



BOOK REVIEW

BJME book review, Dec 2022: Elizabeth Haddon

Sound Teaching: A Research-Informed Approach to Inspiring Confidence, Skill, and Enjoyment in Music Performance edited by Henrique Meissner, Renee Timmers, and Stephanie E. Pitts. Abingdon: Routledge, 2022. 146pp., hardback £44.99; eBook £13.59. ISBN: 9780367622138, DOI: 10.4324/9781003108382

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This edited volume explores research and practice in music psychology and music education, highlighting valuable insights arising from varied studies which will inform and inspire further developments in music performance teaching and learning. Structured into four main parts focusing on ‘Musicians as Teachers’, ‘Developing Specialist Musical Skills’, ‘Group Leadership and Interaction in Ensembles’ and ‘Strategies for Enhancing Musical Confidence and Enjoyment’, the volume achieves an informative selection of research grounded in pedagogical reality within diverse areas of practice, at the heart of which is the importance of student-centred teaching and learning. The publication complements other edited volumes such as ‘Musicians in the making’ (Rink et al., 2017), ‘Developing the musician’ (Stakelum, 2013), providing further insights into practice while also representing research engagement as within reach of all practitioners.

The 12 chapters provide very readable and engaging accounts of research and practice, accessible to those who may not, themselves, be working within research cultures, as well as of value to students and staff in higher music education, those working in school music education, community settings and instrumental/vocal teachers across all contexts. Much of the content was featured in conference days at the University of Sheffield. The origins of the material are from masters and doctoral studies at the same institution; this can be viewed as a manifestation of empowerment of practitioners through the trajectory of contributing authors demonstrating research engagement developing their practice, and the knowledge construction and research output benefiting the understanding of other musicians.

The structuring of the book has been carefully considered by the editorial team, and the individual chapters provide enticing material which includes illustrative vignettes and clear summaries with implications for further research and practice. The concise length of the chapters supports the immediacy of the text and leaves the reader keen to explore further; the editors’ opening chapter provides helpful contextualisation and their final chapter adds further insights, provides useful guidance for practitioners considering developing research skills and highlights tools and resources. This focus on supporting the development of practice and research aligns the volume as a whole and underpins the person-centred approach to education revealed within the inner chapters.

The inclusion of diverse areas of practice and pedagogical contexts enhances the relevance to the wider readership, while stimulating reflection. Braz Nunes’ chapter, ‘How musical learning experiences have an impact on music educators’ attitudes and practices’ is one of many putting the learner at the centre of inquiry while encouraging the reader to reflect on their own position: do we adapt to our learners, supporting their engagement with music, or do we deploy fixed pedagogical practices; how might our pedagogical approaches be influenced by context? Miller’s chapter, ‘Traditional musicians as teachers’ gives consideration to the ideals of democratic, participatory facilitation and illuminates teaching strategies for Scottish traditional music which

could be deployed across genres, as well as promoting awareness of the social benefits of participation and means by which these could be supported – a theme which also emerges in the chapter on choral singing by Bonshor, ‘Conductors as teachers’. As with other chapters, a feature of Bonshor’s writing is the inclusion of quotes from research participants, revealing choir members’ desire for informative feedback, their discernment of genuine/false praise and sensitivity to the verbal and non-verbal communication from the conductor; insights from this chapter could be applied across contexts and genres to enhance positive communication in any pedagogical setting.


Meissner’s individual chapter, ‘Teaching children and teenagers expressive music performance’ again provides encouraging research findings and specifically details methods which can be used with children to work on musical expressiveness. In particular, dialogic teaching is brought to the fore and illustrated through the inclusion of teacher–student verbal interaction excerpts; modelling is also indicated as a positive approach. Nevertheless, there is scope for considering how to achieve learner responses to teachers’ questions in cases where students may be shy or unforthcoming. How can educators further support learner voice?

Li’s chapter on ‘Developing timbre on the piano’, Hawkes’ chapter on ‘Teaching pre-performance routines to improve students’ performance experience’ and Perdomo-Guevara’s chapter ‘The teacher’s role in the enhancement of students’ performance experience’ further highlight the value of communication and the need for teachers to deploy care concerning their educational language and to consider how this may reveal their pedagogical priorities. Li highlights the value of cross-modal practices – drawing on ‘metaphors, adjectives, gestures and embodied actions to explain timbral intentions’ (p. 52); mental skills training is brought to the fore as well as the visual and sonic contribution of performance gestures. Hawkes details pre-performance routines emerging through an action research project and their positive deployment by young students. The application of these could be further considered beyond performance; for example, in preparation for individual and group lessons and rehearsals. Perdomo-Guevara’s chapter is particularly welcome in revealing how those who enjoy performance conceptualise it, building towards consideration of how teachers can support a growth mindset in their students as well as help musicians find emotional connection with their audience and joy in performance.

The focus on mastery is further demonstrated within Ayerst’s chapter on ‘Mobilising improvisation skills in classically trained musicians’. As elsewhere in this volume, a particular strength is the capacity of the author to reveal reflections on their own learning processes; this involves grappling with issues of control, freedom, perceptions of tradition versus dynamic creative agency, comparison to others and self-assessment. While an individual learning context could be viewed as a lonely construct, Ayerst shows how scholarship and research strands supported the learning process. In contrast, Pennill’s chapter ‘Communication and interaction in ensemble rehearsal’ positions the learner as part of an interactive group; it is of interest to read that although ‘rehearsal evolves over time’ (p. 75), ‘patterns [of interaction] form quickly and can set the tone for later sessions’ (p. 82). Pennill examines evolving trajectories of interaction, comparing these to research on team development; the findings have interesting implications for the creation of positive, supportive behaviours within ensembles and more widely. Dudson also considers interactive group processes within the chapter ‘Singing and signing with Deaf and hearing impaired young people’, contextualising and illuminating strategies used by hearing music leaders working in this context. Student responses again demonstrate the positive outcomes of this work; the findings would also be of relevance to those working with young learners in other settings.

Overall, this volume provides rich, detailed insights into carefully selected contexts of research and practice, with a focus on supporting learners to not only develop musical skills but to also enjoy their interaction with others including teachers, ensemble members, conductors and audience. The reflective awareness detailed within illuminates the concerns of the contributing

authors and also invites the reader to question their own practice, priorities and privileges; the means by which this is achieved forms a very positive addition to scholarship and will no doubt inspire further developments in research and practice.

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References

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