



## Reviews of Publications

### **Taking a Learner-Centred Approach to Music Education *Pedagogical Pathways***

**by Laura Huhtinen-Hildén and Jessica Pitt**

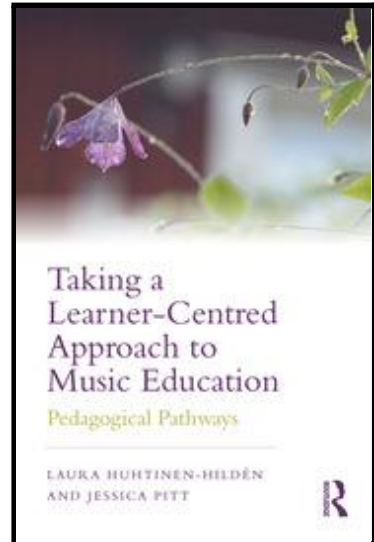
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*Reviewed by Nadja Kraft*

This book brings a fresh view to musical learning and puts the learner at its centre. There are so many books on the market bursting with ideas and often giving a very detailed and almost prescriptive plan (and of course we do need these!) on what to do with music groups in community settings, preschool and the classroom, but this one focuses entirely on the learning experience of participants in group settings and how teachers can plan for and contribute to fruitful learning.

The book is in two parts. Part 1 is about underpinning a learner-centred approach to music education and gives a wealth of theoretical understanding on learner-centred thinking, collaborative learning in and through music, planning as navigation and negotiation in the learning process, and the many different positions of the pedagogue. The starting point is learner-centred teaching as a holistic approach and the authors see learning music as an essential element of living a fulfilled life and propose that humans flourish through creative music making. They give insights into the dimensions and understanding of how children learn and explain the importance of why learning with peers is essential and how social, emotional and cultural learning are closely linked. Activities should be playful and build on learners' ideas and so have a deeper meaning for them. Huhtinen-Hildén speaks of 'pedagogical sensitivity' and writes that if we think about teaching as interaction and dialogue, with learning at the centre of the process, it allows the possibility of including both the pedagogue's and the learners' potential for growth and change.



Being an Orff practitioner myself, I was both very excited and disappointed at first when Huhtinen-Hildén and Pitt mention the 'Grand Methods' of music education pioneers like Orff, Kodály, Dalcroze and Suzuki. Excited, because Orff got a mention, but a bit disappointed at first, because I thought everything they described in the book so far was describing the creative process of a good Orff-Schulwerk session in all its colourfulness, and links very closely with the Orff approach today! They are however urging pedagogues to look beneath the technical dimensions of these 'Grand Methods' and search for their philosophical foundations. They want to encourage us to retell their stories through today's music education narratives, This is something I totally agree with: we all know that the Schulwerk was revolutionary at the time it was written, but it is slightly outdated and only some of it can be used successfully in group music making today with children, however the philosophy behind it reflects the multi-faceted creative process Part 1 of the book so beautifully expresses.

However, to my satisfaction, Orff together with Dalcroze do get the credit for being the best-known music educators who worked with movement. Their pedagogical approaches are described as being based on experiential learning, the process, and creativity.

I spent a long time reading Part 2 and have never put so many post-it notes on pages in a book! It is a beautiful and mesmerising treasure of practical ideas and it truly inspires the reader to look at everyday life and turn its many aspects into magical learning experiences. Amongst more traditional objects like scarves and instruments, are a collection of buttons and old shoes; painting with pure water on rock or paper to make graphic notations without having to worry about a final result as it would magically disappear again; not just fish in the sea but secretive fish and the secrets of the sea; not just the sound of an instrument but an emotion through that sound, or the question: Are you afraid of sounds you hear? I could go on and on. Throughout the book the reader is urged to reflect on the use of wordy instructions, and whether they're needed at all or how they can be used in a meaningful way without over-describing an activity. There's a whole chapter about making music visible and tangible, there are examples on how to actively listen to a traditional piece of music and many pathways described as to what to do with them: exploring movements, developing dances together, improvising, finding little rhythms or words and taking those as starting points for compositions, and all these ideas put the emotions and experiences of the group's learners in the centre. The possibilities of the workshops and pathways in the book are endless, and there are so many different music pieces used and described that it took me many hours to find and listen to them and I haven't had the chance to explore all of them properly.

The activities are not dedicated to particular age groups and can be adapted to suit the needs of different groups. The reflection and discussion boxes throughout the book are invaluable if your practice includes teaching music and movement education students. The many questions asked and ideas for further personal research are equally important though for every reader and I strongly recommend taking the time to answer them. I promise it will give you many different views and it will enrich your own practice. I can certainly see myself trying out many of these wonderful ideas, however bearing in mind if you are teaching large classes in primary schools for example, not everything will be possible to achieve in lessons and the emotions and thoughts of the children can certainly not always be discussed. You have to be prepared to feel unsettled at times and ready to take the risk that not everything can always be planned for! But if you take small steps, guiding your group skillfully through the creative process and allowing space both for yourself and the participants to grow and learn collaboratively, you will appreciate the help of this book enormously.

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