

## BOOK REVIEW

Gould, E., Countryman, J., Morton, C., & Stewart Rose, L. (Eds.). (2009).

*Exploring Social Justice: How Music Education Might Matter*. Toronto: Canadian Music Educators' Association/L'Association canadienne des musiciens éducateurs

JULIET HESS

In *Exploring Social Justice: How Music Education Might Matter* (2009), Gould and her team of editors tackle some extremely difficult issues. This book pushes beyond the boundaries of the band/orchestra/choir paradigm to wonder what else might be possible in music education. The title itself asks a fundamental question: how music education *might* matter. As music educators, *can* we make a difference? Does teaching children to sing in tune make a difference? Does teaching children how to play wind instrument make a difference? If it does not, can we reconceive music education as education for social justice so that, as music educators, we do make a difference? This is a book that asks those “hard questions”. It also comes up with theorized, tangible suggestions that are directly applicable to practice. Research in this book can be implemented in any music classroom (and many general classrooms as well) where care has been taken to foster respect and a sense of community between all members of the classroom.

So, why should we as educators engage in social justice? Music, by its very nature, is social and therefore music education is embedded in the social world. Because of its social nature, it provides a unique opportunity to affect change at local and possibly global levels. If, as educators, we aim to teach our students and not our subject, we gain the possibility to educate for far more than what can be tested in school. Education can be values-driven; we can educate the students we teach to be global citizens (Bradley 2006), who are mindful and respectful of the people in the world around them, and who actively seek to make the world a better place through both critique and action.

The question then is not so much why we should engage in social justice with our students, but rather why we would choose not to when there is so much to be gained. The task seems daunting; this is the work of “changing the world”, after all. However, this book provides perfect jumping-off place—a place to begin the work of utmost importance by taking small steps. This book provides both theoretical and practical foundations to move towards a critical pedagogy in the classroom. Many chapters in the book emphasize valuing students as co-teachers in the classroom—appreciating students not as empty vessels ready to receive knowledge from the omniscient teacher as in the banking concept of education (Freire 1970), but rather as equals with valuable knowledge to contribute to the classroom. Subjugated knowledges and experiences, as pointed out by Steven Lashbrook and Roger Mantie in their joint chapter, have a place and a voice in a classroom that educates for social justice.

The book is organized into three sections. The first, entitled “Theoretical Frameworks”, provides the theoretical foundation for what follows. Lise Vaugeois’ chapter defines social justice as “the work of undoing structures that produce raced and gendered oppressions and systemic poverty as well as the work of challenging discourses that rationalize these structures” (p. 3). This definition emphasizes both the enormity and the importance of the task and sets the framework for what ensues. There are seven contributing authors in this section and topics range from using critical race theory and postcolonial theory to critique in the music classroom (Lise Vaugeois), to broadening repertoire without creating an Other (June Countryman), to the interrogation of world music choral publications (Deborah Bradley) and the reconsideration of the concept of masculinity through examining war songs in the repertoire of the *Amabile* choirs (Carol Benyon). Roger Mantie, however, cautions against a universal concept of social justice, noting that “any appeal to a singular conception of social justice should be understood as a political maneuver intended to mask vested interests under the cloak of universality” (p. 98). Lee Willingham wonders about the justification for teaching for social justice *through* music education instead of simply teaching directly for social justice, while Susan O’Neill advocates for reexamining the curriculum and our teaching practices and pedagogy using the four components of the theoretical framework she outlines. Chapters in the section vary in strength theoretically and many are functional practically as well as theoretically. Although three scholarly publications have devoted entire issues to social justice and music education,<sup>1</sup> this is still a relatively new area of music education, which perhaps accounts for some of the under-theorized chapters. Chapters venture into critical theory, but with a new focus: bringing critical theory into the classroom and teaching students to think critically and question taken-for-granted ideas they see in front of them. Vaugeois (2009, pp. 9-10), for example, provides a table of questions that students can ask to critically question music they are presented with in class.

The second section, "Research Initiatives", consists of nine authors reporting on their research. This section featured a real range of research and also a diversity in the way that the research was theorized. Topics ranged from the music education practices in South Africa (Alvin Petersen), to the traditional large ensemble music program and its structure in direct opposition to concepts of self-determination and self-development (Katie Carlisle), to the use of popular music in the curriculum (Karen Snell). Methodologies varied, but were generally well-executed. Those that were not, perhaps related more to the fact that this is a newer area of music education and some taken-for-granted notions were being allowed to stand, when perhaps they should have been critiqued. For example, Beatriz Ilari's chapter on "underprivileged" Brazilian children and adolescents, which examined social-musical programs run for children by NGOs, had strains of salvationist narratives and distributive justice running through it, which she left uncritiqued. However, Luisa Sotomayor and Isabelle Kim critique those same discourses of charity that threaten to accompany all outreach projects by using Boler's (1999) pedagogy of discomfort, instead proposing an alternative outreach model based on Lave and Wenger's (1991) concept of communities of practice (p. 225). Some of the chapters in this section were absolutely inspiring to me as a music educator. Valerie Peters and her students, for example, became ethnomusicologists as they explored the local Italian music culture in their Montreal community using ethnographic techniques, fostering a great respect for the local community. Edwin Wasiak describes a thoughtful cross-cultural collaboration between the University of Lethbridge and the local Blackfoot community; this sounds like an incredible project, and perhaps one that could be implemented on a smaller scale in a local community.

Section three, "Emerging Practices", concerned itself with practices currently taking place in music classrooms across Canada and the United States. Nine authors contributed to this section. Topics here range from the use of improvisation pedagogy in the classroom (Douglas Friesen), to a description of the Critical Pedagogy for Creative Artists course (Michele Kaschub) and the One World Youth Arts Project (Steven Lashbrook and Roger Mantie), to the use of mixing and remixing as a way to engage in social justice in the music classroom (Mark Campbell). Notable in this section is a narrative by Brianne Whyte describing her journey as a preservice teacher towards a notion of music education rooted in social justice where music education is a tool towards social justice rather than an end in itself. Many of the projects in this chapter can be implemented in the classroom, particularly after the theoretical foundation provided by the previous two sections. I found Michele Kaschub's project particularly inspiring. She describes a project called the Critical Pedagogy for Creative Artists course where eighteen students who were sophomores and juniors in a music appreciation class essentially designed their own course which, after exploring music that has been written as a call to action or with social justice in mind, and exploring social issues, culminated in producing student compositions that were statements on issues that students identified as important to them (i.e. child abuse, the situation in Darfur, being an immigrant, etc.). This brings the concept of the music appreciation course to a whole new level. There is still listening and appreciation,

but now the content is found and shared by both students and teachers (once again valuing the students' voices). The culminating projects aimed to educate the listener on an issue that students identified as important. Projects such as this one demonstrate what a classroom can look like when it is actively engaging in the practice of social justice. This section is for practitioners who are looking to move beyond or alter the band/orchestra/choir paradigm towards the music classroom that initiates a thirst for social justice and the elimination of oppression and fosters respect for all people.

The possibilities for the classroom are endless. This book has something for everyone—the practitioner, the academic, the student. Educating for social justice is a monumental task, yet I think, at this point in time, most music educators would agree, if only vaguely, that it is important. However, engaging in the practice of social justice without an underlying philosophy of music education could potentially have damaging results. With the theoretical grounding, this book provides not only the practical, but asks many of the difficult questions that enable the shaping of a philosophy towards educating for social justice. After shaping a philosophy, which, like social justice, will probably continually change as understandings develop, there are many projects in the research section and the practical section that could be adapted for various situations.

Speaking as an academic as well as a classroom elementary music teacher, very rarely have I found a book that is so meticulous in both theory and practice. The theoretical work is extremely strong and there are many practical ideas that I could implement into my classroom immediately. This is an exciting piece of work for music education and all editors and contributors should be congratulated for what is, on many levels, an inspiring piece of work—one which should perhaps be on the required reading list of all future and current music educators.

Traditional Western music education features large ensembles, where the individual voice is compromised in favor of the “greater good” of the ensemble. The study of the repertoire for large ensembles sends clear messages as to whose music is important (i.e. *who* is important) and whose is not (i.e. *who* is not). As the contributors to this book suggest, this paradigm is on its way out in music education in favour of a new era, where students' voices are valued and everyone's music (i.e. *everyone*) is important. This is not to say that this cannot be done in the large ensemble context. Carol Benyon, Deborah Bradley, and Edwin Wasiak all conceive of new possibilities within the large ensemble, whether it be a focus on different repertoire (Benyon and Bradley), constant critique and contextualization (Bradley), cross-cultural collaboration (Wasiak), or the reconception of the ensemble as a more democratic organization.<sup>2</sup> It is not about teaching music anymore; it is about teaching people and being taught ourselves. Tolerance is not enough. As Wasiak (2009) points out:

*Racism is more alive and well in Canada than most of us would like to admit. How can this be? Are we not a tolerant multicultural nation? Do we not tolerate diversity of lifestyle, religion, culture, and race? Perhaps, but social justice is not about tolerance—it is about understanding and respect (p. 212).*

This is not an easy path, but this book is a tool available to all music educators. Paths are less difficult to travel when we do not have to travel alone.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Boler, Megan. 1999. *Feeling power: Emotions and education*. New York & London: Routledge.

Bradley, Deborah. 2006. "Global song, global citizens? Multicultural Choral Music Education and the Community Youth Choir: Constituting the Multicultural Human Subject." In *Education*. Toronto: Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.

Freire, Paulo. 1970. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed: 30th anniversary edition*. New York: Continuum.

Lave, J. and E. Wenger. 1991. *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> The following journal issues were devoted entirely to issues of social justice in music education: *Music Education Research*: 2007, 9 (2), *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education*: 2007, 6 (4), and *Gender, Education, Music, Society*: 2008.

<sup>2</sup> I am drawing here on notions of critical pedagogy present throughout the book rather than those three specific chapters.