

International Journal of Education & the Arts

Editors

Terry Barrett
Ohio State University

S. Alex Ruthmann
New York University

Eeva Anttila
Theatre Academy Helsinki

Brad Haseman
Queensland University of Technology

<http://www.ijea.org/>

ISSN: 1529-8094

Volume 16 Review 2

August 29, 2015

Hear, Listen, Play! **How to Free Your Students' Aural, Improvisation, and Performance Skills**

Karin S. Hendricks
Boston University, USA

Book Reviewed: Green, L. (2014). *Hear, listen, play! How to free your students' aural, improvisation, and performance skills*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Citation: Hendricks, K. S. (2015). Hear, listen, play! How to free your students' aural, improvisation, and performance skills. *International Journal of Education & the Arts*, 16(Review 2). Retrieved from <http://www.ijea.org/v16r2/>.

Hear, Listen, Play! **How to Free Your Students' Aural, Improvisation, and Performance Skills**

Anyone familiar with the work of Lucy Green will not be surprised by the content of *Hear, Listen, Play! How to Free Your Students' Aural, Improvisation, and Performance Skills*, which serves as a practical guide for music teachers as they engage with their students in informal music learning practices (see Green, 2001, 2004, 2008). The approach outlined in this handbook reflects 15 years of multi-team research projects involving numerous students and teachers who offered time, expertise, and feedback throughout various stages of the program's development.

In *Hear, Listen, Play!* Green takes on the challenging task of formalizing the informal by creating a systematic how-to guide for teaching based on the way popular musicians learn. It might be tempting to question the validity of this text by suggesting that the incorporation of informal learning principles – which Green suggests are innately “holistic” and “haphazard” (2014, p. xvii) – into formal institutions and through more systematic structures might taint or stifle the essence of informal learning. However, Green’s work should be applauded for its efforts to reach out to a larger base of music educators who, because of their own backgrounds in formal music learning and their relative comfort levels as teacher-directed providers of information, may not otherwise be ready or able to facilitate a level of freedom that informal music learning can require.

This book may, therefore, offer a middle ground – reminiscent, perhaps, of the “synergistic” approach offered by Reimer (2003), where agreement and possibility might emerge from what appear to be radically opposing philosophies and approaches. Notably, Folkestad (2006) has suggested that we consider formal versus informal as two ends of a continuum rather than a dichotomy, which might lead us to consider the myriad possibilities for synthesizing elements of these divergent music learning paradigms. By sharing research-based principles in a how-to format – including lists of steps, flowcharts, and even the use of the word “should” from time to time – Green effectively translates principles of one worldview to readers from another, thereby meeting teachers where they are pedagogically and inviting those who may be unready for a music education revolution to at least take courageous steps toward evolution.

Overview

Hear, Listen, Play! is divided into three parts, each offering “HeLP” strategies for different teaching-learning contexts. Part 1, for instrumental tuition, focuses on one-to-one approaches such as private studios in which a learner engages in music by the side of an instrumental expert. Part 2, for ensembles, is geared toward small or large groups of learners who might meet together in schools, extracurricular activities, or part of a community learning program. Part 3 focuses on classroom learning, including specialist classes or generalist classes with mixed-ability students, with an emphasis on dividing students into friendship groups and facilitating learning with a variety of instruments. Some of the material presented in each part is redundant with that of other parts, clearly by design since Green recommends that “some readers may prefer to skip parts of the text, and it was written with that in mind” (2014, p. xix).

Before delving into each music learning setting, Green introduces the handbook by offering five main characteristics of informal popular music learning practices to help the reader grasp the perspectives and strategies that make up this approach. This delineation of characteristics might also aid more formally-taught musicians in comprehending how this form of learning

Hendricks: Hear, listen, play!

differs from what they have previously used in their classrooms, ensembles, and studios. The introduction also contains a concise summary of much of Green's research findings and provides a solid rationale for the inclusion of informal strategies in more formal learning settings.

In the section titled "Why popular music?" Green addresses two important differences relating to the transmission processes of popular music: First, young popular musicians are less likely to learn from observation of and participation with adult or other experts in a community, and more likely learn in isolation by listening to recordings. Second, young popular musicians who do learn in community with others tend to do so with peers rather than with adults or experts. Informal approaches may, therefore, be important for learners because "they take the onus of transmission away from an authority figure, expert, or older member of the family or community and put it largely into the hands of the young learners themselves" (Green, 2014, p. xxiii).

The HeLP approach provides a unique opportunity for learner freedom in terms of musical preference, learning style, and interest, but also in the development of comprehensive musicianship that includes aural, improvisational, and creative skills – proficiencies that are receiving increased attention by music educators and scholars in the 21st century (College Music Society, 2014). HeLP also offers students opportunities for choice, control, and responsibility over their learning, something that music and educational psychologists have similarly advocated to enhance motivation, enjoyment, and long-term interest in learning (see Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2001; McPherson & Davidson, 2006; O'Neill, 2006; Renwick & McPherson, 2002).

Listening is a critical element of informal music learning, accompanied later by working out relationships between sounds and the learning of music theory. For this reason, audio samples play an important role in the use of this text. Green has provided a companion website (with username and password listed in the text) so that readers can download audio tracks for eight pieces of music that are addressed throughout the book, complete with strategies for teaching each song. Green has not provided notation of the music, suggesting that "it is important that the teacher engages in the same aural experience as the students" (2014, p. 9).

Part 1: One-to-One Instrumental Learning

The section devoted to one-to-one instrumental tuition begins with a description of the research through which this application was tested, and then helps teachers prepare by discussing such elements as time frame, instruments and equipment needed, and other elements of teacher readiness. Of note is a comparison between this approach and the Suzuki

method, which also focuses on learning by listening to and copying recordings (Suzuki, 1969/1981, 1969/1983).

Green offers basic steps for learning the pieces on the companion website, including recommended “stages” that are presented in a particular order, which she illustrates through the use of flowcharts. Green is quick to emphasize that these stages are recommendations, and that teachers might choose to combine the stages as determined on an individual basis. Included in this discussion are prescriptions and suggestions for introducing popular styles, classical pieces, and songs of choice to young music learners.

Based on previous research, Green offers predictions on how students might respond to this approach depending on individual learning styles. She also assists teachers in understanding their role when using this approach, which requires them to stand back and observe, allowing students to figure things out on their own more than they may be comfortable or accustomed to doing. Green assures teachers that “they are still teaching, but in a different way” (2014, p. 23).

Included in recommendations to teachers are suggestions regarding new ways to consider perfection, mistakes, and notions of “correct” versus “incorrect,” especially considering how various approaches to these issues may or may not foster improvisation and creativity. Green provides numerous quotes from students and teachers to emphasize and illustrate strategies outlined in the text. Although the inclusion of quotations from the research read a bit like testimonials at times, it was an effective way for teachers to imagine how their own students might react and to plan accordingly.

Part 2: Ensemble Learning

When initially testing the informal learning approach with instrumental teachers who taught in one-to-one settings, Green did not anticipate that any of these teachers who also led bands, orchestras, or other groups would have interest in applying these principles to their teacher-directed ensembles. However, Green highlights numerous and diverse examples of research participants who demonstrated its successful application in their ensemble settings as well.

Part 2 contains similar steps, strategies, and research-based examples as those outlined in Part 1, but adapted for ensemble-based learning. In this section teachers are even more strongly encouraged to be able to play the songs by ear and also provided with strategies for working with multiple students simultaneously (e.g., managing the ensemble, modeling, facilitating student leadership, appropriate encouragement, etc.). The section contains an edited transcript of an actual class using HeLP strategies, which some readers might find especially illustrative of the approach.

Part 3: Classroom Learning

The application of HeLP strategies in classroom settings, which is drawn from Green's well-known Musical Futures program (n.d.), introduces much of the same material as the previous two parts but in an order that is more appropriate for generalist classrooms. Here there is an assumption that students may not be as familiar or comfortable with music performance as their counterparts in one-to-one or ensemble settings, and that teachers may not fully recognize the musical propensity that their students possess. Green aims, therefore, "to give teachers insights into aspects of their students' musicality, potential, and personalities, of which they may have previously been unaware" (2014, p. 63).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the classroom learning section emphasizes student freedom more than the applications to one-to-one and ensemble-based learning. Here students have liberty over choice of songs and instruments played, reasonable ownership regarding group membership selection, and freedom to set their own goals and work out their own practice sessions. Green reminds any reticent readers that, even though their teaching might look different from what they are accustomed, they will indeed still be teaching (and still be very much in demand) through modeling, technical help, and offering support and redirection. Transcripts from prior research are provided to illustrate the implementation of this approach in a classroom setting.

Additional Resources

In addition to the companion website, Green has provided several resources to support this text, which are found in the Appendix. These include: findings from an aural test experiment that compared students who had learned through HeLP strategies with similar-level students who had not, references to studies that guided the creation of the handbook, citations for other similar approaches and theories, helpful websites, and further information regarding the music tracks on the companion website. The handbook is also filled throughout with photos of students who are engaged in HeLP learning environments, an added aesthetic touch that effectively illustrates the engagement and ambiance of the HeLP experience.

Conclusion

In *Hear, Listen, Play!* Lucy Green has effectively bridged the worlds of formal and informal music learning by providing how-to steps for teachers who may be accustomed to more structured, top-down teaching approaches, as they guide students who may be interested in more student-directed, improvisatory, and creative approaches. Does the prescribing of steps and incorporation of informal learning components into more formal learning environments cause the "informal" to become "formal" after all? In any case, the ideas and strategies in this book offer a refreshing alternative to traditional teacher-directed approaches, and is a welcome and much-needed resource for 21st-century music educators.

References

- Bransford, J. D., Brown, A. L., & Cocking, R. R. (2001). *How people learn: Brain, mind, experience, and school*. (Expanded edition). Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.
- College Music Society. (2014). *Transforming music study from its foundations: A manifesto for progressive change in the undergraduate preparation of music majors*. Report of the Task Force on the Undergraduate Music Major, November 2014. Retrieved from http://www.music.org/pdf/tfumm_report.pdf
- Folkestad, G. (2006). Formal and informal learning situations or practices vs formal and informal ways of learning. *British journal of music education*, 23(02), 135-145.
- Green, L. (2001). *How popular musicians learn: A way ahead for music education*. London: Ashgate.
- Green, L. (2004). What can teachers learn from popular musicians? In C. Rodriguez (Ed.), *Bridging the gap: Popular music and education*, pp. 225-41. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Green, L. (2008). *Music, informal learning and the school: A new classroom pedagogy*. London: Ashgate.
- Green, L. (2014). *Hear, listen, play! How to free your students' aural, improvisation, and performance skills*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- McPherson, G. E., & Davidson, J. (2006). Playing an instrument. In G. E. McPherson (Ed.), *The child as musician: A handbook of musical development* (pp. 331-351). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Musical Futures. (n.d.). *About Us*. Retrieved from <https://www.musicalfutures.org/about>
- O'Neill, S. A. (2006). Positive youth musical engagement. In G. E. McPherson (Ed.), *The child as musician: A handbook of musical development* (pp. 461-474). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Reimer, B. *A philosophy of music education: Advancing the vision*, 3rd ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Renwick, J., & McPherson, G. E. (2002). Interest and choice: Student-selected repertoire and its effect on practising behaviour. *British Journal of Music Education*, 19, 173-188.
- Suzuki, S. (1969/1981). *Ability development from age zero* (M.L. Nagata, Trans.). Miami, FL: Summy-Birchard.

Hendricks: Hear, listen, play!

Suzuki, S. (1969/1983). *Nurtured by love: A new approach to talent education* (W. Suzuki, Trans.). Miami, FL: Summy-Birchard.

About the Author

Karin Hendricks is an Assistant Professor of Music Education at Boston University, with previous positions held at Ball State University and the University of Illinois. She has presented research and practical workshops at national and international conferences, and has published papers in a variety of academic journals and books. Her research interests include social psychology and early childhood string pedagogy, with a particular focus on contextual and cultural influences upon motivation, self-belief, and musical engagement.

International Journal of Education & the Arts

Editors

Eeva Anttila
University of the Arts Helsinki

Terry Barrett
Ohio State University

Brad Haseman
Queensland University of Technology

S. Alex Ruthmann
New York University

Managing Editor
Christine Liao
University of North Carolina Wilmington

Media Review Editor
Christopher Schulte
University of Georgia

Associate Editors

Kimber Andrews
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Marissa McClure
Indiana University of Pennsylvania

Sven Bjerstedt
Lund University

Kristine Sunday
Old Dominion University

Editorial Board

Peter F. Abbs	University of Sussex, U.K.
Norman Denzin	University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, U.S.A.
Kieran Egan	Simon Fraser University, Canada
Magne Espeland	Stord/Haugesund University College, Norway
Rita Irwin	University of British Columbia, Canada
Gary McPherson	University of Melbourne, Australia
Julian Sefton-Green	University of South Australia, Australia
Robert E. Stake	University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, U.S.A.
Susan Stinson	University of North Carolina—Greensboro, U.S.A.
Graeme Sullivan	Pennsylvania State University, U.S.A.
Elizabeth (Beau) Valence	Indiana University, Bloomington, U.S.A.
Peter Webster	University of Southern California, U.S.A.