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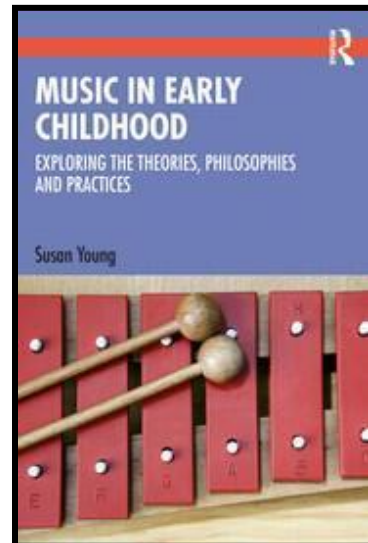
Book Review

Music in Early Childhood: Exploring the Theories, Philosophies and Practices

By Susan Young

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Reviewed by Diana Hawley



As an American Orff-Schulwerk teacher educator, I often reflect on how I might more effectively help teachers draw connections between the experiential, conceptual, and pedagogical learnings introduced in summer Levels courses and education principles outside of Orff-Schulwerk. The practicing teachers who attend courses typically leave our two weeks together seeming energized and better equipped for facilitating Orff-Schulwerk inspired experiences with their students. In some ways, however, I observe that our hyperfocus on the Orff-Schulwerk approach as its own entity limits participants' capacity to synthesize and contextualize their learning. Our brief, end-of-day reflecting conversations do not accommodate the deep dialogue required to draw meaningful connections to influences outside of Orff-Schulwerk. Without knowledge of how the approach interconnects with other big ideas in education, teachers are at risk of falling into patterns of practice out of habit rather than intention; they might understand the *how* of Orff-Schulwerk but not the *why*. Susan Young's latest book, *Music in Early Childhood: Exploring the Theories, Philosophies and Practices*, may be a tool for addressing this challenge in the American Orff-Schulwerk Association (AOSA) Teacher Education Levels Courses and, contrary to the title's suggested target audience, for music educators of students in all life stages.

Summary

Young has compiled a thorough yet accessible resource that supports the professionalism of music educators. On the opening page of the 178-page book, Young characterizes music educators as reflective professionals, open yet discerning:

A professional early childhood music educator understands that a good teacher is constantly evaluating and modifying their practice ... they are pedagogical pluralists, nomads, using their professional judgement to make choices. They retain a healthy, intellectual scepticism towards the taken-for-granted, new trends or quick fixes. They are grounded and realistic, yet also imaginative, wise and optimistic. (p. 1)

Challenging teachers to interrogate the habits of practice that might “work” in the moment yet lack theoretical or philosophical integrity, Young provides a comprehensive overview of theories and pedagogical approaches that serious early childhood music educators will want to consider. The book is designed for easy navigation by readers, whether practitioners or students, who are eager to build a schema of theoretical and philosophical understandings that support intentional, thoughtful music teaching. Young’s goals with the book are twofold: (1) to help teachers develop a theoretically-sound conception of music education, and (2) to equip teachers to make critical judgments as they grow in their practice. The author has bundled chapters into five chronological sections that provide an overview and discussion of 15+ educational philosophies, beginning with historical theories of learning and ending with current trends in music education that signify a shift that ‘brings the teaching of music closer to the realities of young children’s and families’ everyday lives’ (p. 129). Each chapter consists of a brief biography, philosophical overview, principles, image of childhood, practices, and key texts. Additionally, a culminating ‘comments and connections’ section helps the reader see potentially hidden lineages or interconnections between chapters. A consistent format across chapters makes for an authoritative yet manageable resource that equips the reader to jump from chapter to chapter or read from cover to cover.

In Part I, Young provides a brief overview of two historical learning theories, recapitulation and behaviorist psychology, that have DNA still present in contemporary music classrooms. The essence of recapitulation theory is that ‘children repeat in their development the physiological and cultural development of the species’ (p. 17). The author includes this theory, now considered outdated, to highlight the importance for practitioners to examine problematic aspects of our traditions critically in order to apply them ethically and pragmatically in contemporary contexts. This topic might also be of particular interest to Orff-Schulwerk practitioners, as evolutionist theories influenced Orff’s early thinking about learning and development. Also in Part I, Young explored the roots of behaviorism, a theory that surfaces in music education as a premise that music learning is about developing proficiency in a variety of musical behaviors.

In Part II, Young highlights the theories of learning advanced by Froebel, Dewey, Montessori, and Isaacs. The author argues that ‘the legacy of these educators inspires and challenges us to continue examining assumptions underlying current trends in early childhood music education’ (p. 27). Today’s Orff-Schulwerk inspired practices are informed by these theorists’ ideas about the role of the teacher as one who functions as a partner in learning, designs learning environments, and helps students close conceptual gaps.

In Part III, Carl Orff surfaces alongside fellow composer-educators Dalcroze and Kodály. In this section, Young traces the lineages of Orff, Dalcroze, and Kodály to earlier educational philosophies, noting that ‘each method drew on techniques and teaching methods that were already in existence ... this is often not appreciated’ (p. 61) The author further reminds readers that making use of these approaches with fidelity should mean balancing a strong

understanding of the founding principles while also adapting for contemporary students and contexts.

In Part IV, Young summarizes the work of Piaget, Vygotsky, and Bruner, three psychologists whose work marked a shift toward the psychological study of children into the 1970s. Together, Piaget, Vygotsky, and Bruner inspired more nuanced questions about human development. Young notes the important legacy of Piaget's emphasis on child-centered practices and the development of pedagogies designed to 'reflect their needs and interests as the main drivers of their own learning' (p. 103). Bruner's extensive contributions to understanding the processes of learning also influenced the direction of curriculum design in music education. Additionally, Vygotsky's sociocultural theories of learning initiated new interest to 'understand young children's music learning within social and cultural contexts' (p. 93).

In Part V, Young draws connections to the social and cultural worlds of students, noting 'the varied nature of these final sections reflects the philosophical and theoretical diversity that has come to be characteristic of more recent music education thinking' (p. 129). The author uses this section to highlight the work of Malaguzzi and the Reggio Emilia approach, and to provide chapters on each of the following topics: Listening and Exploring Sound, Communicative Musicality, Music Play and Playful Pedagogies, and Addressing Diversity. In the final chapter, Addressing Diversity, Young draws connections to critical pedagogy and culturally responsive practices. The wealth of information in this chapter compelled me to mark pages 175–76 in my personal copy as a place to return to during my planning sessions for upcoming teacher education courses. The author includes a robust list of reflecting questions, well-crafted prompts that invite teachers to think thoughtfully and critically about cultural considerations.

Implications for Orff-Schulwerk Teachers

A notable strength of this book is the author's clear writing style. As if separating the sections of a braid, Young pulls apart the interconnected ideas that inform music education practices into distinct chapters. This process allows readers to look at each strand individually and notice how the shape of each one has been influenced by those alongside it. Once all the strands are visible, the reader can reassemble a braid with greater intention and integrity. The opportunity to differentiate and clarify big ideas in music education sets up Orff-Schulwerk inspired educators to consider the approach in the broader music education landscape.

This text highlights ways in which Orff-Schulwerk is not a stand-alone entity, but rather part of an interrelated network of thinking about music learning. After reading the book, I was motivated to reflect on how we, as a community of Orff-Schulwerk inspired practitioners, might engage in dialogue with each of these influential voices. How might these conversations support us as we continue to adapt and innovate our approach? For example, if we were to examine the role of the teacher, what might surface in conversation with Froebel, Montessori, Vygotsky, and Bruner? Young suggested that Froebel would urge us to be 'a sensitive partner in play who offers freedom with well-judged guidance' (p. 32). Montessori might encourage us to consider how environmental factors in the classroom design could be shaped to foster student

independence. By contrast, Vygotsky might encourage us to focus on student-teacher dialogue, through which the teacher supports students, following their lead, drawing out and stretching their ideas. Bruner might invite us to evaluate to what extent processes inspired by imitation, exploration, and improvisation support his ideas about modes of learning: enactive, iconic, and symbolic. Considering other ideas does not take away from Orff-Schulwerk, but rather helps us be reflective professionals who show sound discernment.

As an AOSA teacher educator, I have been aspiring to make foundational Orff-Schulwerk principles and histories even clearer in my teaching. Young agrees that teacher education courses are heavy on ‘content, teaching tips and activity ideas’ and light on ‘in-depth discussion of the origins, philosophy or principles of the method’ (p. 90). Along with others (Benedict, 2009; Campbell & Dahm, 2022), the author suggests this surface-level focus has contributed to the reification of instructional processes associated with Orff-Schulwerk, contradicting the approach’s central tenet of creativity. To make sure the teachers I work with prioritize, as Young suggests, ‘identifying the learning needs of the children and selecting pedagogical strategies that will best serve those needs’ (p. 90), I plan to draw connections to influential voices outside of Orff-Schulwerk to encourage teacher-participants to synthesize and contextualize their understanding of the approach.

In conclusion, I highly recommend *Music in Early Childhood: Exploring the Theories, Philosophies and Practices* as a resource for any—not just early childhood—music teachers who aspire to do purposeful work to their fullest potential. Discerning teachers remain steadfast in purpose as social, cultural, and political contexts shift. Young warns, ‘without a clearly defined purpose rooted in values and principles, music education can be hijacked by those whose purpose is politically strong’ (p. 4). By grappling with the ideas in this text, music teachers will bolster their content knowledge and criticality, equipping themselves to sustain a clear sense of professional purpose in our changing world.

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