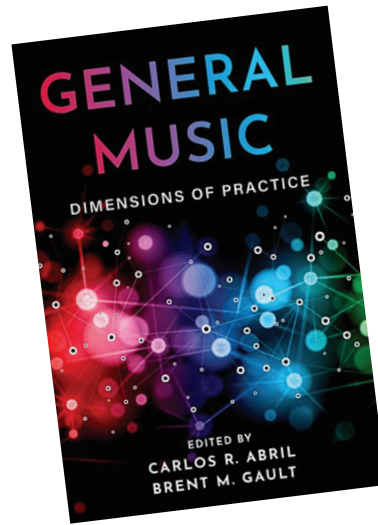


Reviewed by Judith Thompson-Barthwell

## General Music: Dimensions of Practice

Edited by Carlos R. Abril and Brent Gault  
Oxford University Press, 2022



*We should treasure the person who can be a generalist, the conduit for a world of wonder and awe. —Yo-Yo Ma*

As general music educators, we need to embrace our importance as generalists in steering young music makers toward their pride, success, enjoyment, and possibilities. The general music educator can draw from a wide array of areas of knowledge and music practices. Our power lies in the ability to direct our students, as a group and individually, toward their musical needs, desires, and deeper understandings.

*General Music: Dimensions of Practice*, edited by Carlos Abril and Brent Gault, contains many possibilities for how to think about and focus on what is best for today's students. Through well-researched articles centered around the 2014 National Standards of Performing, Connecting, Creating, and Responding, new and diverse ways of engaging or thinking about music are presented. Each chapter is a piece of a holistic puzzle, ideas for teachers and teaching artists to explore and consider in their practice. Alternating between music making (performing and creating) and the meaningful dimensions of music (connecting and responding), each chapter includes background and rationale, guidance ideas for engaging, and suggestions for how to assess growth.

The previous book edited by Abril and Gault and published in 2016, *Teaching General Music:*

*Approaches, Issues, and Viewpoints*, examined a wide variety of approaches for teaching general music, whereas this book could be considered the next step in the direction of exploring current best practices in music education.

Readers will be pleasantly surprised at the connections the featured writers make with the situations their college students will and do encounter in the everyday teaching of children. For example, this book shares current research of what is working in America's music classrooms today. The focus is on the digital age in which our students learn and the need for those from middle and upper elementary to high school to have a voice and a choice in their education, starting with and relating to their views and understandings. The generalist music educator works as a facilitator to guide, organize, and direct students toward their best music education.

Those who hold Orff Schulwerk at their core will also appreciate the diversity of a wide variety of approaches for teaching general music. Orff Schulwerk teachers have always been interested in multiple approaches (i.e., singing, playing, moving, watching, listening), from imitation to creation and connecting with related and integrated arts. They have also embraced other theoretical and philosophical understandings as well as methodologies and applications as they fill in gaps and complement classroom situations. *General Music: Dimensions of Practice* can

introduce younger and older teachers to even more approaches to capture the interests of our 21st-century students.

After the introduction, which explains what the book is about, how it is organized, and who it is intended for, each section shares several thought-provoking articles. Readers can choose one section or a chapter of interest, in any order. Several chapters have a companion online supplementary resource to review as well.

The first section, “Performing,” begins with an article about the importance of singing, using the one instrument we always carry with us. Logically, the next articles explore Orff instruments, fretted instruments, band instruments, and ways of bringing world music into the music classroom with instruments.

Next, the “Connecting” section embraces and explores many ways of associating and connecting ideas, including within the music curriculum, other subject areas, and diverse musical cultures. Children of today also need to make connections with themselves and others (windows and mirrors), and some need meaningful music relationships to reflect their living, social, and historical environments for music classes to feel relevant. The generalist music educator’s role is to allow multiple ways of knowing to occur. Making musical connections important and meaningful in the lives of all children is the focus of the chapters in this section.

Creating, though it can be messy even with a structure, is a necessity with young people today. Children need to have opportunities to create as they learn to feel confident and try out their identities. The “Creating” section offers

explorations into music composition, production, song writing, and the use of digital media in the classroom. Creating naturally evokes critical thinking skills that involve conducting, symbolic representation, pre-production/production/post-production activities, listening, and many other aptitudes, whether students work in person or online. Readers will find a plethora of ideas to consider about organization and ways to think about involving students in this section.

The last section, “Responding,” presents three chapters—responding through movement, listening, and analysis. Each of these chapters refers to deeper understanding of what happens in the music classroom by responding to what is heard. It presents lesson plan ideas readers will find helpful and applicable.

*General Music: Dimensions of Practice* combines the tried and true of what has worked in education and includes new understandings of how today’s children learn. This book also describes some newer or unknown applications, and challenges educators to re-examine how, why, and what they teach. ■

**JUDITH THOMPSON-BARTHWELL** has been a member of AOSA since 1975. A music educator for 44 years in public and private schools, she is retired but stays involved with children by volunteering in music classrooms in the Detroit area. She also mentors working educators as invited. Judy was an AOSA Movement and Basic Levels Teacher Educator for many years and has served on the AOSA National Board of Trustees as a trustee and treasurer and on several AOSA sub-committees. She received the Michigan MEA Music Educator of the Year Award in 2012 and the AOSA Distinguished Service Award in 2021.

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