

Book Reviews

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Music Education for Changing Times: Guiding Visions for Practice edited by Thomas A. Regelski & J. Terry Gates (2009). New York: Springer, 2009. Hardback, 214 pp., £89.99. ISBN: 9789048126996.

This new contribution to the Springer series *Landscapes: The Arts, Aesthetics, and Education* is a collection of essays written by members and allies of the MayDay Group, a think tank of internationally known scholars in the music education community who critically examine music education policy and practice. As stated on the back cover, 'The book aims to challenge thought and change minds'. One of the challenges in discussing philosophical ideas and policy in music education is presenting cogent arguments in a user-friendly format. As such, the editors organised the book along the seven ideals formulated by the MayDay Group in the document 'Action for Change in Music Education' which addresses musicianship, culture and society, leadership, institutions, interdisciplinary, research and theory, and curriculum. Two authors contribute an essay addressing each ideal and preceding each pair of chapters is a brief overview introducing the referenced ideal and the major ideas articulated by the authors. The book's grand scope and rich discussion of music education in postmodern society serves as a useful resource for academic audiences, researchers and practitioners.

Regelski and Gates each preface the book's chapters with a clear overview of its content, a description of terms, and a rationale for why the discussion about changing current practice is necessary. Regelski correctly points out the predominance of autocratic teaching methods in today's schools, largely ignoring

students' musical and educational needs in democratic societies. Reminiscent of Dewey's philosophy, Gates urges readers to view music education ecologically, as contributors and beneficiaries of music teaching and learning, as opposed to looking at it through a technical and methodological lens. Much of music education today exists for the preservation of traditional forms of music (i.e. band, orchestra, choral music). Gates urges us to consider thinking about a progressive approach, one that is more flexible and adjusts for creative changes in the present time.

Much of the book is predicated upon viewing music from a praxial, rather than an aesthetic perspective. As Wayne Bowman explains in Chapter 1, the praxial approach rejects 'technical-rational models of musicianship' (p. 5), teaching, and learning, to focus on the fluid process of experience through mindful action. In order to achieve this, Roger Johnson (Chapter 2) criticises the top-down, authoritarian ensemble structures of the US curriculum, recommending broadening music education to include contemporary forms of music, thereby encouraging independent thinking through aural and digital forms of music-making. His essay points to an unnecessary divide between music in school and music in society.

Bringing focus to the current dilemmas in music education, Marie McCarthy clearly articulates past practices and philosophical assumptions of music education (based in aesthetic idealism) and discusses current trends promoting an 'egalitarian, student-centered' approach (Chapter 3). One reason for this change is rooted in pragmatism, which Scott Goble (Chapter 6) explains in a lesson on its founder, Charles Sanders Peirce. A key question that music educators often ask is, how can we inspire

students to participate in music throughout their lives? From the pragmatic perspective, Goble suggests they must be given the opportunity and ability to engage meaningfully (connecting with the community) in music that they call 'their own' during their youth. One can draw a parallel here with Johnson's essay.

Whether music spaces are located in the far end of a school building or music programmes are threatened by economic conditions, music educators sometimes experience their practice in isolation. Anthony Palmer (Chapter 10) clarifies the need to see music education in the grand scheme and to recognise its relationship with other facets of living. Stressing that multiple viewpoints of reality give us a more accurate picture of the world, Palmer suggests music teachers should treat each individual student according to his/her needs, rather than according to a one-size-fits-all mould. Doing so prompts institutional change that is more inclusive of individual identities (see Elizabeth Gould's essay on queer identity, Chapter 5 and Julia Eklund Koza's essay on racial politics in undergraduate programmes, Chapter 7) and socio-cultural music practices.

Changes to the music education curriculum are necessary to promote what Gates calls 'dynamic permanence' or transmission of our musical past while adapting methods in the present to shape the future. David Elliott (Chapter 13) gives the reader an overview of traditional curricular styles rooted in linear objective-based teaching and then describes a pragmatic, social-constructivist approach. Imparted through a strong political tenor critical of the United States' current educational reforms, Elliott promotes a curriculum based upon social constructivism and authentic learning. Sandra Stauffer (Chapter 14) elaborates on this paradigm by recognising each person's 'place' or experience in the world as a

starting point to creating a learning environment that is experiential, collaborative, and learner-centered.

Knowledge concerning music education practice is based upon research. As Richard Colwell (Chapter 11) rightly points out, quality research grounds theory, informs practice and has meaning for a broad audience. Highly critical of music education research, Colwell promotes critical theory and brings it in line with praxial philosophy, focusing on the process of social and cultural transformation. In the following essay (Chapter 12), Graham Welch advocates 'ecological validity' of music education research through recognition of multiple viewpoints, diverse research traditions, and the relationship of neuropsychological research to music education. Continued critical research will help to create larger theoretical constructs that can accurately portray an individual's unique experience in the world.

Although the book attempts to discuss music education from a global perspective, much of it is still rooted in Western, Eurocentric approaches. A richer and arguably more illuminating discussion of music education might emerge with the addition of greater diversity of individuals from other musical traditions and regions of the world. One area that received little attention and is undeniably a great impetus for music is the role of spirituality. Neuropsychological and other forms of scientific research are significant, but what are scholars of spirituality saying about music and music education? Including others in this vibrant and necessary discussion will broaden our understanding and connect us to the greater world.

Overall, this new addition to critical dialogue on music education practice focuses the discussion on the big picture, providing perspectives through multiple

lenses. It achieves the purpose of inspiring discussion and raises questions about why we continue down the same trodden path promoting traditional methods that bear decreasing relation to our contemporary world. The question now is, what do we do next? Some authors, such as Koza and Stauffer, provide helpful anecdotal evidence that may serve to be starting points for implementing these ideas in practice – yet more needs to be done. Goble encourages the reader to ‘engage these important ideals. Grapple with them. Deepen your own ideas, beliefs, and convictions . . . Act on your ideas, and reflect critically on the results’ (p. xxix). Talking about the issues is merely a starting point; action is the essence of praxis and the necessary catalyst for change. It will also ensure that more people experience the process of making and listening to music in changing times.

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Minds on Music: Composition for Creative and Critical Thinking by Michelle Kaschub and Janice Smith. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009. Paperback, 281 pp, £12.95. ISBN: 9781607091943.

The teaching and learning of composing in schools is so much ingrained into the English National Curriculum that it takes a book such as this to jolt British readers out of an established mindset, and to consider alternative ways of doing things. There are significant differences between UK and US music education, however, and this book makes no bones about being for a US audience, reminding readers that ‘teachers accustomed to leading performance ensembles may be tempted to place primary focus on the creation of performable

products’ (p. 19). Herein lies the essential difference between the US and UK, but having established their parameters, the authors go on to describe a range of approaches to the teaching of composing that in many cases apply equally well across a range of national and international contexts.

Interests in composing and researching have developed considerably over the past years, and this book serves two audiences: academic researchers investigating the construct of educational composing, and teachers who wish to introduce or develop their classroom practice in this area. As an overview of research in this area, this book is fairly comprehensive; it gives a good overview of thinking and writing on this topic, and then takes this and applies it in real worked examples of how teachers could employ these ideas in the classroom. Thus we have a nice developmental overview of the composing process (p. 36 et seq.), which is well-reasoned in its coverage of issues involved; and then later in the book a series of vignettes which show how hypothetical teachers go about undertaking composing work with their pupils.

Also included is a discussion of the nature and form of group, or conjoint composing. This is a key area of interest in those national contexts where composing is already an established part of the curriculum, and there is helpful discussion of some of the issues. Group composing as a theme emerges in a number of points in the book, as do other topics, and this exploring of different ideas in different contexts means that a sort of spiral curriculum runs through the structure of the book, in that ideas on, say, assessment crop up in a number of areas and are discussed accordingly.

Which link segues in an ungainly fashion into the topic of assessment! It is here that I felt most strongly the tug of different accountability systems. The work of