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Aesthetics, music education and the construction of school knowledge

Vivienne Huifen Sang
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Aesthetics, Music Education and the Construction of School Knowledge

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

by

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Bachelor of Music (National Taiwan Normal University, Taiwan)

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2007**

CERTIFICATION

I, Vivienne Huifen Sang, declare that this thesis, submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Department of Education, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualification at any other academic institution.

Signed

Vivienne Huifen Sang

Date:

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the construction of school knowledge with particular focus on the impact of socio-cultural-economic discourses on music education. The context of the study is the Integrated Curriculum as structured in school textbooks for secondary education in Taiwan. The study is guided by the following questions:

1. What is the impact of the socio-cultural-economic discourses on the integration of music knowledge?
2. How is the integration of knowledge realised in the Arts and Humanities textbooks?
3. How are the goals set for the domain of Arts and Humanities made manifest through the integration of knowledge?

A mixed research method and the case study approach are employed to answer these questions. Regarding the epistemological factors interwoven in the Arts and Humanities textbooks, several theoretical perspectives offered in integrated curriculum, music education, and critical theory scholarship form the conceptual, qualitative foundation of this study. A quantitative approach investigates the extent of integration of arts knowledge and the relative coverage of different arts disciplines and a modified form of Critical Discourse Analysis is employed as the methodological tool to explore a selection of discourses in texts.

Data sources include the relevant documents of the Integrated Curriculum project, textbooks and the National Syllabus which is taken as the blueprint of educational practices in Taiwan. Data analysis involves investigating integrated models, the relationships between the content knowledge, competency benchmarks, and curriculum goals, and the socio-cultural-economic discourses in and/or behind the texts.

The conceptual framework employed throughout the study is based on the aesthetic theories and the critiques of culture industry proposed by Theodor W. Adorno. Based on his social observation, he argues a loss of autonomy of the individual where music is being manipulated as a means of social control. The socio-economic phenomenon of 'cultural turn' can be viewed as Adorno's 'culture industry', generating what Adorno called 'fetished mass culture'. The lenses of Adornian music sociology employed in this study illuminate the interaction of music with other social agencies. The employment of the lenses to music education further reveals the deconstruction of music knowledge and music aesthetics in the construction of school knowledge.

The study reveals the prevalent discourses of how the de-differentiation of 'culture' and 'economy' affects the construction of school knowledge. The four series of textbooks adopt different approaches to fulfil the goal of knowledge integration in the context of the Integrated Curriculum. Their approaches manifest how the conception of integration is contextualised in the socio-cultural-economic context of Taiwan.

The three case studies indicate that:

- (1) The creative education is manipulated as an infrastructure for creative industry; the examination of film music points out that the musical signifiers have been turned into the commercially signified.
- (2) The aesthetic education is transferred to declarative knowledge; the examination of western classical music illuminates the practice of musical symbols in discursive discourses.
- (3) Multicultural education has become a battlefield of identity and control; the stories of Taiwanese Bunun people disclose a lack of multicultural aesthetics in the appreciation of multicultural heritage.

This study thus points to the need for educators to pay close attention to school music education which allows or denies possibilities for aesthetics. The findings also contribute to the research literature about the current status of music education in the broader context of the Integrated Curriculum. The study may also have relevance to educators concerning issues of music appreciation, aesthetics, and critical pedagogy of music education.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC)

Commission of Education Reform (CER)

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Critical Pedagogy of Music Education (CPME)

Discourse Analysis (DA)

Discipline Based Arts Education (DBAE)

Government Information Office (GIO)

Ministry of Education (MOE)

Music Education as Aesthetic Education (MEAE)

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
(UNESCO)

World Trade Organization (WTO)