

BOOK REVIEW

## Knowledge and Music Education: A Social Realist Account

*Knowledge and Music Education: A Social Realist Account* by Graham J. McPhail. Routledge, 2023. Hbk, 256pp, £130. ISBN: 9781032292519. doi:[10.1017/S0265051723000293](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265051723000293)

The structure of this book, moving from “theoretical matters” in the first section, through to “into the classroom” in the second and onto “looking to the future” in the third, is carefully considered and accessible. Social realism has become an important pillar in the sociology of education and *Knowledge and Music Education: A Social Realist Account* provides a key text for music educators.

“Theoretical matters” draws on key education and social theorists but also provides a strong historical perspective to frame an episteme for music education. After problematising knowledge when perceived through a post-modern lens, Basil Bernstein’s (2000) pedagogic device and the rules that underpin the recontextualisation of knowledge are introduced in the opening chapter: *Knowledge and its Discontents*. Chapter 2: *A Theory of Knowledge for Education* draws from a range of theoretical perspectives, from “Aristotle to . . . Winch” (p. 24). The distinction is made between “two types of knowledge – epistemic knowledge (from the disciplines) and sociocultural knowledge (from everyday life)” and “two key knowledge forms within epistemic knowledge: knowledge-that (knowledge of something) and know-how-to (knowing how to do something with that knowledge of something)” (p. 28, italics in the original). There is an implication here that these binaries are antinomies. This is a recurring theme throughout this book, exemplified by the caveat towards the beginning of Chapter 2 that bridges the traditional-progressive divide by emphasising that “learning first relies on a classroom environment that is ‘progressive’ in terms of its relational dimensions” (p. 24). Rather than emphasising a traditionalist approach, associated with a “content based . . . approach to the curriculum” (p. 40), social realism here is based on “the reality of concepts, judgemental rationality, and fallibilism” (p. 40). Having discussed the importance of disciplinary knowledge in Chapter 2, music as *A Discipline in Search of an Episteme* is the focus of Chapter 3. Here a historical perspective further establishes a distinction between transitive epistemic knowledge and intransitive everyday knowledge. Bernstein’s perceptions of vertical (epistemic) and horizontal (everyday) discourses are used to inform this historical perspective, but there is a clear recognition through “music on the move” (p. 58) that both forms of knowledge discourse impact upon each other. Music and music education are dynamic fields that “reclassify what knowledge is valued and legitimised” (p. 59). Both Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 focus on *The Discipline Recontextualised* and shift the reader’s focus firmly in the direction of music education, ultimately providing a foundation for the key concluding chapter in this section, Chapter 6, *A Subject in Search of an Episteme*, which provides a carefully considered example of a “praxis of conceptualisation” (p. 92).

“Into the classroom” brings the notion of a praxis of conceptualisation into the classroom. Chapters 7 and 8 consider *Recontextualising the horizontal*. The idea of searching for “connective and foundational conceptual knowledge” (p. 122) through “the cognitive and linguistic move from concrete meanings and context-dependent language and thought towards context-independent language and thought” (p. 123) resonates with the ideals of using powerful knowledge within the context of social justice in education (Young et al., 2014). There is a clear sense that powerful knowledge is not just based on a process of transmission and acquisition through deliberate practice. The example of an “interstylistic lexicon” (pp. 132–134), illustrated by the doctoral work

of Carroll (2017) (McPhail, 2023, pp. 123–131), exemplifies how conceptual principles can be applied within new contexts, reflecting music education based upon principles of generative learning and creativity (Odena & Welch, 2009). Chapter 8 introduces the term “thingification” (p. 121) and Chapter 9, *Making the Tacit Visible and Audible*, discusses in greater depth the need for learners to develop their conceptual language through thingification. More exemplars from music and music education research are drawn upon to illustrate the thingification of music practice or knowing-in-action. The contexts for these illustrations are broad and inclusive but deliberately focus on music where generative and creative aspects of knowing-in-action are a priority (Jazz and Indigenous African Music). To further illustrate how music teachers can embed thingification into their teaching, Maton’s (2014) concepts of semantic gravity, semantic density and semantic waves are used to emphasise a shift towards identifying powerful knowledge in music education, or stable abstract concepts that apply to multiple contexts: “The concept of a semantic wave enables the surfacing and thingification of what many expert teachers already do, but in making the tacit explicit, the concepts become potentially more powerful as they become part of a teacher’s knowledge-that and know-how-to” (McPhail, 2023, p. 151). Chapter 10, *Curriculum Coherence: Connecting Knowledge-that with Knowledge-how-to for Deeper Learning*, operationalises a praxis of conceptualisation through a “curriculum design coherence model” (CDC) (p. 154). The mapping of concepts using one superordinate concept and several subordinate concepts within the context of a classroom music topic (The Blues) is clear and coherent and carefully justified. There are several figures in Chapter 10 that provide useful summaries of the ideas presented. Chapter 11 highlights the challenges associated with “invisible pedagogies” (p. 169), further emphasising the assertion that teachers need to make the tacit explicit in their teaching through a mixed modalities approach that aims “to bring both epistemic and social dimensions of learning into some sort of balanced relationship so that the potential for cumulative and deep learning is enhanced” (p. 170). Theoretical concepts from Bernstein (2000) and Shulman (1986) are used to frame discussions about pedagogic approaches and priorities. Chapters 12 and 13 deal with practical applications of curriculum delivery. There is a return to The Blues to illustrate CDC in action in Chapters 12 and 13, which moves from general classroom music education towards illustrating how a praxis of conceptualisation can be applied to specific ensemble contexts.

The final section of the book looks to the future. Chapter 14 *Crossing the Stylistic Divide*, returns to notions of formal and informal in music education. An assumption might be that the former is associated with Western Art Music and the latter with popular music, but several powerful case studies illustrate how knowledge-that within different stylistic contexts can enhance the inclusive nature of music education. Chapter 15 *Music Education for the Future* returns to Bernstein and how “Bernstein’s concepts allow us to see the production and reproduction of pedagogic discourse as dynamic” (p. 223). Interestingly, the concept of a *pedagogic* device (Bernstein, 2000) is changed to “who controls the *epistemic* device” (McPhail, 2023, p. 223; italics added). This illustrates the central focus of this book, which is about knowledge in music education.

There has been a historical shift in education policy in England that draws upon aspects of social realism. There has been the identification of powerful knowledge through curriculum policy documentation, with a clear emphasis on the direct instruction of knowledge-rich curricula (Claxton, 2021). Within this neo-traditional context, the balance between knowledge-that and know-how-to has been lost to prioritise the acquisition of declarative knowledge (knowledge-that) for pupils to retain in their long-term memory (Davis, 2023). This book seeks a balanced perspective, invaluable to colleagues who are challenged by working in contexts and jurisdictions that prioritise biased and idealised approaches towards music education. Nevertheless, the dual epistemic perspective of knowledge-that and know-how-to reduces the importance of introducing pupils to new contextual knowledge (knowing about). Links to Bernstein’s (1999) horizontal and vertical discourses create a knowledge hierarchy, particularly when the types of knowledge are directly associated with formal and informal learning. This hierarchy is compounded by the term

“informal musical knowledge” (McPhail, 2023, p. 105), associated directly with popular music (p. 105). One mitigation may have been to emphasise that informal learning is a pedagogic approach (Green, 2008), where the concepts of internalisation and improvisation can be applied to any musical context.

The importance of enabling learners to use concepts to think and talk (and even write) about their music-making is not new. In 1982, John Paynter highlighted the importance of musical concepts in secondary music education. Through his subsequent contribution to the National Curriculum Council Arts in Schools Project (NCC, 1990), “concepts” were included in an epistemic list of “Elements of Learning”, along with “skills” (know-how-to), “value/attitudes” (knowing of) and “information” (knowing about) (ibid, p. 55). There were also two “ways of engaging” in the arts promoted by the project: “making and appraising” (ibid, p. 48-49), which resonated with the idea of a praxis of conceptualisation. The academic abstractification of knowledge for its own sake relates to a separate, objectified and even scientific approach towards music education. There may be space for this, but fundamentally a pedagogic approach that includes rich knowledge should encompass a broad epistemic pallet that relates to music education as an artistic experience.

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