

Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education

The Peer-Reviewed Electronic Journal of the MayDay Group

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*Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education*¹ provides a unique and important venue for scholarly publication in music education.

The MayDay Group,² sponsor of ACT, is dedicated to improving communication and fomenting critical discourse in music education. ACT, therefore encourages dialog and exchange about issues that are often neglected by specialized journals catering to sympathetic insiders, issues ignored or restricted by gatekeepers of special-interest groups, and issues that fall ‘between the cracks’ created by the distances separating specialized disciplines. As its title suggests, ACT assumes a reflexive stance toward the institution of music education and its traditional premises, paradigms, and practices—the “unthought categories of thought which delimit the thinkable and predetermine the thought”³ frequently taken for granted by musicians and music educators. Rather than embracing a conventional disciplinary stance, ACT publishes critical work from across the spectrum of research modes and topics: its orientation is thus interdisciplinary or postdisciplinary.

However, ACT is concerned to advance more than a mere miscellany of research. Its diverse offerings are unified, focused, and given force by the MayDay Group’s “action ideals,”⁴ broad-based, principled statements on major issues related to the practice of music education. ACT’s particular focus, then, is “action for change in music education,” rather than compiling, reporting, and storing research for its own sake. In light of this very down-to-earth goal, ACT seeks to explore topics that offer to improve the effectiveness and thus the status of music education. As a result, ACT serves as venue for the pursuit of research topics, themes, interests, and methodologies that may not fit neatly into prevailing and conventional research paradigms—research that none the less warrants publication and dissemination because of its potential importance to music education practice. ACT also affords opportunities for scholars to explore the interstices between specialties in search of fruitful connections that may be otherwise

overlooked and excluded from critical discourse. The collective significance of these concerns, it should be said, stems from belief in the profound importance of music to society.

The *book review issues* of ACT critically explore research both from within music education and from various ‘outside’ disciplines. Instead of conventional reviews presenting the evaluation of a single individual, these special issues feature multiple essay-reviews by leading music educators who interpret, engage with, and interrogate the book under review in terms of its relevance and interest to music educators. In so doing, highly specialized research can be brought to bear on the needs, interests, and critical perspectives of music education. Monographs dealing with musical identity, feminism and aesthetic theory, race and music, and two different sociological studies have been reviewed, each including a reply by the author of the book or monograph under review.

One special issue of ACT has presented the proceedings of the Third Symposium on Sociology of Music Education (April 2003, University of North Texas), a research focus that, despite its clear importance to music educators, lacks a journal of its own and is significantly under-represented in other music education journals.

ACT insures the quality of its publications by a *rigorous refereeing process*.⁵ Refereeing follows a “blind review” protocol in which reviewers qualify their judgments with comments and suggestions designed to strengthen manuscripts under consideration. At the same time, ACT also seeks to minimize insider jargon and discourse. It thus seeks to be accessible to teachers and music education students without either talking down to them or oversimplifying content. In practice, then, ACT submissions typically go through several stages of rewriting, designed to clarify specialized terms and translate technical jargon into more easily comprehended language. Thus, accepted manuscripts often require revision both in light of reviewer recommendations and subsequent editorial requirements.

ACT has an extensive *international readership* of whose diverse needs, interests, and concerns it is keenly aware. As an open access electronic journal (please see below), ACT’s readership extends to the entire world of researchers and teachers, not just to a designated group of subscribers—nor, for that matter, just to music educators only. In a typical month, ACT is visited by readers from more than sixty countries from every part of the world. As a result, the

work of authors is exposed to critical appraisal from a broad range of perspectives. As an example, one article elicited formal replies from four authors in three different countries. Where articles deal with national or regional specifics, authors are encouraged to frame their research in terms that are relevant and interesting to readers in other countries or situations.

ACT's home page is directly linked to a *discussion forum* on the MayDay Group homepage where readers can comment and react to articles immediately, and as formally or informally, extensively, or briefly as they wish. A "search" feature of the MayDay Group website includes ACT publications, providing students and scholars with keyword access to articles not possible with print journals.

As an electronic journal, ACT features *navigational tools* that enable easy access to citations and notes without scrolling or jumping to and from the end of the article. ACT also integrates sound, visual media, and animation unavailable in print journals. And since printing costs are not an issue, there are no arbitrary constraints on article length or the inclusion of data. ACT has published articles in other languages along with a parallel version in English.

While ACT employs a "house style" for consistent formatting, *scholarly style* and documentation protocols are determined by the nature of the research and the preferences of authors or national paradigms, as long as they are consistent and clear to readers.

In sum, ACT provides a unique contribution to music education research, theory, and practice—one that helps make specialized research more accessible while also offering visibility to research denied for a wide variety of reasons by conventional print journals in music education. ACT is part of a growing movement toward open access professional research journals that, taking advantage of the Internet, seek to make research available for free to readers around the world without sacrificing quality.

Notes on Open Access Publishing

Authors and personnel committees interested in more information about the trend to open access scholarly publishing can begin by consulting The *SPARC Open Access Newsletter* at www.earlham.edu/~peters/fos Among the many resources and reports available on this site, the *2007 Newsletters* (#105 and following) are particularly informative as to the advantages and growth in open access publishing. See, for instance:

- Trends favoring open access
- Open access 2006
- Creating an intellectual commons through open access
- Open access in the US
- Open access mandate for the NIH (US National Institute of Health)

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For a recent in-depth analysis and argument in favor of open access scholarly publishing, see also:

John Willinsky, *The Access Principle: The Case for Open Access to Research and Scholarship* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2006).

Amazon.com quotes Willinsky from the Opening of his book:

The year 2003 signaled a breakthrough in scholarly publishing for what might be loosely termed the open access movement

From the front cover:

A commitment to scholarly work carries with it a responsibility to circulate that work as widely as possible: this is the access principle. In the digital age, that responsibility includes exploring new publishing technologies and economic models to improve access to scholarly work. *Wide circulation adds value to published work.* It is a significant aspect of its claim to be knowledge. The right to know and the right to be known are inextricably mixed. (italics added)

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The author of a library science research study of open access publishing currently (2007) underway in the UK comments, “It seems to me that there are the most OA journals in Medicine, Physics and Maths. Medicine and Physics seem to have more because they started the OA trend earlier than other disciplines From reading current literature and news reports on the topic, it would definitely seem that the number of journals either switching or considering switching to OA is constantly increasing, in tandem with the reduced costs of storage, bandwidth, etc., and as the model becomes more recognised by authors as one that works, and beneficial to them.”

(personal communication, 2007)

¹ <http://act.maydaygroup.org/>

² <http://www.maydaygroup.org/>

³ Pierre Bourdieu, in Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc J.D. Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992): 40.

⁴ See the Submission Policies on the ACT home page (<http://act.maydaygroup.org/>). See the MayDay Group's action ideals (on which these policies are based) at <http://www.maydaygroup.org/php/actionideals.php>.

⁵ The occasional exception being an invited article by a recognized authority.