

## Making Sure It's About What's Best For Students: Following on Regelski's Tractate

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What can be done to re-orient a field of education like music, when far too many teachers teach the way they were taught using traditional procedures that stupefy and deaden students to the subject matter, rather than working creatively to invigorate and empower them to become thoughtfully engaged, independent music makers? The first article in this issue of ACT is a re-publication of a paper written by Thomas Regelski following the meetings of the scholar-teachers who first convened on May 1, 1993, ultimately to establish the MayDay Group (MDG) as an ongoing organization. In “Tractate on Critical Theory and Praxis: Implications for Professionalizing Music Education,” MDG co-founder Regelski introduces and then draws upon the Critical Theory of philosophers and social theorists in the Western European Marxist tradition known as the Frankfurt School to appraise the practice of music education in the 1990s. In particular, he addresses misapplications of rationalism and empiricism that give rise to “false consciousness”—i.e., the blind acceptance of science as the only true source of knowledge and the belief that social planning and the free market will inevitably lead humanity to the “good life.” Regelski challenges music teachers’ related, dogmatic adherence to *methods* in their teaching, observing that such “methodolatry” leads to the “endullment” (numbing) of students, and he points teachers to a pragmatic alternative: Adopt a professional teaching praxis that is oriented toward bringing about beneficial results for students, one that advances individual, recreational, and amateur music-making in *all* genres at *all* levels of performance to engender “good time” in their lives. Since the inception of the MDG, Regelski’s critical thinking has stimulated numerous music teachers and music teacher educators to reassess their professional praxis. The question now is

this: Have things changed for the better since the 1990s? The six remaining articles in this issue all bring to light others' efforts—in various arenas—to ensure that music educators' work is invigorating and empowering for students.

In “Desire for Recognition and Recognition of Desire: A Theoretical Account of the Influence of Student Teacher Fantasy on Self-Efficacy,” Robert Gardiner provides ACT readers with an interesting interrogation of the tension that emerges between the values that university music students in the UK bring to their teacher preparation programs and the ways that those values change over time, becoming ever more congruent with their “fantasies” of what a teacher should be and do as influenced by their teacher education. As Regelski encourages in the tractate, Gardiner looks at both the “system” of preparing music teachers and the ways that their fantasies about music teaching may represent a false consciousness of what is expected of them as music teachers. That perceived expectation often runs counter to their personal beliefs about the value of music for their students and results in a denial of “the empowering knowledge and social conditions for becoming the authors of their own histories” (Regelski 2020). Gardiner additionally looks at his own complicity in the creation of that fantasy through requirements to assess student teachers according to positivistic “standards,” followed by a review of previous articles in ACT that highlight the resistance of such forces.

Robin Rolfhamre's account of government-mandated assessment of university-level music instruction in Norway describes a boondoggle riddled with inconsistencies and fraught with conundrums. His article, “Through the Eyes of an Entangled Teacher: When Classical Musical Instrument Performance Tuition in Higher Education is Subject to Quality Assurance,” surprisingly does not include the pointed words *ineffective assessment measures*, *misguided managerial expectations*, or *neoliberal capitalist compulsion*. Yet it outlines how accreditation and funding for state university music programs depend on students' assessments of instruction that they have not yet acquired the knowledge or experience to evaluate fairly, on training students primarily for jobs as performers rather than nurturing them for lives as creative artists, and on requiring teachers to recruit increasing numbers of students to support their programs and to retain their tenured positions (among other dubious practices). Rolfhamre shows that university-level music instructors in Norway are entangled in the tentacles of an unwieldy “consumer-product based quality assurance protocol.” In resonance with Regelski, he places his hope in negotiations within this situation, in order that “the personal

development of the students (artistic skills, life skills, virtues, and social skills, etc., in relation to them as individuals) takes precedence over fulfilment of the contractual learning outcome.”

In “Dewey’s Theory of Experience: A Theoretical Tool for Researching Music Teacher Learning,” Jody Stark argues that a nuanced understanding of how music teachers learn is critical to enacting and supporting change in the field of music education. She explains how Dewey’s pragmatic theory of experience—which entails *interaction/transaction*, *continuity*, and *situation* as conditions—facilitated her understanding of the process by which human beings learn and grow. Stark describes how, in an earlier, interpretive study of three elementary music teachers’ professional learning, she found that attention to those conditions enabled her to understand *growth*, as each teacher “became someone else” through their respective experiences. However, Stark also found Dewey’s theory fell short in certain respects, as it did not adequately account for other important dimensions of learning and teaching in elementary music education. She explains how Lave and Wenger’s theorizing of learning as a social and situated act that takes place in specific *communities of practice* enabled her to grasp how teachers affirm and confirm their practice relative to the values and members of such communities. Likewise, Bourdieu’s concepts of *field*, *habitus*, and, *cultural and social capital* helped facilitate her understanding of assumptions made by others in the teachers’ school communities. With Stark’s guidance, the teachers were able to use those assumptions “to their advantage and to the advantage of their students.” Stark explains that these scholars’ theories enabled her to think more richly about elementary music teachers’ growth, and gave her new understandings of how she could support change in their teaching practice.

Sanna Kivijärvi and Lauri Väkevä examine the benefits and detriments of using Western Standard Music Notation (WSMN) in general music education (i.e., in music classes in schools) in their article, “Considering Equity in Applying Western Standard Music Notation from a Social Justice Standpoint: Against the Notation Argument.” They cast a critical eye on the argument made by many music teachers in Western nations and elsewhere: “Because the skills of decoding WSMN are useful in learning certain kinds of music, they are useful in learning any musical tradition.” Kivijärvi and Väkevä explain that while WSMN highlights the most essential aesthetic aspects of music in the Western art music tradition (melodic/harmonic and rhythmic/metric parameters, as well as dynamics), it does not give

prominence to the most essential aspects of *all* cultural genres of music. Further, they assert that wherever some or all students are unable to decode sonic information from a written symbolic system (e.g., owing to cognitive disabilities or because use of such a system is irrelevant in their cultures), teaching WSMN could even be regarded as pedagogical malpractice. Kivijärvi and Väkevä recommend that teachers investigate whether they could use alternative notation systems or no notation systems at all in their classes to give all students equal access to musical learning. They conclude that teachers must realize social justice by exercising “pedagogical tact” as they assess (like Regelski) how best to *meet the needs of students*—with or without the use of WSMN—in the particular teaching-learning situations and cultural contexts where they work.

Dan Shevock furthers his concerns for eco-literate music pedagogies in “An Environmental Philosophy for Music Education Based on Satis Coleman’s (1878-1961) Writings on Music and Nature.” Coleman may seem an unusual choice upon whom to draw as a model for pedagogy despite her connections to the progressive education movement, since much of her work as an educator was influenced by Recapitulation Theory. Shevock rightly critiques this thinking as racist; some scholars have linked Recapitulation Theory to eugenical thinking (Fallace 2015). Rather than ignoring the significant body of pedagogical work that Coleman produced, however, Shevock offers an overview that provides readers with a useful model for today’s music educators who seek to cultivate environmentally friendly, eco-literate music pedagogies. As Shevock argues, Coleman put forward an environmental philosophy of music education that can empower today’s teachers to develop authentic, holistic, and ethical curricula (Regelski 2020) and help students cultivate musical skills in ways that can influence their action throughout life.

Janice Waldron and Kari Veblen give readers a fascinating glimpse into the world of Scottish Pipe Bands (SPBs) in their first article from a multi-part research study, “Oh Canada meets Scotland the Brave: Identity, Meaning, Culture, and Music Learning in an Intergenerational Canadian-Scottish Pipe Band.” Their in-depth look into the learning methods developed by an internationally recognized Canadian community Scottish pipe band supports many of the concerns that Regelski articulates related to student empowerment and the cultivation of skills that ensure music making throughout life. The members of the SPB in Waldron and Veblen’s article help each other to take “personal control of their own destinies rather than being manipulated by impersonal technologies” (Regelski 2020, this issue).

The means by which the SPB ameliorates the high costs related to learning Scottish bag pipes provides an equity model that may be of interest to other community musical groups, and the care and concern of the SPB members for each other suggests a music education that cultivates what Regelski calls “the good life”: a situated life experience resulting from both personal and social intentionality that leads to a strong sense of community and life-long music making.

The essays in this issue reflect the kinds of concerns that prompted the formation of the MayDay Group nearly three decades ago. The authors approach these matters from their own unique perspectives; collectively, the essays illustrate how the ideals on which Thomas Regelski and J. Terry Gates founded the organization remain relevant for today’s music educators. They offer approaches that reflect the principals of Action for Change (see <http://www.maydaygroup.org/about-us/action-for-change-in-music-education/>) that guide MayDay Group members and critical educators in today’s world.

## References

- Fallace, Thomas D. 2015. *Race and the origins of progressive education, 1880–1929*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Regelski, Thomas A. 2020. Tractate on critical theory and praxis: Implications for professionalizing music education. *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 19 (1): 6–52. <https://doi.org/10.22176/act19.1.6>