

Probing Power, Perspectives, and Possibilities in *The Routledge Handbook to the Sociology of Music Education* ACT Book Review Issue

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Music has, since its first emergence among humans, provided a vehicle for expressing matters that might be considered sociological—matters of human groups and societies, their behaviours, and their relationships. Throughout time, people have explored, through songs and with instruments, aspects of love, war, migration, collective loss or trauma, birth, death, marriage, heroes and villains, shared fears and struggles and their societal consequences, and much, much more. The list of sociological subjects expressed through music is probably infinite. Thus, it makes sense that music researchers would turn to the discipline of sociology in their efforts to understand the effects of musical expression on societies.

What scholars now call the sociology of music first emerged in the early twentieth century; initially, authors described music and musical practices and their social settings or postulated analogies, metaphors, and similes concerning music and society. It soon became apparent, though, that descriptions require analysis in order to qualify as “sociology” (Green 2021, xxiv). As Lucy Green observes, sociology is “both a science and an art” (xxiv), and like both science and art, the sociology of music has changed over time. Applying this science-art to music in education (i.e., music education), studying music’s effects on human groups, societies, their behaviours, and their relationships, has led to the development of an academic area of study that is difficult to define precisely but which opens myriad possibilities for wide-ranging investigations and interpretations.

Thus, the editors of *The Routledge Handbook to Sociology of Music Education* undertook an enormous task, one with abundant opportunities for exploring a wide array of topics. With the realization that sociology of music education has become a field inclusive of vastly divergent and important areas of study, the editors of the *Handbook* chose to focus on applying “sociological constructs and theories to issues such as globalisation, immigration, post-colonialism, inter-generational musicking, socialisation, inclusion, exclusion, hegemony, symbolic violence, and popular culture” (Wright et al. 2021, i). The result is a truly expansive book consisting of 36 chapters written by 46 accomplished scholars; it will no doubt become a “go-to” resource for music education scholars for many years to come.

Such a comprehensive volume, however, provides unique challenges for anyone intending to review it. The depth and breadth of topics engaged within the *Handbook* make it impossible to adequately represent them within a single review. Thus, when Scott Goble and I, as co-editors of *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education*, decided to proceed with a review issue of *The Routledge Handbook to the Sociology of Music Education*, we realized that we, too, had undertaken a gigantic task that provided myriad opportunities for rich discussion and analysis, as well as an ever-present risk of overlooking something of importance within its pages. One of the first challenges we faced was identifying scholars in music sociology to review the *Handbook* who had not already contributed to it. The *Handbook* editors did an impressive job of soliciting experts to contribute to the publication, but they created something of an editorial challenge because ACT co-editor Scott Goble had co-authored a chapter with Anita Prest. (Scott recused

himself from working on the section containing that chapter). The volume is divided into three sections; therefore, we decided that this ACT review issue should focus on each of those three sections in order to address as much of the book as possible. Thus, this issue of ACT comprises six essays: two for each section of the *Handbook*, written by scholars who are equally expert in the areas addressed within the three sections. The final article in this issue is a response from the *Handbook's* editors.

ACT always seeks to offer readers new and unique perspectives on current issues in music education; accordingly, ACT book review issues do not follow the pattern of “traditional” book reviews. Author-reviewers are asked to apply their scholarly expertise to expand on themes, fill in possible gaps, correct or add to certain points, and in general, compose an essay of free-standing interest and importance. They are encouraged to explore issues and concerns raised for them in the section of the book they are reviewing, even if those concerns are not explicitly addressed in the book itself. The point of the reviews is to initiate dialogue on important points and issues germane to our understandings of music, our approaches to curriculum, and, where appropriate, our approaches to music education, with the goal of generating further discussion on those issues or concerns (ACT Book Review Issue Guidelines).

The contributors to this issue of ACT have certainly taken these guidelines to heart, and I predict that some of the essay reviews in this issue may become “must reads” for scholars serious about the sociology of music education. So, without further ado, I hereby introduce the essays and their authors in this special book review issue of *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education*.

Section I of the *Routledge Handbook* is dedicated to exploring issues of “Post-structuralism, Globalisation, Internationalisation, Post-colonialism.” To lead off this issue of ACT, **Graham McPhail** offers a provocative essay that presents epistemological arguments about knowledge itself; he seeks to raise “the issue of how to ensure that criticality maintains a constant reflexive edge within the academic community to avoid simply utilising the moral high ground as justification for changes to [music] education.” Also writing about Section I, co-authors **Carol Frierson-Campbell** and **Guillermo Rosabal-Coto** ask readers to “consider how ‘power relations’ and ‘paradoxes’ might get in the way of meeting social justice goals” in music education.

The second section of the *Handbook* focuses on “Capital, Class, Status, and Social Reproduction.” **Vincent Bates** offers readers a detailed examination of this section, asking why there is so little of Marx’s work represented, particularly considering the section title. Conceptualizing the social field of capitalist reproduction as “the Game,” Bates observes that “the global capitalist totality literally is a game of life or death for much of the world.” Music education thus represents one game among the thousands that individuals living under capitalist systems must play every day—a game that, unfortunately, too often overlooks (or chooses to ignore) the rich diversity and cultural wealth inherent within marginalized groups, including those living on the economic margins. Accompanying Bates’s provocation in this section is an essay by **Rohan Hardy** and **Alexis Kallio**, who “identified three core themes woven throughout the book section: (i) the politics of belonging, (ii) *illusio* and governance, and (iii) professionalism and capital.” Their exploration of the chapters in Section II of the *Handbook* suggests a future-oriented perspective on the social and societal responsibilities that music education offers, engaging with what music education *is* and what *it could be*.

The third and final section of the *Handbook* is dedicated to “Crossing Borders—Problematizing Assumptions.” **Ailbhe Kenny’s** review essay problematizes “the politics and performativity of citational practices that continue to reproduce White, heterosexual, male, and geographically limited scholarship” within music education. The final review essay is from **Roger Mantie**. Through a combination of philosophy and sociology, Mantie emphasizes “the difference between the empirical and the normative to argue for greater sociological sensitivity to music education’s relationship to the political role of schooling as a state institution.”

To conclude this ACT special book review issue and in keeping with the goal of generating discussion about the concerns raised by the essays’ authors, the editors of *The Routledge Handbook to Sociology of Music Education* have responded to the reviewers, providing further articulation of their goals for the *Handbook*. The response essay from **Ruth Wright**, **Geir Johansen**, **Panagiotis A. Kanellopoulos**, and **Patrick Schmidt** reminds readers that in undertaking a monumental project such as the *Handbook*, one could never satisfy all readers’ questions, nor can they cover all possible topics of concern, no matter how important they might be. But this does not mean we should stop trying; indeed, as scholars and educators, we must keep probing these concerns in our teaching and in our research. As one of ACT’s editors, I am deeply appreciative of the time, effort,

and care the *Handbook* editors invested in this project and grateful for the scholars whose work appears within it. They have provided music educators with an important resource for additional sociological inquiry in music education. Thus, it is the hope of the ACT editors that this review issue will inspire further communicative exchange about what has and has not been articulated, both within the *Handbook* and within the six essay reviews comprising this issue of *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education*.

References

- Green, Lucy. 2021. Foreword. In *The Routledge handbook to sociology of music education*, edited by Ruth Wright, Geir Johansen, Panagiotis A. Kanellopoulos, and Patrick Schmidt, xxiv–xxv. Routledge.
- Wright, Ruth, Geir Johansen, Panagiotis A. Kanellopoulos, and Patrick Schmidt, eds. 2021. *The Routledge handbook to sociology of music education*. Routledge.