

Dana Anex

## A Classical Educational Curriculum for Youth

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As those of us watching and participating in this conference are well aware, we find ourselves now in a stage of imperialism, in which productive capacities are being destroyed, in order to concentrate control of resources in the hands of the global elite. Part of this apparatus of economic destruction is the public education system, which in its current form functions to hinder the capabilities of the broad masses of people. It separates parents from their children for seven or more hours a day, alienates families from the educational process, fosters a strong distaste for study among the general population, and indoctrinates children to defend imperialism as long as it has a socially liberal façade.

Pending revolution, we must push the limits of what is possible under bourgeois public education through the curriculum. Parents, workers, intellectuals and teachers who see these problems must unite to find a solution, beginning by implementing a curriculum rooted in Lyndon LaRouche and Helga Zepp-LaRouche's concept of Classical education. Following a Classical education curriculum, students from a very young age learn the highest form of expression in their native language through poetry, develop their curiosity in problem-solving through the study of geometry and physics, and engage in a process of creative discovery through Classical music.

I am a Classical musician and I teach Classical violin, viola, and string ensemble classes in after-school programs in the Chicago public schools. I have also worked as a substitute teacher and assistant in classes during the regular school day in many different parts of the city, under many different economic conditions.



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### A Tragic Degree of Unfulfilled Potential

Across the board, I have observed a tragic degree of unfulfilled intellectual potential among students. In the more impoverished South and West sides of the city, the literacy rate in first, second and third grade classes is very low. Out of a class of 20 second graders I assisted for the day, for example, maybe 3 students knew how to read. The same 3 students could do addition with single-digit numbers without assist-

ance. Most schools in those parts of the city do not have foreign language, art, or music as part of the day-to-day curriculum. There is virtually no time for play, and students are harshly berated throughout the day by teachers and staff for the smallest infractions.

The schools with the worst conditions are blank slates where it would be relatively easy to introduce a Classical education curriculum, because there is really no existing curriculum to speak of. The underemployed intellectual class must be redirected to serve the working masses and, through this process, be re-educated themselves.

Now, I will turn my focus to one particular school, on the far west side of Chicago, where I teach in an after-school strings program for fourth- to sixth-grade students. The program takes place four days a week for nearly two hours each day. At this school, the conditions are relatively better than what I have seen at other schools: Most students can read and write pretty well by third grade. They have some wonderful teachers who treat them with respect, and they have a general music teacher who, to me, seems very bright and engaging. However, these students are still performing far below their potential, for reasons internal and external to the school environment.

Chicago is very segregated and the most economically underdeveloped and violent areas, such as this one, tend to be majority black. Along the main thoroughfare, less than a quarter-mile from the school where I teach, there are boarded-up, rundown buildings, and dozens of

people staggering or doubled over in the street, drugged to oblivion. I see parents walking their children home from school through this scene of destitution and misery. The high rates of violent crime affect children even during the school day. I've had one very intelligent and musically gifted fourth-grade student complain daily of extreme exhaustion, due to the sounds of drag-racing and gunfire taking place on her street throughout the night. Being immersed in these ugly and violent conditions, children receive the message that prosperity, safety and beauty are not for them.

### **Introducing a Classical Education Curriculum**

This year, I'm working to implement a Classical education curriculum in this after-school program, and I'll be documenting its progress for those wish to attempt a similar curriculum at their schools. Though the problems we have observed in the education system will not be resolved through changes in the curriculum alone, even at an early stage of implementation, I see profound changes in my students, particularly in their self-discipline, intellectual curiosity, and problem-solving abilities.

The Classical curriculum consists of three broad categories of study, the first of which I call "Repertoire and Poetry"; the second of which is "Practical Music Theory," the branch of music theory concerned with developing the skills needed to play, sing, or compose more effectively; and the third of which is "Speculative Music Theory," the branch of music theory which deals with the scientific and philosophical aspects of music.

For the portion of their study devoted to learning repertoire and poetry, the students are learning to play the melody from the *Ode to Joy* on their instruments. I'm taking this opportunity to play Paul Robeson's rendition of *Ode to Joy* for them, in which he [sings](#) both the original German and an English translation.

Paul Robeson's recordings provide a wealth of melodic and poetic material for students, especially considering that he performed songs from the Classical repertoire, traditional American songs, and working songs from around the world. The music and text are simple enough for them to understand and emulate, but are beautiful, meaningful, and performed at the highest level of musicianship. I also think it is important for students to hear these classics sung in a black American voice, because the Classical culture that we develop here will not be simply transplanted from elsewhere,

but will be a characteristically American Classical culture.

For the practical music theory training, [my students] are working on developing the skills they need to write and to voice counterpoint. Currently the students are learning to write and to play in a few major keys and identify intervals. I'm having them play some common contrapuntal patterns, which were commonly used in composition from roughly the time of Mozart. Once their skills have developed further, I plan to have them learn to identify, use, and elaborate on these patterns in practice.

Today, this kind of music is often derided as "formulaic," but I think that stems from a misunderstanding of creativity. Lyndon LaRouche stressed the importance of writing in counterpoint for children, because it teaches them the importance of convention and order in the creative process. Both Classical and popular cultures are currently in decline, precisely because individualistic breaks from collective creative endeavors are so encouraged and incentivized. Instead, we should encourage the younger generation to draw on our enduring tradition and ideas in their creative processes.

For their speculative music theory work, they will recreate the experience of ancient music theorists. Ancient speculative music theory was founded on experimentation with properties of a vibrated string. It is possible for even a beginning level student to actually play and hear the harmonic series on an instrument, so students can begin from very early on in their training, to understand the relationship between acoustics and human invented musical practices, such as the conventions of harmonic tonality, meaning the typical harmony and structure of music in major and minor keys.

With this simple hands-on activity, they begin to learn to analyze features of the natural world in relation to human perception, understanding, and creative activity. Through this analysis, they can come to an understanding that the music of Bach, for example, did not "just come to him one day." His genius was to a great extent the product of building upon centuries of creative discovery.

Now, having presented a very particular view of the current state of the education system, and a very particular set of solutions, I'm interested to hear others present their views, their solutions, and their reasoning. From there, we can construct a more general picture of the situation and determine our way forward.