

Reviewed by **Laura Bartholomew Young**

## Urban Music Education: A Practical Guide for Teachers

Written by Kate Fitzpatrick-Harnish  
New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015

**K**ate Fitzpatrick-Harnish begins the first chapter of her book, *Urban Music Education: A Practical Guide for Teachers*, boldly declaring a “counter-narrative of urban music teaching—a perspective on teaching in this setting that focuses on the strengths of our students rather than on their weaknesses.” She notes that, too often, “urban schools and students have been labeled in stereotypically negative ways.” Currently, she is an associate director of music education at the University of Michigan, but Fitzpatrick-Harnish started her career as the director of instrumental music at Northland High School in Columbus, Ohio, where she learned firsthand about the challenges her students and colleagues faced daily.

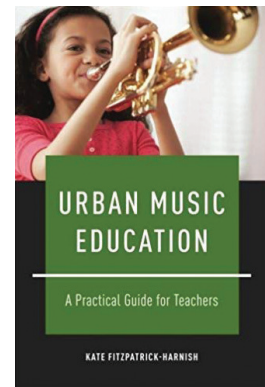
As she prepared for her first teaching job in this large, urban high school, many people shared unsolicited advice warning her to be careful to guard her privacy and “brush up on (my) classroom management skills.” She explains, “The message that I received from outsiders was that my students would be dangerous, my school unsafe, and my property unsecure if I chose to teach in this school.” As she learned about the statistics of the school, which was 72.9 percent minority and over 71 percent “economically disadvantaged,” with no budget at all for the music program, she remembers thinking, “The

only thing I knew for sure was that I had a lot of learning to do. Then I met my students, and everything changed.”

From her students, Fitzpatrick-Harnish learned that the most important goal is to get to know our students. We must thoroughly understand their needs, abilities, cultural backgrounds, desires, and goals. She cautions that, “Educators often misinterpret actions and behaviors within the classroom as being defiant or oppositional, when they are not intended as such.” If we take the time to understand our students, and put their frustrating behaviors into context, the strategies they display may become clear to us. She quotes Basil Bernstein on this topic: “If the culture of the teacher is to become part of the consciousness of the child, the culture of the child must first be in the consciousness of the teacher.” When the relationship and understanding between student and teacher is secure, the teacher may then start to teach explicitly and judiciously reinforce the expected behaviors necessary in the music classroom.

**Fitzpatrick-Harnish invites us to consider which ideas are beneficial to our specific school situation, to evaluate how our attitudes influence our students, and continually seek out resources that will further our growth as teachers.**

Rather than providing a “how-to” list of steps and strategies, Fitzpatrick-Harnish describes the *attributes* and *attitudes* research confirms lead to an urban music teacher’s success. Among the topics discussed in the book are issues related to children in poverty, under-resourced schools, community bias, increasing community engagement, educator bias, building trust, ways to grow administrator and parent support, and how to find support when we need it. For example, on page 50 she describes Martin Haberman’s research on the attributes of highly successful teachers in urban, high-poverty



schools. She notes Haberman found these teachers tend to be nonjudgmental, not easily shocked, excellent communicators and listeners, lifelong learners, and driven and energized by the opportunity to help students succeed.

Fitzpatrick-Harnish invites us to consider which ideas are beneficial to our specific school situation, to evaluate how our attitudes influence our students, and continually seek out resources that will further our growth as teachers. Her ideas are thoroughly grounded in scholarly research and are clear and engaging to read.

New teachers and veterans alike will appreciate the concepts presented in *Urban Music Education: A Practical Guide for Teachers* because they are applicable to any age level. Those who are just beginning their careers will find inspiration, and experienced teachers who may need to hear a word of encouragement will find affirmation. Fitzpatrick-Harnish very

effectively adds the viewpoints of five other music teachers in a series of “sidebars” accompanying and illuminating each chapter. In her final chapter, “Finding Support and Inspiration,” she also includes moving letters from many former urban music students, each of whom speaks to the heart of her overall message: “In the end, I believe that most of us do what we do because we believe in the power of music to be transformative in students’ lives.” ■

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