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Review:

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Martin Fautley. Assessment in Music Education (2010). Oxford University Press 2010. ISBN: 978-0193362895; £17,-.

When looking at the title of the book to be reviewed the reader would expect broad and up to date information on the current state of assessment in music education – including the existing empirical research. This hope in part is disappointed although the book is worth reading because Martin Fautley was teacher and head of music ensembles in English schools for many years and always turned his attention to school practice. Meanwhile he is teaching music at Birmingham City University in England and has been involved with creativity e.g. in connection with group composition processes, too. He is familiar with everyday life at school and its restraints, which stem from the practice of assessment (and sanction) in English schools. The area of conflict in the triangle between aesthetic practice, administrative demands to assessment in music education, and psychometric handcraft is well known to him – it's the real topic of the book.

It starts with an explanation of the meaning of “assessment”. The English definition cannot be translated easily, because in the discourse it is connected with formal “analytical reporting” (i. e. large scale assessment) as well as daily judgement (“informed evaluation of a situation” (p. 2)), but is always more than giving marks. This broad understanding of the definition is Fautley's kick off point; at the same time the target of the book is to make “assessment” an essential and integral part of the teaching-learning process. He does not start taking sides in the debate, which is typical for Fautley's calm way of arguing but with definitions: quality criteria, forms of “assessments” and of the presentation and also pedagogic paradigm which play a role within assessment.

As a practitioner not as a psychometric expert he approaches the various facets of “assessment” regarding reasons, the questions of measurability and practice in a practicable and not psychometric way. He dedicates own chapters to performing, composition, imposing and listening as important fields of behaviour for teaching. Against the background of practice and the scope of high stake testing in Great Britain he specifies the contradictions and aporia teachers are confronted with or get into by for example reducing their teaching only on measurable contents (p. 63f.). For that reason the text is more than discussing the questions of assessment in music education in order to clarify didactic questions, e. g. in the chapter which dedicates to IT. Their use, which was discussed extensively with regard to test construction, has changed the character of teaching music more than in any other subject. Fautley recognizes the interaction between both facets. However, he understands the role of New Technologies on the side of the survey more as a technical development and not as a new quality resulting from new forms of survey (e. g. at palm tops) which give feedback for teachers and pupils or from adaptive testing: “The teacher’s mark book is still an important tool in the storage of assessment data. (...). The use of ICT as an e-mark book can simply replicate this (p. 176f.).

The importance of composing in English music education is mirrored by an own chapter on this subject. Fautley differentiates precisely between process (“composing”) and product and teamwork as well as individual work (for older pupils). He stresses the formative use of evaluation and develops their variety on the basis of different stages of compositional processes which have been developed for decades by Graham Wallas, Pamela Burnard and Betty Ann Younker. No special methods are developed or explained but the basic remarks on “three aspects of musical endeavour [...] of composing (process), composition (product), and performance all of which are candidates for assessment” (p. 144) are useful not only for the teacher at school but also for the test construction, systematic music pedagogy and the evaluation of models and projects and should not be considered as self-evident.

Fautley’s main subject is the development of classroom teaching: five of fifteen chapter headings start with “developing”. From the view of practitioners it goes without saying that he is not very much engaged in questions of dimensionality, validity or administrative (and in the end political) conditions of “assessment”. From his point of view there are a lot of wrong questions in the debate, because it is more than the test form and testing itself. It is not the end of pedagogy “but [...] the idea of talking with pupils and helping them to learn has been slowly replaced by the grading of a summative task or test” (p. 19). The common difference between “assessment *of* learning” and “assessment *for* learning” is seen as a central theme in many places in the book and Fautley points out the significance of help regarding the learning process. He is quoting practical examples not neglecting the unique character of music education, that’s useful for the debate and there is no other comparable book in specialized literature in German speaking countries. His wants a holistic approach: “The wider the range of assessment data can be accrued, the nearer we will get to

understanding the whole, but, and this is crucial, the sum of the assessment part will never equal the pupil-whole” (p. 188 f.).

Sometimes it would be preferable to get a version of empiric findings (but not only from the perspective of a journal dedicated especially to empirical music education). The attempts to model competencies as well as American experiences with large scale assessment in Connecticut or Florida are missing. Moreover, a study on the behaviour of putting forward tasks and questioning of teachers (William, 2000) is mentioned in the context of taxonomies without explaining their contents or referring to music education (p. 36). In the chapter regarding the assessment of performance there is no reference to the extensive research regarding the influence of the musical judgement by external factors (e. g. attractiveness, posture, etc.). In the chapter of development of hearing the view of linearity is emphasized, which would make it impossible to take a look backward for the beginner (“novice”) (p. 155). Here he ignores that even beginners do recognize repeat and contrast and that it is important to consider the question of musical memory, its way of functioning and structural capacity in detail, in order to be able to understand the learning process regarding form perception.

The existing research plays but a minor role. To the reviewer it would have been desirable, had they been pointed out in order to focus questions. In connection with the problems of appreciation of music the linear development of competencies is questioned. Fautley underlines the influence of motivational factors and identification processes and at the same time he questions the presumption of such a development; it would have helped the book had he presented studies (or perhaps demonstrate research desideration). The presumption of linearity, which could be derived from a constructivist approach and has in Germany been documented in a new text book for general music education, is much appreciated at the moment. The book does not offer the possibility to kick off an empirical discourse, on the other hand regarding the extensively reported positions in theory and practice it presents a theoretical reference frame, which is useful for everybody and can work as a corrective.

It is a commonplace which must be repeated again regarding this book. Often English speaking authors are more successful in writing precisely and at the same time comprehensible and easy. Due to the fact that Fautley is mentioning the word humor in his preface gives a nice impression of the author and his book.

(translation Gabriele Gerber)

References

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