

Music Education Should be on Guard Against the Negative Effects of the Education Concept of Neoliberalism - Based on the Value of Music Education Body of Papers

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Abstract: The education concept of neoliberalism is the conceptual product of neoliberalism in the field of education. Since 1970s, under the influence of the worldwide popularity of the education concept of neoliberalism, music education has gradually shown a tendency of “de-aestheticization” and “utilitarianism”. This paper, re-interprets the value of music education through the critical reflection on the education concept of neoliberalism, hoping that people will acquire a clearer understanding.

Keywords: Music education; Neoliberalism; Negative effects; Value orientation

Neoliberalism, following classical liberalism and modern liberalism, became popular in western countries in the 1970s. The concept of neoliberalism advocates “privatization” and “marketization”, believing that all decisions concerning politics, education and society should serve the “free market” to ensure the maximization of economic benefits. The education concept of neoliberalism, as the product of neoliberalism thought, has exerted a strong influence on music education, but meanwhile, it produces many problems. Analyzing the negative effects of these problems is helpful for us to seek the value of music education and provide reference for the development of music education in China.

1. A bird’s-eye view of the education concept of neoliberalism

The education concept of neoliberalism is the reflection of neoliberalism in the field of education. As Michael W. Apple said, “There are two main viewpoints of neoliberalism on education reform: one is to promote the relationship between education and economy; and the other is to give schools direct access to the market.^[1]” According to neoliberalism, the value of education lies in enabling the educated to better adapt to the future career so as to contribute to the development of global business. The education concept of “serving the market” has been deeply recognized by western capitalist countries represented by Britain and the United States, and has rapidly spread to the world, constantly affecting all fields of education. The main characteristics of the education concept of neoliberalism are shown in the following three aspects:

1.1 Market-oriented education

Neoliberalism trumpets the decisive role of markets in allocating resources and the globalization of capital. Based on this, western capitalist countries led by Britain and the United States vigorously promote the reform of education system, introducing economic factors and market factors into school management. Neoliberals believe that “the criterion for judging the value of all knowledge is ‘market’, and whatever is beneficial to the market must be beneficial to society. Therefore, knowledge with a market is valuable and useful, while knowledge without a market, no matter how scientific, is useless. In the knowledge economy, all knowledge must accept the test of the market.^[2]” Driven by “market orientation”, parents become “consumers” and education is “commodity” and parents can choose more suitable education for their children based on their own ability. On the other hand, neoliberals consider that ordinary schools must also be market-oriented and constantly demonstrate their competitive advantages to attract parents to pay for their “educational products”.

1.2 Privatization of education

Neoliberals are not optimistic about government-led public education, because they think that the over-centralized education system is not conducive to the competition between schools, not to mention the improvement of education level, and may lead to the abuse of education funds and the low awareness of competition among students. Neoliberals stress that education can only be made efficient by introducing competition from private schools. As a result, neoliberals have been pressing the government to reduce or stop spending on public areas such as education and advocating the establishment of private schools as an option for parents. At the same time, private schools can select students according to their own needs to ensure efficient output.

2. Music education under neoliberalism

The education concept of neoliberalism that advocates “education serves the market” regards education as a tool for capitalists to make profits. In the field of music education, the influence of the education concept of neoliberalism can be seen everywhere, such as the tendency of specialization, hierarchy and standardization presented by music education.

2.1 Specialization tendency

In order to enable students to be better accepted by the “free market”, the education concept of neoliberalism weakens the educational function of music education and instead emphasizes the professional music learning. This tendency of education specialization takes music education as the teaching of musical skills while ignoring the humanistic effect of music, and regards the level of students’ “singing and playing” as the only criterion to test the achievement of music learning. In short, professional music education treats students as containers and inculcates them with various abstract music concepts, making music learning a boring training for students in listening, music recognition, skills, ear training and other aspects.

2.2 Stratification tendency

For some people at the bottom of the social ladder, their limited economic ability will result in their lack of the right to study music. In addition, in western capitalist countries represented by Britain and the United States, due to the widespread phenomenon of multi-immigrants, multi-races and various groups interwoven together, the stratification tendency of education is particularly obvious, and exclusion often occurs among different groups. As Ryan asserts, “exclusion not only happens in schools and communities, but also happens to everyone, who, to varying degrees, has suffered rejection from our current social, economic systems.” The phenomenon of stratification has become a normal state of music education under the influence of neoliberalism.

2.3 Standardization tendency

Neoliberals consider that the task of schools is to provide high-quality “output” in line with the needs of the market by using standardized education models. In the field of music education, standardized “output” emphasizes the completion of the necessary skill training in accordance with the prescribed teaching content within the prescribed time. This education model ignores the formation of students’ personality, character and ethics in music education, and pays little attention to the development of students’ individuality. And the music works taught under this education model do not pay attention to the interests of students. In terms of teaching inspection and evaluation, this education model often measure students’ musical achievements superficially through standardized written tests on music theory, or through students’ performance on several assigned pieces of music.

3. Reinterpretation of the value of music education

Music and education, as important parts of human culture, are closely linked because they are both committed to the overall prosperity of human beings, laying emphasis on individual development, advocating fairness and justice, and promoting learners’ correct outlook on life and values. Therefore, music education cannot be equated with the pure technical training, the market commodity. The primary concern of music education is “people”, and the core is to pay attention to the development of people’s subjectivity and promote people’s individual socialization. Music teaching should promote the cultivation of humanity.” Consequently, first of all, the value of music education rests with entrusting rights to students, so that students can experience happiness in the process of music learning, and master the ability to express themselves and change themselves through music; secondly, music education helps to inherit the traditional culture of the nation, understand the excellent culture of each nation, and establish the world outlook of equality, inclusiveness and sharing; finally, music education requires students to form correct ethical values by guiding them to learn excellent music works.

4. Conclusion

As for the value orientation of music education, the most common mistake we make is the lack of thinking about its essence. As a result, music education is often influenced by philosophical thoughts that are not from music education itself, and therefore goes astray. For the study on the value of music education, we should avoid attaching ourselves to a certain educational theory without thinking, and regard it as a creed. The famous music educator David.J.Elliott said, “Those educational theories that are not for the purpose of music education are not enough to explain students’ personal, phenomenal and emotional music experience from the reasons, contents and methods.”

There is no end to exploring the value of music education. The significance of studying the value of music education is not to eliminate the existing viewpoints, but to reach the general consensus that “music education should stick to ethics and take education as the foundation” in the continuous combination of theory and practice, and to gain insights into the advantages and disadvantages of various educational theories.

References:

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