

Book Reviews

Rebuilding Engagement through the Arts by John Finney, Richard Hickman, Morag Morrison, Bill Nicholl & Jean Rudduck. Cambridge: Pearson Publishing, 2005. 92 pp, £9.95, paperback. ISBN 1857498585

This book is the result of a research project undertaken with 11 ‘disaffected’ students from four schools in the East of England. In each school the students from that school taught a lesson or series of lessons in one of the ‘arts’ subjects (drama, music, art and design and design technology) to their peers or younger pupils. One of the main purposes of the project was to discover the extent to which, through their involvement in teaching, the youngsters can become ‘active participants in their own learning, gaining meaningful control over their own school lives and [...] able to view significant others in a more positive light’ (p. 86).

The book begins by outlining the aims and structure of the project and its underpinning philosophy. Each of the following four chapters then focuses on one arts area and gives an account of the preparation for the lessons, the lessons themselves, and the impact of the teaching on the disaffected students’ engagement with their learning and the school community. The researchers then describe their attempt to sustain the initial positive impact on the youngsters’ disaffection through a series of extension activities, supported by teachers in two of the schools. Finally, the book identifies the key issues emerging from the project, particularly in relation to pedagogy, curriculum and institutional constraints, and poses questions that would need to be addressed by schools considering becoming involved in a similar project.

The notion of disaffection is drawn widely, encompassing behaviour ranging from the actively disruptive and aggressive to

passive withdrawal from learning. In almost all cases however the ‘disaffection’ is taken as a given and the reasons for that disaffection not explained or explored in any detail. Only in the penultimate chapter is there a perceptive discussion in general terms of how the narrowness of national and institutional education priorities have ‘silenced the basic need for creativity and self-expression’ (p. 87) leading inevitably to disaffection with school and learning. However, this analysis is not located in the specific school context within which the youngsters’ disaffection is projected. One understands the difficulties in analysing the impact of a particular school ethos on disaffection, particularly when that school is acting as a host for the project; nevertheless the absence of this perspective creates a sense of having to read between the lines, with a number of critical issues relating to individuals only being hinted at. This is, however, my only significant criticism of the book.

This is a slim volume where every word is made to count. The temptation to reproduce, verbatim, vast tracts of interview transcripts is resisted. Where direct quotes are used they are well chosen to illustrate a particular point or idea. It says much for the quality of the writing and the care the authors take to give a rounded picture of the young people (who are not defined purely in terms of their disaffection) that the reader really cares whether or not the lessons go well. It is rare that a piece of research, whatever its other merits, can be described as a ‘page-turner’, but in this case such a description is not inappropriate.

It is particularly refreshing to read of research that actively *involves* young people rather than treating them simply as objects to be observed. Indeed it is not just the results of this research that have the potential to

have a positive impact on young people but, in the case of the young people involved in this project, the actual process itself. The increase in their self-esteem proceeds not just from the success of the lessons but also from their relationship with the researchers and teachers on something approaching equal footing. They take full part in deciding both the focus of the learning and the teaching strategies to be employed. The researchers and supporting teachers from the departments give no ground to the ages and relative inexperience of the young teachers. One is struck by how the demands made upon the students in terms of the concepts and ideas they are asked to engage with, and the autonomy they are granted, are similar to those of adults on initial teacher training courses. That they are able to cope with these demands is clear both through the quality of their teaching (based on feedback from pupils) and the depth of their reflections. In the pupils' analysis of the teaching of the students there is much to learn about what children consider to be good teaching.

It is clear that all the teachers directly involved in the project provided a supportive and secure context for the student teachers. It is also clear that, for many, being involved in the project had a significant impact on their own practice, particularly in terms of reconceptualising their relationship with their classes. The music teacher speaks memorably of how his involvement in the project had caused him to reassess his relationship with the pupils from that of himself as 'the artist, the resource, the live music maker' to one where he sees 'the whole class as a resource. Each class is a dynamic resource' (p. 71).

This is a stimulating and inspiring book which I thoroughly recommend. It says more about the potential of the arts to have a positive influence on the wider learning of

young people than any over-hyped 'Mozart effect'.

GARY SPRUCE
Open University

Music Psychology in Education by Susan Hallam. London: Institute of Education, University of London, 2006. 281 pp, £17.99, paperback. ISBN 0854737162

This book provides a concise summary of research in music psychology which has been selected for its relevance to music educators. The chapters address different areas in musical development and understanding, as follows: music, the brain and learning; early development; musical ability; listening, appraising and responding to music; composing and improvising; learning to play an instrument and develop vocal skills; learning through practice; motivation and musical identity; assessment; teachers and teaching; and the impact of music through life. As a whole, the book has greater emphasis on issues relating to instrumental music education and the music specialist, with detailed coverage of areas closest to Hallam's own expertise such as learning to play a musical instrument and practising. Even chapters which seem more applicable to the classroom, such as those on composing and improvising and on motivation, include the professional within their scope (for instance, studies of expert jazz improvisers, or research into motivation to pursue instrumental tuition). In each area there is a synthesis of selected research findings, with commentary on major debates. Each chapter concludes with educational implications, some of which have relevance to the developing musicians themselves, some for their teachers, some for their families and a few for the broader contexts of music education.