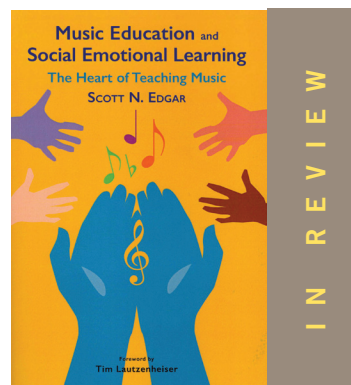


Reviewed by Julie Stephens Bistolfo

Music Education and Social Emotional Learning: The Heart of Teaching Music

Written by Scott N. Edgar
GIA Publications, 2017



Educators are routinely subjected to meetings where the next “new and revolutionary approach” is rolled out. Orff Schulwerk educators are seldom intimidated by these initiatives, however, because we know that any “new approach” probably already aligns with elements naturally embedded within the structure and culture of our music classes. Social Emotional Learning (SEL) is no exception.

In the book *Music Education and Social Emotional Learning*, author Scott Edgar and contributors Jacqueline Kelly-McHale and Jared Rawlings address the importance and role of SEL within kindergarten through Grade 12 school music education settings. The book is framed by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) definition of SEL as a “unifying concept for organizing and coordinating school-based programming that focuses on positive youth development, health promotion, prevention of problem behaviors, and student engagement in learning.” Early in the book Edgar calls attention to the innate SEL strengths of music programs and how music making can facilitate the development of qualities necessary to effectively communicate and build relationships:

The act of group music making can encourage social bonding and the development of social

relationships. Cooperation, communication, positive peer interactions, recognition and support of the rights of others, dependability, responsibility, focus of attention, impulse control, delayed gratification, and acceptance of consequences are some of the skills students can learn in the music classroom.

Edgar and collaborators go on to address the omnipresent advantages and cultural challenges in band, orchestra, and choir classrooms through chapters that include information on socialization, bullying, self-discipline, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. These situations are easily related to the elementary music classroom, though the authors do not explicitly cater to this. The book analyzes common power dynamics and suggests ways to diffuse negative energy and encourage leadership throughout a musical ensemble. All-too-familiar issues of the failed chair challenge, the cliquey upperclassmen, and the outspoken repertoire-hater are addressed with strategies to coach both teacher and student. New and experienced educators alike will appreciate the outline of the widely used Illinois SEL Standards, which have been adopted by CASEL.

A personal highlight is chapter 4, “Music Educators Are not Counselors” which teases out educators’ responsibility to listen reflectively and avoid the urge to step in and solve students’ problems for them. In a country where school counselors are bogged down by logistical responsibilities, teachers become the ones to

whom young people turn, whether we are ready for this or not. This can be especially true with special area teachers, who have the chance to develop rapport with students over the course of several years in a subject they enjoy. Rather than teacher-generated advice, SEL focuses on student-generated solutions. This golden practice of listening, questioning, modeling, reframing, and empathizing can take the heat out of many charged conversations, even beyond the walls of the classroom.

Edgar offers that the supplemental activities (e.g., SEL assessments and checklists) are feasible to administer without special equipment, and I agree. The activities make connections to current repertoire and allow educators to learn more about their students. Additionally, the

Figures 2. Students Working on SEL Lesson in Small Groups With Emoji Boards.



PHOTOGRAPHER: JULIE STEPHENS BISTOLFO. USED WITH PERMISSION.

Figure 1. Emoji Board Used for Modified SEL Activity, Identifying Emotions in Music.



lessons may be re-administered and reapplied in varying contexts and would not necessarily take an entire class period to unpack. Perhaps you are thinking, “I talk to my students all the time about repertoire and how things are going.” Although informal conversations have their merits, the small assessments provide a method for each of your students to offer their current perspectives and ideas in an inviting, nonpublic way. In a world full of texting and

selective anonymity, these assessments can be a gateway to thoughtful face-to-face discussions of repertoire and community building.

For elementary music teachers, the exercises can be modified easily to keep the wheels of classroom communication greased and tuned up. For example, “Identifying Emotions in Music” can be delivered in its original format to upper elementary students or be simplified to pictures for younger children Figures 1, 2, and 3). Congruent with the Orff Schulwerk approach, students can express themselves, practice sharing and justifying opinions, and share their preferences through small, powerful activities. Additional activities include, but are not limited to, goal setting, text analysis, students’ musical biographies, and musical driver’s licenses. Most importantly, they offer inspiration for educators to tailor small SEL assessments to fit the needs of their class culture.

Figure 3. Students Complete and Discuss SEL Lesson.



These issues are eclipsed by the book's relevance to the music classroom in a way that genuinely adds to our practice and enriches our content. I recommend *Music Education and Social Emotional Learning* as a valuable addition to your professional library; it manages to be academically rich while staying practitioner-friendly. For those seeking additional hands-on resources, a student workbook titled *Music Education and Social Emotional Learning, Student Workbook*, also by Dr. Edgar, includes worksheets for 30 activities from the original text. I hope you finish the book the way I did, with a sense of empowerment, new strategies about how to move more gracefully through sticky interactions, and ideas on how to leverage strengths in your community. ■

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A woman with dark hair tied back, wearing a maroon long-sleeved shirt, is leaning over and smiling as she plays a bongo drum. Next to her, a young girl wearing a pink and grey patterned hijab and a light blue long-sleeved shirt is also smiling and playing a bongo drum. They are both looking at each other and the drums. The background is a solid purple color with white musical notes and a treble clef floating around. A yellow banner at the top contains the text 'Hit All the RIGHT NOTES' in white, with 'Hit All the' in a script font and 'RIGHT NOTES' in a bold sans-serif font. Below the banner, the text 'for Every Student' is written in a white script font. On the left side, the text 'SPOTLIGHT ON MUSIC' is written in white, with 'SPOTLIGHT ON' in a smaller sans-serif font and 'MUSIC' in a larger, bold sans-serif font. At the bottom left, the text 'Learn more at mheonline.com/spotlight-echo' is written in white, with 'Learn more at' in a smaller font and 'mheonline.com/spotlight-echo' in a larger font. The Mc Graw Hill logo is in the top left corner, consisting of the words 'Mc Graw Hill' in white on a red background. The overall design is vibrant and musical, with a focus on cultural diversity and community.