music can be listened to without being a form of oppression, can this alienation be persuaded to turn the music into part of their reality. Absorbing the knowledge intrinsic in classical music, this type of listening can demystify the nature of cultural capital, allowing participants to acknowledge their own cultural intelligence. By transforming parameters imposed by the élite, bringing closer an art previously denied to them, people can challenge social-class based inequalities not only in education, but in their lives.

A critical approach to classical music is imperative so as to ensure that it is not simplistically converted into something merely 'banal' or, conversely, 'exotic'. That is why it is so important to appreciate the music that one is listening to, to express opinions about it, discover its history and epistemological codes, and more importantly, share that discovery with others. The learning process can thereby become a social event, bringing an enriched meaning to music that the original artists such as Beethoven would have desired.

Conclusion

Development education has an importance that extends beyond its own borders to education as a whole, and more specifically in the context of this discussion, music education. Freire's perspective helps to break the iron cage where classical music is inserted as cultural capital. As Roland Tormey (2005) suggests, this approach is not only an educational approach but also allows the learner to come to their own decisions rather than having perspectives foisted upon them, albeit for the best possible reasons.

Development education (Edleston, 2006) promotes critical reflection that includes the context as well as the content of learning, where education institutions themselves are challenged. When this critical reflection is placed in the context of learning classical music, the cultural capital embedded within it is challenged as well.

Development education as a transformative process through dialogue can support the making of a complete being and, even, the process of becoming itself (Cruikshanks, 2006). As Freire suggests, we can only attempt to play a part in an ongoing process of transformation, and trust that those individuals who have been moved enough to consider taking action to change the world, will follow through with committed action as personal situations and circumstances allow.

As an epilogue it is worth noting that the practice of music circles illustrated above is currently being increasingly incorporated into development education practice in the city of São Carlos, Brazil. As a music teacher in Brazil, I look forward to extending these practices and assisting in the enrichment of the meaning of classical music with all the diversity of sounds we can find in my country, and with no restriction applied to whoever wants to listen or perform.

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