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# Book Reviews

**Democracy and Music Education: Liberalism, Ethics and the Politics of Practice** by Paul G. Woodford. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005. 160 pp, £16.95 paperback. ISBN 0 253 21739 3.

Paul Woodford invites music educators 'to begin reclaiming a democratic purpose for music education by contributing to wider conversations about the nature and significance of music in our lives and those of our children' (xi). The work starts from the premise that music education has meaning and purpose rooted in the application of reason and conscience. Along with this comes the belief that intellectual freedom and autonomy can be achieved by all mature citizens, and that progress in human affairs is possible. This is the gift of the Enlightenment.

Within this scheme the purpose of music education is to uphold principles of democracy – 'There can be no final or definitive understanding of democracy and thus no final or definitive understanding of what a democratic purpose for music education might imply for professional practice'.

The task before the reader is to engage in a conversation with the writer, to evaluate persuasive arguments and to become a willing participant in the process of rethinking what music education is for. Woodford's book is in six chapters spanning 104 pages of argument supported by 35 pages of end notes. The book is substantial in content and generous in style.

The journey begins in the first chapter, 'Intelligence in the World', by examining John Dewey's notion of participatory democracy. Fundamental to Dewey's conception is the necessary participation of all in 'the formation of common social values regulating the lives of individuals, of the human capacity to pool experiences, to cooperate for the common good, of people as the sources of new knowledge and able to improve their own lives and the lives of others' (p. 2).

Participating in democracy is viewed as moral and political action. For Dewey the school had a particular responsibility to nurture and develop a socialised intelligence leading pupils to become members of a community of inquirers. The task of the school was not so much to teach what to think but how to think. As Woodford makes clear this was not a matter of a child-centred education but rather a progressive one. Indeed, in North America, it was in large part this progressive approach to education that brought about the recognition that musical instruction should play a role in creating the liberally educated citizen.

In reviewing the relationship between Dewey's ideals and the development of music education rationales within North America during the 20th century, Woodford shows the inadequacy of both aesthetic and utilitarian arguments for music education; the one abandoning connections with society, the other disregarding far-off needs and negating the possibility of preparing students to know how to challenge authority, how to question and how to bring about change in musical society. All this leads to recognising the need for educational reform. Here the writer acknowledges the role of 'critical theorists' and 'radical feminists' in furthering understanding of some of the failings of professional music education philosophy and practice. Critics have shown how key Enlightenment ideas such as individualism, reason, justice, and democracy have failed to empower those of every social class and ethnic group, as well as female and male alike. When knowledge is viewed as socially constructed rather than



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given, the implications of such critiques are momentous.

The second chapter is titled 'Intelligence in the Musical World', and sets out to defend liberal education and, while acknowledging its failures, to define it differently. While the ideals of Dewey are revived to allow children to 'participate intelligently as mature citizens in public deliberations or conversations about common musical and other social values' (p. 31), these aims are placed in the context of a performance-based music education where authority is given to the expert musician. But performance alone, particularly when divorced from a democratic interest, does not qualify as intelligent action. It is too narrow, has little ethical or political significance and is ultimately anti-democratic. Performance-based music education becomes the harbinger of intellectual passivity and conservatism. No longer is the music teacher seen as intellectual, critic, generator of ideas and proposals for social change. Instead, there is the tendency for such teachers to develop their own rhetoric and propaganda, to become zealots of particular methodologies, to resort to quasi-philosophical claims with dogmatic advocacy coming to replace authentic conversation and the generation of socially useful knowledge about the purpose and practice of music education.

Here then is a critique of fixed musical standards, repertory, and pedagogy, unquestioned ways of doing things and by implication the widespread proselytising of particular approaches as exemplified in the widespread use of the Kodàly system. All this, so it is argued, is antidemocratic. Woodford is severely critical of the status quo, but equally critical of those who reject the Enlightenment project which, while not having succeeded, remains our best hope for achieving participatory democracy through recognising the intellectual capacities of individuals in society.

The need then is to reclaim the concept of abstract reason while living in a postmodern age. This is the work of the third chapter in which Woodford sets out to find reconciliation with postmodern positions. The postmodern perspective questions the authority of all that is given, claiming that truth is relative and that musical culture is no more than a battle ground on which competing groups with differing ideologies and versions of reality contest for positions of supremacy and dominance, where particular voices speak particular truths. The concept of the general, the universal, the common to all become anathema. But if Dewey's ideal of a common good, a sharing of experience, a social intelligence is to be furthered then it is proposed that 'some set of intellectual and social rules of engagement is required if individuals and groups are to transcend or bridge differences and ideologies in pursuit of social amelioration, or if they are to defend themselves from the vicissitudes of change and the hegemony of mainstream culture.' (p. 39)

Critical realists such as Moore (2004) have pointed out the incoherence of relativism. Here Moore cites a well known logical objection to relativism:

> Relativists claim that *all* truth is relative, but for this to be the case, there must be one truth that is *not* relative: namely, the truth that all truth is relative. Hence it is not true that all truth is relative. (p. 165)

Woodford works to restore the validity of seeking truths that are more than relative, truths that are not, of course, absolute, but open to conversation and deserving of respect while recognising that we can never finally understand. And the example within music education is the way general aesthetic theories have been accorded disrespect by postmodern thinkers. Woodford cites the case of the misguided savaging of the notion of music education as aesthetic education as proving counterproductive to solving the



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problems of music education's current ills. Woodford is calling for sensible scepticism in place of absolute scepticism, for conversation rather than destructive criticism. From here comes a plea for more reasonable debate, working with differences and holding differences in tension. This is the plea too of Estelle Jorgensen in her book *Transforming Music Education* (Jorgensen, 2002). There Jorgensen persists in calling for a 'holding this with that', with sustaining an ongoing dialectic where no quick positions are taken up or solutions found, for this perpetuates dogmatism, prejudice and ignorance. The problems faced by music teachers are societal, artistic and educational and best addressed by individuals in solidarity with others, in communities where all voices can be heard and where multiple perspectives are held in view and where no voices are silenced. This perspective rings well with Dewey's project and the case being made by Woodford.

Chapter 4, 'Music Education and the Culture Wars', enters the heart of political debate in North America and Western democracies in general. We live in conservative times where education has become subjected to the ideologies of 'neo-liberalism' on the one hand and the 'new right' on the other. Neo-liberalism takes the view that what is private is necessarily good and what is public is necessarily bad, that investment in education needs to show tangible economic benefits, for the world is intensely competitive and pupils must be equipped as effective producers and consumers within it. In North America the term 'new right' refers to a loose coalition of neo-conservatives and Christian fundamentalists who believe strongly that the delivery of a public good such as education should reflect a particular set of values, yet be open to market forces and above all be accountable. This leads to standardisation and testing and to certain kinds of knowledge having greater currency than others. For Woodford, this coincides with a professional retreat from debate and the abandonment of music education by the public sphere. There is no longer a forum in which to generate wider political ideals within a participatory democracy. The result is a move towards creating a curriculum responsive to corporate taste and values and to perceived ways of doing things as right and correct, and politically and economically expedient. All this is unlikely to prepare children for their future role as informed and discerning citizens. But this is not a cue for Woodford to find salvation in the counter arguments of the cultural left, for 'capitalism is not all bad'. What is needed is a language of critique and possibility and this requires a more politically educated profession.

Thus in chapter 5 the task is to find ways of reclaiming the public sphere. Woodford takes the case of 'multi-culturalism', an approach to music education frequently uncritically embraced by music teachers. As Woodford points out, the arguments of the relativists (and here the work of David Elliott (1995) is referred to) seek merely to acculturate children to existing cultural and group practices by showing how these practices are different and particular. Here is a passive transmission and acceptance of cultural values and practices, not a questioning and evaluating of them. There is no move to equipping children with the capacity to engage in the hybridisation of musical values or, when appropriate, to reject values and practices considered to be less than humane. Are children being taught to be critical in their cultural border crossing, to exercise choice and to discern when democratic values are being undermined? Woodford asks, what critical attention has been given to engaging with a multi-cultural approach to music education? In what ways might such an approach further the ideals of a participatory democracy? It is time for Woodford to consider what he terms 'essential virtues' and here he arrives at



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Aristotelian notions of 'friendship, love, neighbourliness, or mutual respect, coupled with honesty, self-restraint, courage, and a willingness to compromise for the sake of some greater good.' So we return to the notion of a greater good, of a community of minds making society in the way Dewey proposed.

In the final chapter the previous pages of philosophising become suggestions for music teachers wishing to instill liberal values in their pupils. They will need to know that music has the power to both liberate and manipulate; that all interests and values must be subjected to criticism; that no one has a monopoly on truth; that underlying all musical choice and action can be democratic ideals; that notions of inclusiveness need to be continually reevaluated; that curricula need to be attuned to the minds of students so that, in Dewey's words, 'the teacher becomes a student of the pupil's mind'. There is above all else a need for public intellectuals to challenge anti-progressive and anti-democratic tendencies within the neo-liberal and neo-conservative alliance. Practice needs to be once more infused with social, ethical, moral and political considerations.

To the British reader the work tells a great deal about the challenges of pursuing Dewey's democratic ideals in the North American context. It tells of the stodginess of much current thinking and practice, of an uncritical approach and the prevalence of advocacy over rationale, as well as the overwhelming power of political and moral alliances operating to silence the voice of music education. Music educators, so it seems, have lost touch with greater purposes sufficient to inspire democratic action and to connect with Dewian ideals of participatory democracy, demanding that the school be a site to engender a 'pooling of ideas' where a community of common purposes might be forged, where questions are continually asked and where uncertainty about doing the right thing is the norm.

We are in the middle of a period of reaction in education and this makes the book timely, for in attempting to redefine a liberal musical education we are offered ways in which to transcend postmodern dogmatism, the coalition of fundamentalism and instrumentalism of the 'right', as well as the radicalism of the 'left'. Politics, morality and the social order are rarely spoken of in the *British Journal of Music Education*, indeed rarely spoken of amongst music educators at all, for as Woodford points out, theirs has become a private sphere, disconnected from the public sphere. Yet the political, moral and social order have been the stuff of the world from earliest times, out of which the very conception of a music education grew. In Nel Noddings' book 'Happiness in Education' (Noddings, 2003) a chapter is devoted to 'aims talk', where the reader is reminded of Plato's care in determining educational aims as part of greater social, political and moral purpose, and of how these are kept in sight as he proceeds to elaborate pedagogical principles bringing coherence and integrity to his project. Woodford's book too reminds us of the need for 'aims talk' and for a more politicised and inclusive approach to music educational endeavour that will impact on the society which it has the potential to both shape and serve. We should be grateful to Paul Woodford for tackling the subject of democracy and music education.

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**Serious Play: An Evaluation of Arts Activities in Pupil Referral Units and Learning Support Units** edited by Anne Wilkin, Caroline Gulliver & Kay Kinder. London: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 2005. 96 pp, £8.50, paperback. ISBN: 1 903 08004 5.

It would be no exaggeration to say that the UK arts education establishment is currently in the grip of an evaluation frenzy. Arts projects up and down the country, both in and out of school, are subject to scrutiny by a growing army of independent evaluators, hired to justify the spending of public money, charitable grants or lottery funds on what, until recently, would have generally been thought of as recreational activities.

The upside is that educational, cultural and social agencies are all, increasingly, singing from the same hymn-sheet a refrain which acknowledges the multiple benefits of giving young people opportunities to participate in arts activities. In music alone, a lottery-funded national organisation, Youth Music, spends around £30 million per year on projects taking place largely out of school hours. And in every project it is possible to find testimony to the beneficial outcomes of taking part. That making art in a collaborative environment can contribute to social and personal development, concentration, intellectual skills, self-esteem and promote social cohesion is self-evident. The challenge comes in attempting to prove cause and effect relationships from among a host of contributory factors, all of which are variables, from projects whose unique features are usually more significant than their common features.

*Serious Play* is only the latest in a growing tide of reports commissioned by funding bodies, logging the progress of arts education projects, big and small, and all of which have carefully considered observations to make. The problem is that they are largely making the same observations – again and again. Despite the meticulous methodology employed by the three authors here (under the august auspices of the National Foundation for Educational Research), their tentative but nevertheless somewhat obvious conclusions tell us very little new and indeed are no different to those the present writer was able to reach in similar studies 10 and even 20 years previously.

This is a pity since the evaluation initiative, prompted by both the main funding partner (the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation) and the NFER, can call on resources and corporate expertise which ought to have led to a much bolder and more challenging approach to the research. One can appreciate why this did not happen: *Serious Play* focuses on a small number of arts projects carried out in Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) and Learning Support Units (LSUs) supported by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation as a matter of funding priority over the last eight years or so. The report could be seen in terms of an exit strategy closure. However, in reading the document, one is constantly tempted to apply the observations to any school-based project using visiting artists – the conclusions the authors draw are hardly specific to units catering for pupils with anti-school issues or in need of temporary learning support.

The research had three phases: a retrospective study of four completed projects, observations on three current projects and a follow-up study of the post-project impacts of the latter. There were four PRUs and three LSUs involved, from schools (not specified in the report) across the country. Pupil participants were in the age range 11–15 and the projects worked with smallish groups of between 6 and 12.



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Activities ranged across drama, digital art, prop making, carnival arts (including percussion music), DJ and music technology, songwriting, film making, photography and dance. Some projects enabled several arts options, others had a topic- and artform-specific focus.

The bulk of the observations were by structured interview – 69 across all three phases – including PRU/LSU teachers and support staff, visiting artists, pupils and 'significant others' (e.g. head teachers, arts organisation officers). Supplementary data were gathered on pupil attendance, behaviour, exclusions, educational attainment and reintegration.

The four research aims – which quickly multiplied into a complex matrix of information gathering – consisted of examining:

1. the impact of the project on areas such as attendance records, attainment, pupils aspirations, potential for re-integration into mainstream education, levels of engagement or disruptive behaviour and the acquisition of skills and knowledge;
2. perceptions (from all participants) of whether an arts project makes any difference to the overall culture of the PRU/LSU and to what extent any legacy exists;
3. the professional relations between host staff and visiting artists;
4. cost-effectiveness, specifically in relation to the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation funding.

Somewhat surprisingly, no observations were made on whether the impacts were artform dependent, although we know from previous work by Kinder that they are more likely to be artist personality-dependent. Perhaps more seriously, the work began too late to be able to establish baseline criteria for objective measurement of the above aims. Even by chapter 2 – a discussion of the project contexts – the authors find themselves having to admit that 'a host of differences existed between, and within, the PRU and LSU sample, including: individual pupil factors . . . staffing . . . site context . . . and facilities' (p. 23). But by factoring these variants into the observations, conclusions became increasingly generalised – and thus applicable in reality to any generic school arts project. It proved difficult to pinpoint any factors which related specifically and exclusively to PRU/LSU work.

Positive experiences were recorded for the majority of pupil participants – the effects being marked often in spite of the operational obstacles which inevitably haunt such projects. However, it is tempting to speculate whether almost any change to the routine, whether arts-based or not, might not have had similar impacts – just the chance to relate to a new face for a few weeks might be enough. Observations pointed to an overall significant combination of factors here: visitors with potentially desirable skills, relating to pupils in a more informal way, but at the same time expecting a 'professional' approach to the work – and treating pupils more as colleagues than as students. Mutual respect seems to be the name of the game.

Interviewees reported improvements in attentiveness and concentration in approximately 50% of the pupils – extending into other lessons. Similar improvements in self-confidence and maturity were reported. The authors were also at pains to point out the value of sheer enjoyment – the buzz of the immediate affective experience – as being significant as much for its absence elsewhere in school life.

On the other hand, they were sceptical that these positive effects could resonate for more than a few weeks after the end of the project. Given the entrenched nature of problems many of the pupils were suffering from, only long-term interventions would be likely to have any lasting effect. And here, sadly, we encounter an all-too-typical scenario. 'Big splash', high impact arts



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projects, by their nature cannot be sustained over a long period; moreover, they can cause considerable disruption to everyday school culture and require teacher management above and beyond the call of duty. Schools which do not sign up to these implications rarely benefit from the experience. But what happens when the visitors all say goodbye? Without an active, ongoing arts context in the school, pupils must inevitably feel let down, having been given a taste of something interesting but having no chance to follow through. The authors make this point strongly enough and point to the need for more sustained funding structures which could support a programme of projects rather than a one-off.

Although *Serious Play* contains few revelations about the circumstances of artists working in schools, it does set out the issues with clarity and consistency, and ties them to specific observations. For a music-specific study covering similar ground in mainstream education, readers could also refer to my own *Musicians Go To School* (London Arts/Sound Sense 1997).

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**Valuing Musical Participation** by Stephanie Pitts. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005. 190 pp, £40, hardback. ISBN: 0 754 65095 2.

This book argues that participation in musical activities is both valuable in itself and a learning experience which is characteristically under-rated by the formal musical and educational establishments. The argument is based on four case studies of musical participation, all by adults, and it is a welcome addition to a number of recent studies in this area.

Using the cases, Pitts examines some of the lenses through which we view music in this society and critically appraises some of our commonplace notions, including what we mean by 'musician' and the relationship of musicians to the amateur/professional divide. She makes the case that music is a fundamentally social activity in which participants pursue personal goals within a social context. This is a process which needs some negotiation and inevitably involves compromise but the rewards are significant. They include the opportunity to share and compare experiences with like-minded others. There is some useful discussion about the way in which music is similar and different from other leisure activities, including more passive ones such as watching television. One aspect of music which will be recognised by anyone who has been involved in the social production of music is the prospect that shared musical experience sometimes (but not always) surpasses the individual contributions which go to make it up. But there is also the prospect of participation allowing new perspectives to open up on music, often stemming from the way in which it is played and interpreted by others, professional and amateur. These features of musical life are derived from the book's case study interviews and exemplified across the different cases in an illuminating way.

The arguments described above occupy the first six chapters of the book and are well worth reading. But, since readers of this journal are likely to be most interested in education, it is the educational analysis to which I will devote the remainder of this review. For those involved in education, the chapter on fostering participation (Chapter 7) is of particular interest, particularly when the implications of participation for formal education are examined. It is here that a number of difficulties about the case study choices which had niggled from the start came to a head. The purpose of the book is intended to be the study of everyday engagement of participants in musical activities. This is a very general aim but the focus of the book, as determined by the cases, is rather particular. The choice of



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cases underpins all the subsequent data analysis but the rationale for their selection is not discussed in depth. Pitts outlines the choice of the four cases in the first chapter and describes the selection as being steered by a concern to identify activities connected with her own experience, based on prominent local events with which she had no previous involvement (p. 4). The cases were (1) A-level and first year university music students, (2) performers and audience at a Gilbert and Sullivan festival, (3) participants in a contemporary music summer school, (4) performers and audience at a chamber music festival. It seems to me that the selection is important for a number of reasons. Cases determine the focus of the study and so this book is mostly about participation in classical music – which is fine except that nowhere is the nature of the cases and the type of music they involve explicitly discussed. Green's (2001) study of popular musicians, for example, uses cases which could be described as paradigmatic in Flyvberg's (2001) sense, since they were all popular musicians. But much of the discussion in this book is about music participation in general and the particular nature of the cases at least deserves some discussion in relation to the aims.

The particularity of the cases is especially pertinent to the educational analysis. Although the social background of the participants was not discussed, it becomes fairly obvious that they were typically endowed with considerable social capital. Many of them were described as having busy and fulfilled lives outside of their musical activities. Again, this is not intended to be a criticism of the cases or, indeed, of the participants but it does constrain considerably what might be said about education. I would endorse the view advanced here that informal learning deserves much more recognition as a pathway to participation but there are clearly issues about inclusion, access and social capital. These are addressed to some extent; there is some discussion on page 127 about the ethical difficulties of selection for school instrumental tuition, by financial support or ability. But there is an assumption that problems of inequity in music would be solved by achieving equality of access. Removal of barriers to access would certainly be a start but, as Barton (1997) makes clear, inclusion can only be effective if curricular barriers are also dismantled. The twentieth century focus of attention in instrument tuition on classical music, with its assumptions about literacy, technique and repertoire, created huge curricular obstacles to children's learning. So the type of music which forms the basis of any study does make a difference.

Much of the discussion of education comes from interviews and e-mail correspondence with a small sample (seven individuals) from one of the cases. Although I can see the argument that these were well-placed as informants, it isn't clear why the musical backgrounds of all the participants could not have been used to give more data about learning. Presumably the interviews would have been too long. The seven informants do provide some interesting perspectives on the relation of formal learning to subsequent musical lives. But my difficulty with this chapter was compounded by the prominence of the example of an outreach project whereby an orchestra performs works composed by school children, another example based on classical music. Again, I was left wondering about this case since it seemed likely to be a minority activity and again I would have been interested in some explicit discussion about its selection. Apart from anything else, if the argument is that informal learning through participation can be effective, then it is



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curious to focus on the kind of music which has the most formal approach to learning.

Nevertheless, the implications which are then discussed are interesting and worth careful consideration. If, as the author observes, independent learning is such a strong feature of this kind of participation, then it would be foolish of schools and universities not to try and capitalise on the kind of engagement and motivation which appear to be associated with it. This is something which has come out of other studies but I suspect that it might be hard to do for a number of reasons. Independent learning may be more difficult for less mature individuals some of whom will have considerably less social capital (or different social capital) from the participants in this study. And we may exhort teachers to be more receptive to emerging interests in their pupils, even if these are different to their own (p. 135). But teachers are likely to have the same kind of enthusiasms as displayed by the group members in the book and part of their motivation may be to pass on their enthusiasms in the same way as these participants aspired to do. If, for example, a teacher were part of the book's Gilbert and Sullivan group, supporting pupils in the development of rap or rock may not come easily. It may be that we have to conclude that schools may not be the most appropriate places for developing the kind of keen engagement described in this book and others.

I read this book first on holiday in Ireland where many of my evenings were spent playing fiddle in traditional music pub sessions. The commitment and enthusiasm which is so clearly demonstrated in these chapters was easy to see in the musicians who were tolerant enough to put up with me. On more than one occasion, the session began to 'fly', the term used to describe the perception that the music is in some way transcending the individual contributions. But as I got a lift home in the back of a painter and decorator's van in the early hours of one morning, I couldn't help reflecting on how representative the groups in the book were. It would be invidious to make claims based on some kind of inverse snobbery (and I was sitting next to a GP earlier in the evening) but it does seem to me that music education research is sometimes a little coy when it comes to social class. I suspect that this is to do with concerns about accusations of elitism, which surface briefly on page 127. But social class is related to social capital which is itself related to effective learning. To be fair, there are suitably cautious disclaimers about generalisation but the book's title makes at least an implicit claim about music in general. All this said, I would urge anyone interested in informal music education to read this book. It is interesting, well-written and scholarly, with a significant literature backing up much of its analysis. The final chapter ends with eight ways in which the social activity involved around music benefits its participants, which would form a useful basis for further research in different types of music. All in all, a thought-provoking and enjoyable read.

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