

Article Review

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Article Title: The Generative Theory of Musical Learning Part I: Introduction

Author: Eunice Boardman Journal: University of Illinois

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What is the author's purpose?

I think the author's purpose is to inform their audience (perhaps music educators or the public in general) about the generative theory of musical learning and how it is applicable to classroom music settings. She discusses how the act of learning music cannot be dissected into "atoms" like other learning theories can be, as taking a fraction of a piece of music out of context simply does not make sense. You have to have the entire piece in order for it to be comprehensive. She also discusses how a linear cause and effect relationship in skills and the interpretation of music cannot be proven. Her purpose is to show that there is a theory to learning music, but it cannot be approached the same way as other subjects' learning theories. The act of learning must be generative -- it must have the potential to lead to even more learning.

What are the salient issues in this article? (i.e. the main issues that provoked/stimulated your thinking)

I found the set of axioms the author described to be very interesting because they will be useful in the development of my teaching skills. I didn't realize that the ability to create symbol systems was a fundamental human trait, but it would make sense because language (specifically the alphabet) is a symbol system, as are things we see in everyday life (such as traffic signs). In a sense, notated music is very much its own system of symbols. This in turn would explain why music is universally understood around the globe.

The second axiom -- describing the interdependent elements of music -- helps to explain why music isn't complete without action, emotion, and cognition all occurring simultaneously. If you perform the act of playing music without thinking about what you're playing or without emotion and interpretation of the piece, it will not feel complete.

The third axiom is about the role of a school when it comes to teaching music. I think this part will be the most beneficial to me because I'll be able to incorporate it into my career. Boardman explains that whatever is taught in schools must be something that cannot be learned on its own. If you are teaching something that a student can learn on their own time without instruction, it is redundant and non beneficial. She also explains that everything taught must be useful in the future; the goal is student independence, so they must be able to take the information you give them and transfer it to other aspects of their education to continue their learning.

How do you believe this article will impact your personal/professional development as a teacher? (i.e. what insights, connections, comparisons, or considerations resulted from reading this article?)

Like previously mentioned, I think the set of axioms will have the biggest impact on my development as a teacher. I now know that I can introduce musical concepts to students at a young age because comprehending symbol systems is an innate human ability. I'll be able to teach students that music is only complete with the interdependency of action, emotion, and cognition. I can also use this while lesson planning to figure out when and how to teach these elements. Since the role of the school has been defined, I can use this for lesson planning as well. I'll be able to connect each instruction to the next in order to better prepare my students for the future and ultimately their independence of being able to learn on their own. All of my teaching must be generative; it helps guide a student to learn more than what is simply introduced in the lesson.

I think the explanation of the six components of a learning environment will be immensely helpful, too. The way Boardman explained the sequence of each component will be useful not only when it comes to teaching, but I think I can also use it while studying for my current classes. The content must be learned in context in order to interact with the information. Therefore, I know not to try to practice something without knowing the surrounding context. The act of learning will involve a behavior (such as reading, writing, and maybe even practicing) which will be influenced by the mode of knowledge representation. This entire interaction is guided by the cognitive strategy to get from the unknown to the known -- this gives me independence and the ability to adapt to alternative methods while learning. All of these aspects will depend on the attitudinal climate -- essentially the state of mind I'm in. If I'm having a bad day, my learning will not be as effective as when I'm having a good day. If the content being introduced to me is done so in a way that doesn't work for my learning style, I'm not as likely to retain the information. Integrating all of these components will help me set myself (and eventually my future students) up for success.