

# International Journal of Education & the Arts

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## **A Review Essay: Routledge International Handbook of the Arts and Education**

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Some books really matter, and *The Routledge International Handbook of the Arts and Education* is one of them. For an arts educator stuck on a desert island with the option of taking only one book, this might very well be the one to take. The book most certainly belongs in every research library, but as of 2018 an affordable paperback version has been released, making it arguably the most ideal text for use in an introductory arts education course to graduate students. It effectively introduces readers to the importance of the arts as well as historical background, recent developments, current theories, and ongoing debates central to current thought in the arts and arts education. Its contributors include world-class scholars who have made outstanding contributions to their respective fields, so in addition to offering an overview of the field, the book also serves to introduce readers to notable scholars in the arts and arts education. In some parts of the world, arts subjects are marginalized relative to such fields as mathematics, languages and technology, and a book of this kind enables even sceptical educators to recognize that the arts merit a significant place in education and are worth investment.

The quality of research selected for recent handbooks from major academic presses sometimes appears to be slipping, but in this case, the editors were clearly committed to including only the work of experts in a collection that is thoroughly vetted, well organized, and rigorously edited. The editors undoubtedly devoted great energy to ensure an impressively high quality product, and in some sense, the publication of this volume may mark a mutual zenith in the exemplary careers of the three prolific senior scholars that served as its editors: Mike Fleming (Durham University, UK), Liora Bresler (University of Illinois, USA), and John O'Toole (Melbourne and Griffith universities, Australia). It remains to be seen who in the next generation will be capable of leading arts education to new vistas, but some of this book's contributing authors are likely to have decades of productivity in their respective futures.

As its title implies, this book is not only a *research* handbook, although its chapters make frequent reference to research studies. Rather, it contains approachable scholarly essays on an array of essential topics. Moreover, it is concerned with "arts and education", not limiting itself to the scope of *arts education*. The book is structured in six parts: Part One: The Role of Theory, Part Two: Historical Perspectives, Part Three: Arts Education and the Curriculum, Part Four: Arts Education and the Wider Community, Part Five: Researching the Arts, and Part Six: Widening Perspectives. With 37 chapters, there is simply too much in the book to describe in a review that does not itself become a lengthy article. Rather than summarizing, the best one might contribute as a reviewer is an overview and some reflections on certain chapters that have proven to be personally inspiring, although it is likely that other readers will be most struck by other points in what is a very complex and diverse 424-page volume. The book begins with an Introduction written by the three editors. While only five pages in length, every word of each sentence in the Introduction is chosen with clarity that

demonstrates a very mature and insightful command of arts fields as well as commitment to unambiguous communication. Also within these five pages, readers are able to understand why the arts matter, that the present day offers unprecedented challenges to the arts, and how this Handbook is a unique international contribution that may well become a landmark of sorts in the field of arts education.

*Part 1, The Role of Theory* begins with a chapter by drama educator Joe Winston (University of Warwick) that offers a vigorous defense of the notion of ‘beauty’ and its role in liberal arts education. This is followed by a chapter by Norwegian music educator Øivind Varkøy, which demonstrates how the European notion of *Bildung*, especially when coupled with existentialist thinking, offers a valuable defense against the excessive infusion of technical knowledge and “instrumentalism” in education. A later chapter by musical theatre educator and consultant Eric Booth interrogates definitions of creativity, including viewing it as both a *process* and its resulting “original and insightful” *products*. Booth then offers a 20-point set of creative skills and argues that the notion of creativity provides a strong rationale for making the arts more central in education. Later chapters demonstrate Richard Shusterman’s notion of *somaesthetics* (embodied artistic experience) as well as ways of understanding the essential role of metaphors in interpretation of visual art.

*Part 2, Historical Perspectives* begins with an extensive chapter by seven co-authors that describes the development and emphases of notable arts education-related UNESCO policy documents—Seoul Agenda and Berlin Theses—and offers an insightful postcolonialist critique in relation to perspectives from Kenya, Columbia, New Zealand (Maori), and Taiwan. This inspiring discussion is followed by an elegant chapter by Sophie Claire Ward (Durham University), which provides an incisive macro-historical overview that is very helpful in demonstrating changing ways of thinking about the role of arts in society.

*Part 3, Arts Education and the Curriculum* contains 12 chapters that focus on curricular issues faced in an array of arts subjects, including visual art, music, dance, drama, literature, poetry, media arts, early childhood arts, special needs arts education, arts therapy, and integrated arts studies. Contributors to these chapters include some of the leading scholars in these respective fields in North America, Germany, the UK and Commonwealth nations. Some highlights of this part include New Zealand dance educators Ralph Buck and Nicholas Rowe’s presentation of a brilliant way to understand individual student progression through curricular structures, as well as UK music educators Pamela Burnard and Martin Faultey’s conceptualization of “creativities” in music. Two other chapters that seem particularly important are the ones on media arts by Michael Dezuanni (Queensland University of Technology) and integrated arts by Madeleine Grumet, *et al.* (University of North Carolina), since advocacy of these topics is sometimes perceived as posing a threat to traditional arts subjects. As mentioned previously,

the arts are sometimes marginalized in schools, and some administrators are naturally attracted by any opportunity to cut expenses by combining them into a single subject (integrated arts), or even to merge with fields promoted by industry (e.g. technology) into a single interdisciplinary subject (media arts). These unique contributions suggest ways that such approaches may be cautiously pursued in various institutions.

*Part 4, Arts Education and the Wider Community* includes four chapters, most of which explore socio-political aspects of the arts to a greater depth than in other parts of the book. The authors address challenges associated with local and national identities, as well as issues seen in art production during wartime. The chapter by Samuel Leong (Hong Kong Academy of Arts) describes three notable examples of community-based arts projects in Hong Kong. The chapter by Michael Balfour (Griffith University) alerts readers to the impact of ideologies, for instance as NGOs are sometimes “pressurized into prioritizing agendas that aim to change cultural perceptions of donor countries rather than attempting to address the inequalities of poverty,” reminding readers that arts education programs are “never value-free” (p. 307).

*Part 5, Researching the Arts* contains three chapters that advocate rather different views on what arts research can—or should—be. While John Harland (UK-based National Foundation for Educational Research) encourages readers to see the value in scientific approaches to research, Brad Haseman (Queensland University of Technology) supports radical approaches that are less constrained by strict adherence to traditional methods. To this reader, a middle path between the rather contradictory views of these two writers seems ideal, so it is very useful to have both of their perspectives, side by side, as contrary frames of reference.

A final section, *Part 6, Widening Perspectives* offers six more chapters on an array of themes, including industry partnerships, intercultural understanding, arts learning in Japan, implementation of arts policies in practice, neuroscience and arts, and how social inequality may be reduced by adopting a more artistic orientation in education. Among these, I would especially like to draw attention to the chapters by Koji Matsunobu (Education University of Hong Kong) and Ann Bamford (University of the Arts London). Matsunobu’s chapter highlights how in Japanese society some arts are commonly pursued as a form of lifelong learning, in order to “engage in self-cultivation, become fully human, and explore the meaning of life” (p. 378). This view of arts may be unusual in many industrialized societies, yet certainly offers a reasonable alternative to more common contemporary views, particularly as many aspects of human life become heavily commercialized and commodified. Ann Bamford, well known for her writings on the “Wow Factor”, focuses in her chapter on the theme of *implementation* as a way of devising improvements to the quality of arts education

offered in schools by enabling the realities of practice to better match the vision of policies. Bamford offers specific recommendations in a model that is likely to generate attention.

The book lacks a Conclusion chapter, but supplementary editorial introductions are included for each part of the book, enabling a strong degree of cohesion and clear organization across its entire length. The Index is also quite helpful, with an inclusive yet elegant design. While the book's title indicates that it is an "international handbook", its editors do not claim to represent the entire world, and indeed South Asia, Latin America and Africa receive very little attention in this volume, while the UK and Commonwealth countries (such as New Zealand) may even be over-represented. Still, chapters are also included by scholars who emphasize discussion of Japan and China, and the lead author of one chapter hails from Kenya, and writes along with co-authors that seek to include Maori, Columbian, and Taiwanese perspectives. The editors seem to have achieved an admirable balance between a wish to include well-written scholarly work covering what many in the English-speaking world regard as major themes in the field and the desire to simultaneously be truly international in scope.

This book may be rightfully recognized as a landmark achievement in the history of arts research and arts education scholarship, and it deserves a wide audience. It confirms that despite enduring challenges the arts are alive and well as an essential sphere of human development, bolstered by quality research and creative innovations.

### **About the Author**

David G. Hebert, PhD is a Professor of Music with Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, and manager of the state-sponsored Nordic Network for Music Education, which coordinates intensive Master courses and exchange of music teachers across eight nations. He is also a Professor II with the Malmo Academy of Music (Lund University, Sweden), and a Visiting Scholar with the Central Conservatory of Music (China). A widely published and cited researcher, he has also held positions with universities in the USA, Finland, Japan, Russia, Brazil, and New Zealand, and has directed research projects on six continents. His writings appear in over 30 different professional journals, and his books—as author, co-author, or editor—include *Wind Bands and Cultural Identity in Japanese Schools*, *Theory and Method in Historical Ethnomusicology*, *Patriotism in Nationalism in Music Education*, *International Perspectives on Translation, Education and Innovation in Japanese and Korean Societies*, *Music Glocalization: Heritage and Innovation in a Digital Age*, and *Advancing Music Education in Northern Europe*.

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