



The Self-Orientalization of Polish Music Education

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Abstract

Polish and international scholars have frequently made use of the postcolonial lens as a presumably valid tool to examine conditions in post-soviet Eastern Europe. The mutual Orientalization of the “other” during the Cold War period in both democratic and communist camps appears to have occasioned prevailing after-effects in the field of Polish music education. This article discusses the above thesis in relation to the writings of two highly influential representatives of postcolonial thought who are also personally connected to the world of music: Edward Said and Rabindranath Tagore. Sections one and two explain the use of the concept of Orientalism as an analytical framework for the article and briefly discuss the rationale behind looking at Poland as a postcolonial country. Next, selected articles by Polish scholars are being analyzed with regard to the historical context of music education in Poland and a broader international perspective. The contemporary discourse of Polish educational policymakers is being discussed with regard to the underlying philosophical and ideological approaches. Finally, the article emphasizes some of the main issues preventing the system of general music education in Poland from acquiring a more inclusive and democratic framework and proposes possible future directions for sustainable change.

Keywords: music education, Orientalism, Poland, Eastern Europe, postcolonial theory

Orientalism as an analytical framework

Although Edward Said (1935-2003), the founder of postcolonial studies as an academic field, did not directly address education in most of his writings, his ideas remain highly relevant through his critique of the general socio-political construct in which education is set. An accomplished classical pianist himself, Said made significant contributions to the field of music education in particular, as co-founder, together with Daniel Barenboim, of the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra of young Israeli and Palestinian musicians. The Barenboim–Said Foundation also supported many educational projects, including the Early Childhood Musical Education Project in Andalusia (Barenboim-Said Foundation, n.d.). Said (1978) introduced the concept of Orientalism, addressing general issues such as “the representation of other cultures, societies, histories; the relationship between power and knowledge; the role of relationships between different kinds of texts, between text and context, between text and history” (Said, 1985). The text immediately became both popular and controversial among scholars and was subject to

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critique, some of which Said comprehensively addressed in his later lectures and publications. Orientalism as a concept, however, originally used with reference to Western depictions of the Orient, has become a popular framework for analyzing different forms of “othering” in an increasingly multicultural world.

There are at least two reasons why Said’s concepts of orientalism should be considered a relevant tool for educational studies: firstly, education is always part of a bigger socio-economic puzzle, and as such, it is inevitably political. Every aspect of education, from *curriculum* content, to teaching methods, is interpreted through a lens constituted by a set of values specific to a particular country, time, and political system. As Said (1985) observes, “Even so relatively inert an object as a literary text is commonly supposed to gain some of its identity from its historical moment interacting with the attentions, judgements, scholarship, and performances of its readers”. Secondly, education is indeed an essential tool, either for or against a change of the sociopolitical *status quo*, the forefront of all political friction. Whilst it might appear obvious that analyzing a country’s educational model without being aware of the broader historical and sociopolitical context can hardly produce valid conclusions, this alone might not be sufficient to understand the complex nature of relationships between education and politics. Said emphasizes the fundamental meaning of discourse for imposing and preserving doctrines and power structures.

Polish music education seems to be stuck in a vicious cycle of dissatisfaction, shared by most stakeholders and reflected in many alarming studies indicating low musical literacy among compulsory school pupils (Weiner & Waluga, 2016), problems related to teachers’ motivation and competence in both general education and music schools (Chmurzynska, 2012; Krajewski & Schmidt, 2014), and low social status of music-related professions (Walczak et al., 2016). Nevertheless, many scholars agree that numerous attempts at introducing sustainable change in the field have had a limited impact on the classroom reality in Polish schools (Łabanow-Jastrząb & Białkowski, 2020; Przychodzińska, 2001; Rakowski, 2010). I propose the postcolonial lens as a potential tool to overcome this impasse through broadening the scope of the investigation beyond a narrow view of education. Said (1985) explains: “there is no such fixed and non-trivial object as Shakespeare independent of his editors, the actors who played his roles, the translators who put him in other languages, the hundreds of millions of readers who have read him or watched performances of his plays since the sixteenth century”. Indeed, problems in education do not originate from within the classroom, and they cannot be solved within one. Critique influenced by postcolonial discourse can serve as a helpful lens in the process of exploring underlying issues in pedagogy, but it can also be a sobering mirror. This article discusses some of the dilemmas of the debate around music education in Poland in the context of Edward Said’s concept of Orientalism and the pedagogical thought of Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941). Both Said and Tagore made fundamental contributions to postcolonial critique, and both were renowned musicians. Tagore naturally fits into this framework as a philosopher deeply involved in education who developed his pedagogical concept by balancing between Indian national heritage and the institutional *status quo* of the British schooling system. Another reason for mentioning Tagore is the apparent similarity of some of his ideas to the pedagogical approach developed by the Polish physician, pedagogue and writer Janusz Korczak (1878-1942) who together with Maria “Maryna” Rogowska-Falska (1877-1944) and Stefania Wilczyńska (1886-1942) started implementing a new philosophy of education in Poland in the

early twentieth century. Both Korczak and Tagore were influenced by the thought of American philosopher John Dewey and both emphasized the importance of child-centered education. Korczak remains a key figure in Polish pedagogical thought, however his progressive concepts, while admirable, increasingly seem disconnected from actual classroom practices. In the field of Polish post-war *music* education, they hardly gained any recognition.

Poland as a postcolonial country

Over the past few decades, Polish and international scholars frequently reached out for the postcolonial lens as an arguably valid tool to examine Eastern Europe after the political re-orientation of the region initiated by the rise of the Solidarity movement in Poland and sealed by the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The fall of communism, as well as the political aftermath of the wars in the former Yugoslavia, drew significant attention in scholarly writing (Kovačević, 2008), marking an end to the ideological framework established after the Second World War. Some scholars claim that the mutual orientalizing (Kovačević, 2008; Said, 1985) of the “other” during the Cold War period in the democratic and communist camps has prevailing after-effects. A highly antagonizing discourse helped justify the political transition, at a cost of perpetuating the dependence of post-Soviet countries from the West as part of their new identity. This process was later reinforced by native anti-communist narratives, leading to Eastern Europe’s particular form of “self-orientalization” (Kovačević, 2008). However, looking at the Polish political and socio-economic situation through a postcolonial lens can also be problematic. After appearing to become a trend about a decade ago, the interest of Polish scholars in this epistemological framework decreased. Some scholars presented the postcolonial paradigm as an important and valid tool for interpreting contemporary events in Poland (Carey & Raciborski, 2004; Thompson, 2010; 2014), while others seemed to be more skeptical, emphasizing the possible misuse of postcolonial theory in the Eastern-European context (Borkowska-Arciuch, 2010). Nevertheless, the postcolonial lens, if applied with care, promises in some ways to shed new light on certain issues of Polish music education and its particular isolation.

Happy island with issues

In her article “Music Education in Poland – a Solitary Island or Integral Element of the Land of Education”, Zofia Konaszekiewicz (2008), who for years chaired the Music Education Department of the Fryderyk Chopin Music University in Warsaw, draws a specific picture of the Polish music education system. In this picture, communist Poland is a “happy island”, where “high culture” and inclusive music education are doing great to such an extent that the whole world envies them. Unfortunately, the island’s high prosperity is brutally terminated by political changes in 1989. The island was allegedly “crushed” against the mentality of the young generation and spoiled by the ideas of the 1968 cultural revolution. Young people, driven by pop culture, reject the three fundamental values of European heritage: objective truth, objective good, and objective beauty, replacing them with relativism, nihilism and hedonism (Konaszekiewicz, 2008). According to Konaszekiewicz, the attitude of the young generation was a product of political change rather than a strong expression of a previously suppressed voice.

As a result, Poland had to face the same issues with which the West had already been struggling for decades (Konaszkiwicz, 2008). Konaszkiwicz's article does not provide a more in-depth explanation to link the 1968 cultural revolution across a two-decade-long gap to the political and aesthetic changes in Eastern Europe in the 1990s, nor does it specify how "fundamental European values" should be placed with regard to contemporary philosophical thought. Rather, it seems to be rooted in a pre-Geertzian understanding of cultural relativism (Cohen, 1989; Geertz, 1984). It is also unclear what evidence might support the author's claims regarding the putative worldwide acclaim of communist Poland's music education. Polish scholars of that time did make a notable contribution to international educational debates published in renowned journals (Manturzevska, 1978; 1979), however, there does not seem to be much Western scholarly writing about the Polish music education system before 1989, and some of the comparative studies made by foreign scholars are rather critical, describing it then already as highly exclusive (Cykler, 1971).² It is also worth noting that prominent Polish publicists used the term "deaf generation" with regard to the younger generation's music culture already in the 1960' (Szwarcman, 2010), which contradicts claims of a dramatic change happening three decades later. Furthermore, Poland never was much of an isolated island, as Konaszkiwicz depicts in her essay: the Polish section of the International Society for Music Education (ISME) was established back in 1965 (Przychodzińska-Kaciczak, 1987), and popular music in the educational context was discussed on international symposia held in Poland already in the early 1980s (Denisiuk, 1980). Nevertheless, today's classroom reality of Polish schools is still greatly informed by pedagogical approaches emphasizing competitive aspects of music teaching and learning, offering little space for pupils' creativity and self-expression (Chmurzynska, 2012; Krajewski & Schmidt, 2014).

Child-centered?

A holistic approach to education was essential to Rabindranath Tagore's pedagogical thought (Samuel, 2010). In his attempt to empower Indian national education, Tagore's philosophical perspective highlights the shortcomings of the British-imposed schooling system rather than making politics his apparent point of departure. The framework proposed by Tagore was individual- and community-centered at the same time, presenting individual growth and the development of society as intrinsically connected (Cenkner, 1976; Samuel, 2010). Similar to Korczak (1919), Tagore approached education from a child's perspective (Samuel, 2010). He emphasized the importance of the learning environment and was a strong advocate for creativity, spontaneity and freedom in education, as well as for the importance of learning through experience (Samuel, 2010; Tagore, 1980). Stressing the importance of the national heritage and local language, in particular, Tagore was also well aware of the approaching challenges for education related to cultural diversity and globalization (Samuel, 2010).

In post-war communist Poland, the designers of the new music education system chose to take a radically different approach than the one endorsed by Tagore. Music education was

² Despite opposing scholarly opinions regarding the status of general music education in communist Poland, there is sufficient evidence to justify the claim that particular forms of amateur music making were indeed highly popular and supported by the state (Nowak, 2017; Witkowska-Nowicka, 1978) and early childhood music education was given significant attention (Konaszkiwicz, 2008; Witkowska-Nowicka, 1978), as well as music training programs for schoolteachers (Denisiuk, 1980).

rebuilt according to a nineteenth-century model and both conceptually and formally detached from other pedagogical fields (Rakowski, 2010). Maria Przychodzińska, one of the most significant Polish music pedagogists of the twentieth century—who authored the “Contemporary Polish Pluralistic Concept of Music Education”, a central concept for general Polish music education after 1970 (Kalarus & Konkol, 2017)—emphasizes the significant role of classical composers, i.e. Karol Szymanowski, and the philosophy of Jean-Jacques Rousseau in shaping the theoretical framework for Polish music education in the late nineteenth century (Przychodzińska, 2001).

The idyllic landscape suggested by Konaszkiewicz (2008), is in reality neither idyllic nor a continuum based on unanimous consent. Several attempts were made to introduce a more egalitarian educational model in Polish schools (Kalarus & Konkol, 2017; Kołodziejcki, 2014; Przychodzińska, 2001; Rakowski, 2010). The first major new concept was introduced in the early 1960s, vastly influenced by the work of Kodaly, Orff, Mursell, Freinet and Kobalevsky (Kalarus & Konkol, 2017; Kołodziejcki, 2014). Eventually, neither Kodaly nor Orff were granted a strong position in the Polish general music education system, as opposed to for example Estonia which at that time was part of the Soviet Union (Sepp et al., 2019). In the 1970s, Przychodzińska, formulating the basics of her New Pedagogy (Kołodziejcki, 2014) alongside Burowska, made a clear attempt to revive the connection between Polish and Western pedagogic thought, referring to John Dewey’s philosophy of education and proposing a child-centered, well-informed yet original pedagogical framework. Przychodzińska’s approach emphasizes the child’s free expression and creativity, as well as the importance of integration of music, visual arts, literature, movement, film and theatre (Kalarus & Konkol, 2017). This experiment, although formally accepted by the communist government as a theoretical framework, once turned into practice suffered from severe incoherence. The utilitarian approach towards music as a purely aesthetic tool typical for soc-realistic art and endorsed by the communist government (Przychodzińska, 2001) was contradictory to the ideas of dialogue and a child’s freedom of artistic expression proposed by Przychodzińska and Burowska. In the field of music education, the talent-focused, highly competitive teaching approach was hardly subject to serious debate. Consecutive generations of music school teachers originating from the traditional teacher training system in Poland seem to preserve a strong tendency for imposing this strict teaching model, based to a great extent on regular criticism towards the students rather than praising their achievements and fostering their self-esteem. A study conducted in 2012 by Chmurzyńska among piano teachers in Polish primary music schools showed that teachers lack pedagogical knowledge and awareness regarding how their behavior influences the students’ motivation. Chmurzyńska (2012) found that “it was obvious that constant criticism, highlighting mistakes, and underestimating the pupils’ effort did not encourage them to work harder. Yet the teachers continued to base their pedagogical strategies on pointing out mistakes”. General and arts education in Poland appear to be, in the above context, “two flipsides” of the same coin, two crooked mirrors facing one another.

Self-orientation

Arts education and general education in communist Poland were separated and remain within jurisdictions of separate ministries until the present day (Rakowski, 2010).³ Przychodzińska, in tune with Rakowski, claimed that in communist Poland a strong distinction between offering *exclusive arts education* that provides high-quality teaching to a very small part of the population, and *general education* where art and music are highly neglected, was established and has persisted over decades. Moreover, she highlights a significant phenomenon: the pre-war pedagogical concept for music education developed by Mikketa merged in the post-war period with the strict and equally exclusive Soviet educational model. As a result of this unfortunate and unintentional fusion, this historically important part of the Polish educational legacy became in many ways indistinguishable from the framework endorsed by the country's oppressive neighbor (Przychodzińska, 2001). In the above context, questioning the very authoritarian educational model without making it a highly controversial and ambivalent political statement has become nearly impossible.⁴

In Poland, the shift towards more inclusive and diverse music education, as observed in most Western-European and Nordic countries, has not yet occurred. While in the Scandinavian countries it is becoming an important part of the scholarly debate whether the shift towards popular music as a core ingredient of general music education has not gone too far (Hebert & Hauge, 2019), in Poland the problems connected to a highly exclusive and conservative educational model have not been fully recognized and acknowledged and are hardly part of a genuine debate between policymakers, although the situation is alarming on many levels. The outcome of general music education is described as dramatically bad by many scholars (Krajewski & Schmidt, 2014; Waluga et al., 2017; Weiner & Waluga, 2016) and less than 2% of all school children nationwide are granted access to music schools. Meanwhile, the social status of professional musicians is extremely low (Walczak et al., 2016). The responsibility for teacher training is split between music academies and universities that are not specialized in music. Practice has shown that students of pedagogical departments at music academies are reluctant to become teachers in general compulsory schools, and often lack pedagogical skills required for crowded classrooms. For many of them, teacher training programs are a second choice if they fail to be granted admission to selective instrumental music departments. This can be interpreted as one of the consequences of the very low status of the music teacher's profession among all music-related fields—which already have low social prestige (Walczak et al., 2016). Universities on the other hand, as institutions with a mainly academic focus, seem to be struggling with providing quality training in music-related subjects to their students, such as musical performance, singing, conducting, and ensemble leadership. The main burden of responsibility for music teacher training for both music and general education lies on music

³ Maria Przychodzińska (2001) in her historical analysis of Polish music education emphasizes the significant role of classical composers, Karol Szymanowski i.e., and the philosophy of Jean-Jacques Rousseau in shaping the theoretical framework for Polish music education in the late nineteenth century.

⁴ It needs to be clarified at this point that particular kinds of community music activities, amateur ensembles i.e., active in municipal cultural centres, were highly popular in communist Poland, and faced a serious crisis after the political transformation, indeed. Those informal musical activities often presented high artistic and educational value and were by nature inclusive and accessible for a large part of the population (Michalski, 1983; Tworkowska, 1992). However, the distinction between the elitist music school system, representing the world of art-music, and those amateur ensembles, was emphasized.

academies, which remain within the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage. The Ministry of Education, in charge of general compulsory schools, has to rely on teachers provided by this talent-focused, competitive system to a great extent. As a result, both in music and general education, the needs of pupils perceived by teachers as “talented” are being prioritized, while the “not talented” majority remains neglected and often becomes discouraged in music (Krajewski & Schmidt, 2014; Rakowski, 2010). Moreover, many music teachers in compulsory schools report severe alienation from other members of pedagogical staff (Krajewski & Schmidt, 2014). In recent decades, there have been several more attempts to reform the music education system in Poland, two of which were initiated by the Polish Music Council (Białkowski et al., 2010; Kalarus & Konkol, 2017; Kołodziejski, 2014; Rakowski, 2010; Socha et al., 2020), but classroom practice remains rather conservative with very little music-making (Krajewski & Schmidt, 2014; Socha et al., 2020). Rakowski (2010) in his essay *General Music Education – a History of National Failure*⁵ presents a rather grim image of Polish general music education.⁶ Przychodzińska and Rakowski agree in their diagnosis, that the separation of arts and general education is the main reason for most of the above issues (Przychodzińska, 2001; Rakowski, 2010).

The fact that the above diagnosis, suggested by Rakowski already more than a decade ago, has had very little if any impact on the music education system in Poland up to the present day, and the wildly criticized *status quo*, which survived several changes in *curriculum* and even severe political shifts, justifies the assumption that there are important underlying reasons for this stagnation other than just lack of agreement around the methodical aspects of classroom practice. Those reasons are related to power structures and social paradigms passed on from generation to generation, in an act of remaking a particular citizenship regime.

In the presented context, I argue that music education in Poland has been colonized in two ways: firstly, by absorbing an isolated, elitist and irrelevant teaching model into the vault of national values and choosing it repeatedly over other concepts, much more representative for the Polish pedagogical thought of the twentieth century and just as well connected to Polish national heritage; secondly, by creating and nourishing a gap between highly exclusive music schools and general music education, and by doing so – imposing the superior position of a particular aspiring social class rather, than classical music as a genre. Western art music (Moraczewski, 2016, 2019a, 2019b) transmitted via a soviet teaching model has become a monumental tool to “preserve” Polish national heritage and “protect” it against the *noble savage* of popular music. The reluctance of different stakeholders to change might have various reasons, but it is important to recognize that all of those reasons are inherently political (Said, 1985).

Discourse shapes reality

Said (1985) emphasizes the fundamental importance of cultural context, understood as “perpetual flux”, for a meaningful interpretation of current events in any particular region in

⁵ First published in 2007.

⁶ *General* music education is a particularly neglected field in Poland. Overall, Poland scores high in PISA tests (OECD, 2018). Music schools unlike general schools offer a high educational standard and are fully subsidized by the state, offering free music education, however, remain accessible to only less than 0,02 of the population of schoolchildren.

the world. He does so by comparing the above to the process of reading literary texts, which are subject to constant re-interpretation not because *they* change, but because pretty much *everything around* them does. National differences have a profound impact on both educational practices and research in every country (Hargreaves & North, 2001). Mapping the competing educational concepts in Polish music education is a challenging task. Historical analysis of the development of educational philosophy in this specific field provides a picture of ongoing attempts to change the *status quo* rather than a continuous evolutionary process and therefore seems to suggest the existence of a long-lasting predominant approach immune to the impact of newly emerging concepts. However, no such approach has officially been stated in the past few decades.

Poland now has a rather progressive *curriculum* for general music education (Kołodziejski et al., 2017) and there seems to be an agreement among stakeholders about the urgent need to support music education in general compulsory education. Whilst a clear depiction of this assumed underlying agenda is nowhere to be found, it seems possible to get a rather clear view of it by studying the discourse concerning what music education is *not* supposed to be, according to some of the major stakeholders. Some of the substantial concerns regarding opening up to a more diverse and inclusive educational model are the presumed compromise on the quality of the artistic outcome and the decay of traditional values (Konaszekiewicz, 2012; Krapiec, 1996) and lowering the status of “art music” by presenting it on equal terms with other music genres (Ciesielski, 2010). The concern about diversity being contradictory with quality seems to be shared by policymakers, schoolteachers who tend to give more attention to “talented” pupils (Krajewski & Schmidt, 2014), and even some stakeholders in the informal music education sector (Sarnowska et al., 2017).⁷

In his lecture “The Role of Art Schools in the XXI Century” Bylicki (2017), at that time Advisor to the Minister of Culture and National Heritage and future head of the Institute of Music and Dance in Warsaw, pointed out clearly what an art school is *not* supposed to be: “another general (primary/secondary) school; a cultural/afterschool center; a club for sensitive children”. Bylicki was referring to art schools, traditionally highly profiled and competitive in Poland. Paradoxically, from an outsider’s perspective, this statement could be easily interpreted as an apotheosis of neoliberal values: quality musicians are a product of the extremely competitive market of classical music and the state should focus on supporting the best and already most privileged, as they are most likely to succeed and bring profit. Investigating paradoxes like this is essential for understanding the situation of Polish music education. Research has shown that the above approach is widely shared among art teachers in general compulsory schools: 40% of them consider supporting the individual growth of “talented” children one of the main goals of their work, whilst only 25% acknowledges the importance of

⁷ Notably, several Polish scholars associated with other academic fields related to music do present a different approach, acknowledging that fundamental terms like *classical music*, *serious music*, *musical canon* – have been proven incoherent and highly problematic (Moraczewski, 2016) and the very term *popular music* also does not “name any coherent historical reality or any recognizable social locus” (Moraczewski, 2016, p. 47). Krzysztof Moraczewski, a widely cited Polish scholar and philosopher, points out, refraining Robert Walser’s essay from the early 1990’, that there is “supposedly no convincing way to defend constructs like *serious music* etc” (Moraczewski, 2016, p. 46; Walser, 1992). In contrast to the above, the debate between Polish music education stakeholders remains a heartland of discourse in which *serious music* is still being presented as clearly superior to all other music genres in terms of artistic and educational value.

giving attention to pupils described as not gifted.⁸ In this context it seems justified to claim, that policymakers should be mindful of the impact of persistently favoring a highly competitive teaching model not just on art schools, but on the whole of the educational landscape.

In early 2020, a 14-year-old student of one of the most renowned music schools in Warsaw committed suicide. A journalistic investigation initiated by the parents of other children attending the school revealed disturbing facts: half of the pupils in the class admitted to having been illegally purchasing Xanax to be able to deal with stress caused by the strict assessment system; several other adolescents also admitted to suicide attempts in the past (Szyłło, 2020b).⁹ Moreover, even scholars who are critical towards the persisting approaches in Polish schooling, tend to position their critics within a framework hardly challenging the *status quo* itself.

In the earlier quoted study, Chmurzyńska (2012) investigates pedagogical approaches of contemporary Polish teachers regarding methodical principles proposed by “outstanding musicians: master-teachers (Varro, Neuhaus, Flesch)”. This is a highly relevant choice in the field of instrumental music teaching: Margit Varro, born 1881, was a renowned Hungarian piano teacher, active in the USA after 1938; Heinrich Neuhaus, born 1888, a famous Russian pianist and pedagogue of Polish-German extraction, jury member of the International Fryderyk Chopin piano competition; Carl Flesch, born 1873 in Hungary, a violin virtuoso and one of the most influential teachers of the early XX century. However, all of them belong to the same generation of virtuoso teachers, deeply rooted in the XIX-century schooling tradition. Neither of them, naturally, addressed the superiority of the one-to-one master-student teaching model in a challenging way, nor is their pedagogical thought being presented by Chmurzyńska in a way that could be read as a significant critique of the Polish educational system. The message seems clear: improvement needs to be made regarding particular aspects of teacher training, but the system, overall, is good. Moreover, the study does not mention a broader pedagogical context reaching out beyond music schooling in which the presented teaching principles were originally formulated as if indeed music education was an island, detached from the land of broader philosophical thought. Even considering the narrow focus of the study, it seems important to note that both Korczak’s “How to Love a Child” published already in 1919, and Dewey’s “Art as Experience” published in 1934, presented the concept of child-centered pedagogy as an essential new paradigm and advocated for the necessity of change.

Education of mistrust

Paraphrasing Said’s statement about the inherently political nature of any societal change, one might say that the relationship between education and politics is bidirectional: educational

⁸ Furthermore, only 11% of all Art teachers in general education give supporting the children’s skills related to self-expression a high priority among educational goals (Krajewski & Schmidt, 2014). The social status of a music teacher is extremely low (Walczak et al., 2016).

⁹ The article, published in January 2020 by one of the major Polish magazines, resonated strongly among music school graduates, parents and teachers, and resulted in a follow-up publication a few months later. Some critiques argued, that in this rather complex situation, schools are not solely to be blamed, and pressure from the side of the parents is also a significant factor (Szyłło, 2020a). One of the school principals interviewed for the article, who wished to remain anonymous, claimed that the procedures imposed by the Centre of Arts Education (CEA), the main supervising institution for art schools in Poland, deserve to be subject to an investigation by the Ombudsperson for Children’s Rights. In response, the CEA posted a rather scanty comment claiming that the current assessment procedures are designed to ensure highest standards in teaching art subjects (Szyłło, 2020a).

systems are always part of and subject to political agenda, and the political *status quo* in a particular country replicates power structures imposed through nationwide education. In this context, Polish music education can be considered a specific case study for issues affecting the country's political and socioeconomic reality. Poland's recent turn towards a more authoritarian government combined with the very low rates of social trust towards politicians in general, regardless of their affiliation (Szafraniec, 2011), seems to mirror on a larger scale the power structures present within the schooling system. In the above context, it is worth notice that music-related professions rank in Poland the second lowest among all existing professions in terms of social prestige, whilst politicians hold the bottom position in the ranking (Walczak et al., 2016). Studies in corresponding fields link issues related to economic and cultural development in Poland to very low rates of social trust (Brzezińska & Czub, 2014), which are amongst the lowest in Europe.

The music schooling system in Poland, trapped in a vicious cycle of self-orientalization, endorses a methodical framework based on competition between students and a strong, almost authoritarian position of the teacher. The student is expected to be passive rather than engage in dialogue and little space is being given to creativity or improvisation. Korczak's child-centered approach, overlooked or ignored by the creators of the first *curriculum* for music education in post-war Poland, clearly proposed a very different educational philosophy. For Korczak (1998), each child was a unique individual. He strongly opposed labelling children as gifted and not gifted, claiming that every child is smart in its unique way, and this diversity is a core value for education. Korczak was even critical of the very use of the word "children", which he claimed was as a specific form of "othering" through addressing a diverse population of individuals with a single term—a potentially harmful unification based on age as the only criterion and reducing young individuals to non-adults. According to Korczak's pedagogical thought, the child is the only genuine expert in the subject of a child's education. The teacher is supposed to be a gentle guide and careful follower, always remaining attentive and open to dialogue. Mistrust towards a child is considered a pedagogical mistake (Kamińska, 2019).

Similarities to John Dewey's concept of educative experience are very apparent in Korczak's work, as well as the implicit understanding of democracy as a shared creative practice (Dewey, 1938, 1966). This recognition of a child's individuality is an interesting link between Korczak's pedagogy and Tagore's (1933) concept of "education of sympathy". Two years before Korczak's "How to Love a Child" was first published, Tagore stated that "fullness" in personal growth can only be attained through sympathy. The American philosopher Martha Nussbaum (2009) uses the philosophical thought of Tagore and Dewey as a framework for her critical analysis of what she diagnoses as an educational crisis. According to Nussbaum, in a world driven by the profit motive, some core abilities associated with humanities and arts, crucial to the health of democracy, are at risk of getting "lost in the competitive flurry" (p. 55). The three abilities highlighted by Nussbaum are: "the capacity for Socratic self-criticism and critical thought about one's own traditions" (p. 55); "the ability to see oneself as a member of a heterogenous nation, and world, understanding something of the history and character of the diverse groups that inhabit it" (p. 56); "narrative imagination" understood as "the ability to think what it might be in the shoes of a person different from oneself, to be an intelligent reader of that person's story, and to understand the emotions and wishes and desires that someone so placed might have" (p. 57). The educational frameworks presented by Dewey, Tagore, and in

Poland—Janusz Korczak, clearly served the purpose of educating pupils equipped with each of the above abilities. On the contrary, the exclusive Polish system of music education seems to represent and endorse very different attitudes. Again: we may only assume what they are by knowing what they are *not*.

The parrot in a cage

Over the last two decades, in most Western-European and Nordic countries, the discourse around popular music in education has changed significantly. There seems to be an agreement between stakeholders that various genres, often labelled as “popular music”, or “rhythmical music”, do represent qualities such as virtuosity, technical and aesthetic refinement, and are therefore valid tools and necessary ingredients of music education. As the debate about the place and role of Western classical music in the *curriculum* is ongoing, it focuses rather on finding the right balance between different genres and pedagogical approaches than on re-establishing classical music’s hegemony in education (Hebert et al., 2017). Whilst music education in Western Europe and across the Nordic countries is shaped by the concepts of democracy and the German notion *Bildung* (Hebert & Hauge, 2019), on the other side, Russia models for the country a strikingly different, yet equally significant pedagogical and philosophical heritage. Poland after World War II has been “trapped” between these two worlds of East and West, isolated from the West, and naturally reluctant towards accepting educational models imposed by its powerful Eastern neighbor. The Eastern and Western world of music pedagogy remained in touch to some extent, in particular, due to the work of renowned virtuoso performers who were more likely to maintain the freedom to travel across countries, learn and teach abroad. However, the destructive impact of the political division between Eastern and Western Europe on a free flow of pedagogical thought was severe. The concept of *Bildung* has significantly evolved over decades and Western music education and the *curriculum* were highly influenced by new concepts introduced by John Dewey, Bennett Reimer, or more recently David Elliott and Marissa Silverman, to name just a few. Nevertheless, the gate for dialogue between Polish and Western philosophers remained mostly closed. Scholarly works of influential American scholars have remained unknown to most Polish educators up to the present day. The Russian educational system has also been developing and changing significantly since the end of the Soviet era (Laritner, 1993; Pozhidayev, 1993; Vorozhko, 2018). Despite Poland being a member of the EU since 2004, Polish music education seems to remain a very isolated space, perhaps more now than ever before.

Discourse matters not only because its undebated inner incoherencies and contradictions obviously affect the outcome of discussions, but principally because it shapes the reality in which debates are held. Acceptance of a particular type of discourse and the *status quo* implied by it is indeed an implicit agreement on the *status quo* itself. Inclusive, socially sensitive music education is not likely to be the outcome of exclusive, conservative discourse, even if some of the presented ideas are progressive. New concepts will not transcend debates into actual classroom practice unless there is sufficient critical discussion of the discourse itself and the underlying worldview it represents.

In his anecdote “The Parrot’s Training”, Rabindranath Tagore describes the story of a Raja who decided to educate a parrot, as the bird was frivolously singing all day long but never

recited scriptures (Chayan, 1994). Upon the Raja's call, noble pundits decide to build a magnificent golden cage for the bird to restrain its instincts diagnosed to be the cause of ignorance and to feed the parrot leaves from textbooks. Soon, the whole crew is so busy maintaining the magnificent cage and praising the ingenious teaching method, that nobody notices the bird had died. Nevertheless, the parrot's education is considered to have been completed successfully: the dead bird, stuffed with wise scriptures, does not engage in any frivolous behaviors anymore. Polish music education has been doing an excellent job so far in maintaining and showing off the cage. And the parrot... Has anyone seen the parrot?

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