

Action, Criticism & Theory for Music Education

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Introduction

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Introduction

Vincent C. Bates, Editor

This issue of *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* is our first regular issue since David Elliott retired. I'm sure the production team and editorial board will join me in thanking David for the diligence, insight, and all-around kindness with which he served. This issue of ACT represents an extension of David's work in that the six featured articles went through the review process during his tenure. Additional retirements include Jack Heller, Brian A. Roberts, and Keith Swanwick from the editorial board and Frank Martignetti from the production team. We thank them for their service and we welcome Cathy Benedict, Deborah Bradley, Hildegard Froehlich, Sidsel Karlsen, and Roger Mantie to the editorial board; Juliet Hess to the production team; and Brent Talbot as associate editor. Kristen Myers continues in a new role as production editor; of all the volunteers who make ACT possible, I am confident that none have worked as tirelessly as her.

This is also my first regular issue as editor. I appreciate the opportunity. Of course, I will not even attempt to "measure up" to the three previous editors: Thomas Regleski, Wayne Bowman, and David Elliott. Through my own service with ACT since Volume 6, Issue 1 (18 of 30 issues), I have worked closely with all three, have the utmost respect for their scholarship, and am grateful for their mentorship. I remain deeply committed to this much needed, open-access publication. From my perspective, ACT provides a unique place where diverse voices in music education and related fields can be heard relative to the ongoing and urgent need for change in music education. All we ask is that authors think deeply and critically, present ideas clearly and accessibly, and address one or more of the MayDay Group Action Ideals.

The first article in this issue, by curriculum theorist **Peter Grimm**, is based on his keynote address at MayDay Colloquium 25: Music Education and Political Agency, in June of 2013 at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada. He explores the relationship between curriculum theory and teacher education, suggesting that curriculum theory can “nourish and invisibly repair our researching and pedagogical minds” as teacher educators and, in the process, reaffirm the place of teacher education within colleges of education. Grimm traces developments in teacher education within the framework of three historical “phases” and suggests that we are currently experiencing a transition into a new phase in which “the worst,” who “are fired with the ‘passionate intensity’ that accompanies the intoxicating effect of anarchy, fanaticism, and hatred” may very well have their way because “the best are paralyzed by lack of conviction.” He warns that if we cannot develop/preserve collaborative partnerships in nurturing “the delicate relationship between academic/institutional autonomy and professional governance,” the next phase could very well involve “an extreme focus on outcomes, leading to a neo-liberalist purging of those programs that take little account of what they produce.”

Next is an insightful philosophical work by **Trevor Thwaites**. He warns of the potentials for dehumanization in modern preoccupations with digital technology in music education. “Technology has possibilities for revealing, but when we simply represent technology as an instrument or tool we remain committed to the will to master it, overlooking the essence of technology.” The essence of technology is that, while it gives a sense of freedom and flexibility, it can actually limit us to the range of possibilities inherent within a given apparatus. “The pedagogical processes we access as we learn a new programme or navigate a new website limit our freedom to act as autonomous individuals and we become technology’s pupils.” Drawing from a depth of scholarship on the topic, Thwaites encourages music educators to think critically about the use of digital technology. “The insistence of the new technologies is such that it calls for a new disposition towards being and for new responsibilities for music education in a technologized, potentially posthuman world.”

Evan Tobias begins his article by underscoring the importance of rap music as one of the most important popular cultural innovations of recent times. For this

reason, he argues, it ought to figure prominently in music education. Teachers who omit Hip Hop from music classrooms “risk marginalizing or silencing students’ voices by limiting the ways they might create and present alternative representations of identity or express their perspectives of society and their lived experience within the music program.” Of course, as Tobias explains, this requires that music teachers understand the breadth and complexity of rap music as a social praxis and its potentialities relative to educating for social justice. In particular, Hip Hop constitutes a mode of interaction through which identities are constructed. “While creating spaces and places for Hip Hop in school music programs is a starting point, music educators also ought to consider how young people enact identities in relation to such spaces, places, and musicking.” Through a well-researched, extensive, thorough, and revelatory discussion, Tobias makes a solid case for “treating rap music as worthy of in-depth study” and for providing curricular opportunities that “help students develop knowledge, understanding, and skill that can in turn support their ability to express and assert themselves.”

Jody Stark explores, from the position of an “outsider,” potential markers of discourse communities within *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education*. To this end, her analysis includes a general overview of the MayDay Group and its relationship with ACT. Even though it is not intended as a comprehensive analysis, her reflections do provide some ideas for how ACT authors show either loyalty to or creative divergence from the community of discourse. Stark discusses a book review issue of ACT, in which authors critiqued Bennett Reimer’s philosophy of music education, and a variety of additional articles representing a cross-section of aims and styles, albeit with a focus on articles that she feels are especially unique or noteworthy. In addition to a number of generalizations she draws from her analysis, Stark concludes that “ACT is a unique space to exchange and debate ideas, a feature that has great potential to engender action in the field of music education.”

Finally, **Scott Edgar** addresses the issue of whether and/or to what degree four high school instrumental ensemble directors, recognized by their respective communities as caring teachers, effectively implement Nel Noddings’ ethics of care. He provides a detailed review of Noddings’ conceptualization of care in education

and prior applications of the same in music education scholarship. This review provides the background for a qualitative study in which the experiences of music teachers are analyzed as they attempt to apply ethics of care within contexts of school instrumental ensembles. Emergent themes include “(a) care; (b) teaching students to care; (c) fostering a classroom environment conducive for care; (d) caring for the individual; (e) continuity; and (f) benefits.” Throughout, Edgar takes a critical view of whether or not music teachers, given the nature of school instrumental music programs (band, in particular), can effectively apply an ethic of care as outlined by Noddings. In some ways the subjects of this study seem successful at doing so, but in other ways it seems to be more difficult. In conclusion, Edgar provides suggestions for how care could be optimized in school bands.