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The Road Goes Ever On: Estelle Jorgensen's  
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## Ch. 20 - Cultivating Hope in an Uncertain World: Engaging with a Pedagogy of Hope in Music Education

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## Section V – An Epilogue for the Unfinished

### Chapter 20

# Cultivating Hope in an Uncertain World: Engaging with a Pedagogy of Hope in Music Education

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### Abstract

In this chapter, I explore ways in which a disposition of hope can sustain a music teacher's professional career and personal well-being at a time of uncertainty and changing values and professional practices. I approach hope as a spiritual human disposition capable of motivating action, sustaining energy, and transforming positively those engaged in education. Themes addressed include: the relevance of hope in the context of schooling today, contemporary approaches to the phenomenon of hope, synergies that give rise to hope in education contexts, and ways of engaging with a pedagogy of hope with implications for music teaching and learning.

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*The hope that things can be better than they now are, the faith and trust in young people as well as in those who are older, and the courage to press on in the face of challenges are essential qualities of successful music teachers. . . . Sometimes, the door opens a crack and the sun shines in and we know the joy that comes when we are surprised by hope and rewarded by courage.*

Estelle R. Jorgensen,  
*The Art of Teaching Music*<sup>1</sup>

In the spirit of exploring the book's theme of *Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness*, I approach hope as a spiritual human disposition capable of motivating action, sustaining energy, and transforming positively those engaged in education. Historically, hope has been associated with human virtue in theological contexts; in recent decades the concept has become secular and has entered the discourse of several disciplines—among them, educational philosophy and theory, positive

psychology, social work, and peace studies. It is a central and fundamental concept underpinning the scholarly works of Estelle R. Jorgensen—from her writings on the aims of education,<sup>2</sup> issues of social justice,<sup>3</sup> religion and music education,<sup>4</sup> and the art of music teaching<sup>5</sup> to her approach to transforming music education.<sup>6</sup>

Celebrating the theme of hope that is threaded through Estelle’s writings, in this chapter, I gather the threads and continue the interweaving, addressing the relevance of hope in the context of schooling today, describing various approaches to hope, and identifying the conditions that give rise to hope in educational contexts. I identify ways of engaging with a pedagogy of hope and end with implications for music teaching and learning.

### ***Relevance of Hope in the Context of Schooling***

As a social institution, the school is a microcosm of the political ideologies, economic priorities, cultural trends, and technologies that shape everyday life and determine the values that motivate human behavior. Since the advent of mass public schooling in the early nineteenth century, external political and social forces consistently challenge the work of teachers and school administrators and demand that schools serve to advance a variety of agendas—from maintaining a distance between the institutions of state and church, building national identity during

wartime, assimilating immigrant peoples from diverse cultures, and promoting social justice to nurturing citizens with a strong moral and ethical character. In our time, teachers face challenges rooted in social inequality, accommodation of heterophonic cultures in the classroom, media saturation, and changing social norms and values.

Teachers carry out their daily work at the intersection of school and society, and the personal vision they bring to that space can determine in large part the enduring significance of their pedagogy as well as their ability to sustain a vibrant and healthy life in teaching. In his compelling book, *The Call to Teach*, David Hansen confronts the realities of enacting a vocation and sustaining a practice like teaching, while locating hope at the center of the process:

The moment one steps into public life, as all teachers do when they walk through the doors of their schools and classrooms, one enters an unpredictable world that will require compromise and adaptation. . . . Teaching is bound to fail when conducted in a spirit of pessimism—and certainly, of hopelessness. Teaching presupposes hope.<sup>7</sup>

For Paulo Freire, hope is an “ontological need” and “an existential concrete imperative.”<sup>8</sup> His philosophy of education is founded on his ontological approach to hope.<sup>9</sup> In his book, *Pedagogy of Hope*, he admits not understanding “human existence and the struggle needed to improve it, apart from hope and dream.”<sup>10</sup> But living from a place of hope

encompasses a range of emotions, from “rage to love,” as Freire puts it. Freire writes that “[i]t is imperative that we maintain hope even when the harshness of reality may suggest the opposite.”<sup>11</sup> Regardless of the perspective through which we appreciate “authentic educational practice,” he argues, “be it gnoseologic, aesthetic, ethical, political, . . . its process implies hope.”<sup>12</sup>

Several contemporary scholars address the urgency for narratives of hope in today’s schools. David Halpin looks to their potential as “an antidote to cultural pessimism” and “an alternative to currently fashionable narratives of professional decline.”<sup>13</sup> Similarly, editors of the book, *Discerning Critical Hope in Educational Practices*, urge educators to turn to resources for hope:

Given the ongoing and cataclysmic developments on the international stage in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, new social arrangements, and new culture of communication modalities and practices, it is timely to reconsider our resources for hope, including central texts on hope, and how they can be interrogated to address the challenges posed by our times.<sup>14</sup>

In her writings, Estelle Jorgensen consistently integrates the language of hope into her vision for transforming music education, particularly in the context of the music teacher. Her focus on hope and the necessity of hope in teachers’ lives is rooted in the writings of scholars who looked to

schools as contributing to a better society. Drawing on Whitehead’s book on the *Aims of Education*, she insists that “music teaching needs to be about bringing life and hope to young and old alike.”<sup>15</sup> And her advocacy for a discourse of hope is integral to her vision of education as social transformation, as she applies the ideals of John Dewey, Paulo Freire, and Maxine Greene among others, to music education. The following two quotations attest to this deep connection.

All our writers—Dewey, Freire, and Greene—albeit in different degree and for various reasons, share the hopeful anticipation that their vision for the present and future—whether it be a just and cultured democratic society, or a sensitive, humane, and imaginative people—can be realized. They write in the belief that transformation in society is not only possible but probable, convinced that human faith, hope, and courage can be relied upon to accomplish the remarkable societal and educative transformations they seek.<sup>16</sup>

Education ought to realize such ideals as freedom, justice, equality of opportunity, and civility, and a more just, humane society. I agree with Freire that hope provides the impetus in the struggle to improve the situation. . . . The arts provide means whereby hope can be instilled and a more humane society foreshadowed.<sup>17</sup>

Other scholars cited by Estelle in her writings also place hope as central to the process of education. bell hooks views

teachers as “keepers of hope,”<sup>18</sup> an incredibly powerful responsibility to bestow on the teacher. That image of hope is omnipresent in Hansen’s study of four teachers in big-city schools “who put at the center of their vision of teaching the hope of having a positive influence on students.”<sup>19</sup> In his preface to Hansen’s book, *The Call to Teach*, Larry Cuban concluded that “to teach is to be full of hope.”<sup>20</sup>

Based on the central place assigned to hope in education among scholars, I argue in this chapter that the presence of hope in a teacher’s vision and the cultivation of hope in students are key to enacting a larger vision for the role of schooling in society. As an ideal for sustaining a life in teaching, hope can be drawn on as a source of meaning, a will to move forward and persevere, a foundation for enacting personal goals, a contributor to mental health, and a well-spring of courage.

### *A Context for Approaching Hope in the Realm of Education*

The presence of hope can contribute powerfully to the process of living a fulfilling life—envisioning, anticipating, bringing goals to fruition, and using the outcome as a source of even greater hopefulness. Hope has served differently across time and discipline. It has a strong basis in faith and religious traditions. Theologian Joan Chittister writes that embedded in each of the major spiritual traditions—Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam—is

“a spirituality of hope that imbues their followers with the power to believe in life, to cope with life, to live life, whatever the burdens that come with the daily dyings of life.”<sup>21</sup> Indeed, as Jorgensen points out, Christian hope is embodied in many choral works—for example, Bernstein’s *Mass*, Mahler’s *Second Symphony*, Orff’s *Carmina Burana*, and the spirituals of African American people such as *Oh, What a Beautiful City* and *In That Great Getting Up Morning*.<sup>22</sup> Poets also highlight its fundamental presence in the human condition, among the most famous that Emily Dickinson who wrote:

“Hope” is the thing with feathers –  
That perches on the soul –  
And sings the tune without the words –  
And never stops – at all –

Writing on radical hope and teaching, Julian Edgoose interprets the meaning of Dickinson’s words as hope being “the animator of the soul and that which gives the tune to the words of our life song.”<sup>23</sup> Dickinson continues the powerful and evocative metaphor to show that in times of struggle hope buffers the wildest storms. In recent decades, across a variety of disciplines, scholars draw on a realistic and pragmatic view of hope that includes struggle and grief. In fact, Chittister calls struggle “the seedbed of hope,” and argues that optimism is not the answer, pretending grief does not exist.<sup>24</sup> She concludes that “[r]eality is the only thing we have that can possibly nourish hope.”<sup>25</sup>

The paradoxical and multidimensional nature of hope and

hopelessness is sometimes expressed in the binary of utopianism and dystopianism. Jorgensen resists the pitfalls of dystopian or utopian mind-sets, “settling, instead, in the region of optimistic realism.”<sup>26</sup> Halpin frames the mindset similarly as “utopian realism . . . rooted in a sensitive appreciation of the potentialities of the here and now.”<sup>27</sup> And the here and now is also the locus of a hopeful mindset for hooks and Freire. hooks writes that “[o]ur visions for tomorrow are most vital when they emerge from the concrete circumstances of change we are experiencing right now.”<sup>28</sup> To maintain hope alive, Freire writes, “educators should always analyze the comings and goings of social reality. These are the movements that make a higher reason for hope possible.”<sup>29</sup>

However, as Hytten warns, care must be taken not to conflate hope with wishful thinking or naive optimism; instead, she offers, as Jorgensen does, a pragmatist vision of hope “that compels us to act thoughtfully and creatively in the present so as to open up yet unimagined possibilities for the future—a hope that is generative, resourceful, engaged, and communal.”<sup>30</sup> A state of optimism on its own, as Halpin points out, “is a mood that often misses the ambiguity of the world.”<sup>31</sup> He turns to the term “good utopias,” which he defines as, radically progressive conceptions of the future of education that eschew mere wistful yearning (“wouldn’t it be nice if”) thinking in favour of positive, unusual, but ultimately practicable visions for the reform of schools and

teaching and learning generally . . . [with emphasis on] identifying the forces and resources within the present social order that are capable of transforming it for the better in the future, so as to provide a significant dynamic for action in the here and now.<sup>32</sup>

Transforming the present social order is core to Jorgensen’s reasoning for “optimistic realism” or John Gardner’s vision for social renewal in “an endless interweaving of continuity and change.”<sup>33</sup> Intensifying the potential of hope in social transformation, Henry Giroux wants to reclaim pedagogy “as a form of educated and militant hope” which begins with the crucial recognition that,

education is not solely about job training and the production of ethically challenged entrepreneurial subjects and that artistic production does not only have to serve market interests, but [they] are also about matters of civic engagement and literacy, critical thinking, and the capacity for democratic agency, action, and change.<sup>34</sup>

And Freire similarly advocates powerfully that pedagogy must go beyond “the sole teaching of technique or content” and include “the exercise of a critical understanding of reality.”<sup>35</sup> A pragmatic, critical hope is at the basis of a recent reconsideration of hope in educational settings, *Discerning Critical Hope in Educational Practices*.<sup>36</sup> The book posits the notion of critical hope not only as “a crucial conceptual and theoretical direction, but

also as an action-oriented response to contemporary despair.”<sup>37</sup>

A pragmatic, critical approach to hope that takes the here and now as the source and looks positively to the future is pervasive in contemporary literature on education, and Jorgensen’s writings belong there. What educational conditions allow for hope to be generated and cultivated?

### **Conditions That Give Rise to Hope**

Freire reminds us that “without a vision for tomorrow, hope is impossible.”<sup>38</sup> Visions for tomorrow are vital, hooks writes, “when they emerge from the concrete circumstances of change we are experiencing right now.”<sup>39</sup> What, then, is needed for the kind of visionary thinking implied by Freire and hooks? A positive disposition, a belief that “something good” can materialize, and an anticipation “*in the here and now* of a better future,” Halpin writes.<sup>40</sup> Freire strikes at the core when he writes that “what makes me hopeful is not so much the certainty of the *find*, but my movement in *search*.”<sup>41</sup>

Another condition of hopeful thinking is “the development of imaginative solutions” in response to the difficulties and struggles of looking ahead realistically.<sup>42</sup> Focusing on the social imagination, Maxine Greene describes it as, “the capacity to invent visions of what should be and what might be in our deficient society, on the streets where we live, in our schools.”<sup>43</sup> She

goes on to say that what she’s describing is “a mode of utopian thinking: thinking that refuses mere compliance, that looks down roads not yet taken to the shapes of a more fulfilling social order, to more vibrant ways of being in the world.”<sup>44</sup> Such thinking, according to philosopher Patrick Shade demands the three central habits of persistence, resourcefulness, and courage: “Habits of persistence sustain us, while habits of resourcefulness guide our active exploration and attempts to transcend our limitations. Courage undergirds our ability to persist and to explore by enabling us to face arduous tasks.”<sup>45</sup> These habits of hope function within a “relational construct,” in which outgoingness and openness towards one’s environment and the people in it are crucially important.<sup>46</sup>

Thus, the notion of hopeful living places individuals in relationship with community. The great advocate of teaching and teachers, Parker Palmer, expresses the centrality of relationship in imparting hope to others:

Imparting hope to others has nothing to do with exhorting or cheering them on. It has everything to do with relationships that honor the soul, encourage the heart, inspire the mind, quicken the step, and heal the wounds we suffer along the way.<sup>47</sup>

The building of such relationships is propelled in the context of community building and social and political activism that challenges unjust systems. Hytten argues that it is only when we act on both individual and systemic levels can we sustain the kind of pragmatist hope that is

so necessary in schools.<sup>48</sup> A state of being hopeful, then is not a passive or empty one. On the contrary, it implicitly involves “adopting a critical reflective attitude” towards prevailing circumstances.<sup>49</sup>

Even with supportive, positive conditions to foster hope, there is a steadfast struggle. Hope is fragile and can be dashed. The enemies of hope, those conditions that work against a hopeful vision, include:

cynicism, fatalism (“It’s just the way things are”; It didn’t work then, so why should it work now?), relativism (avoids commitment of any kind and leaves its followers in a quandary about what it is reasonable to look forward to); fundamentalism and traditionalism (evangelical-like adherence to tradition, which places limits on what we can look forward to).<sup>50</sup>

To end this section, I return to Hansen who connects hopeful teaching with an evolving sense of teaching as vocation. He observed four teachers teach in big-city public and private schools for two years; he listened to them as they struggled with their doubts, and he recorded their thoughts and feelings. He found that even in the face of doubt,

[T]he teachers somehow retained a vibrant hopefulness, knowing full well that they will again and again face disappointment over lapses in their performance and that of their students. This developing sense of vocation—it evolved over time—helped them manage the inexorable

doubts that arose about what they did; it helped them grasp the wondrous thread of hope that makes teaching far more than just working in a school.<sup>51</sup>

### *Sources of Hope for the Music Teacher, With Implications for Pedagogy*

What does it mean to teach from a place of hope and hopefulness? Emerging from the above discussion, and drawing on Jorgensen’s and other scholars’ writings, I offer six sources of hope for the music teacher: inspiration from the past, the power of transmission, teacher agency, student growth and creativity, musicing as a language of hope, and teaching as a vocation.

*Inspiration from the past.* The music teacher does not function in a professional void. She is part of a long lineage of teachers who labored before her to engage students in music making and advance democratic ideals through the art of music education. With that broader historical backdrop, Hansen writes, a teacher can “keep the results of past human effort in view, and see that they were sometimes achieved in conditions far more difficult than those one faces today.”<sup>52</sup> The teacher stands on the threshold of promise and possibility between past and future. Chittister highlights the nature and role of remembering in facing current challenges when she writes: “[Hope] is grounded in the ability to remember with new



understanding an equally difficult past—either our own or someone else’s. The fact is that our memories are the seedbed of our hope.”<sup>53</sup> If we accept that premise, then it behooves teacher educators to build awareness of the past and bring past struggles into discussions of present issues in music education.

*The Power of Transmission.* The threshold of promise and possibility I refer to above is particularly visible in the context of music transmission, serving as a vital source of hope in music teaching. Jorgensen captures the essence of that powerful and responsible cultural moment: “[I]t is important to learn to hope, take heart, and be courageous. Without our efforts, musical traditions bequeathed to us will die. Much hangs on our transforming and transmitting the wisdom of the past to new generations.”<sup>54</sup> She further illuminates the moment:

I am very sympathetic to those teachers of oral traditions who regard what they teach as a treasure. To entrust it to a student is to hope profoundly that it will likewise be treated with great love, care, and respect. It is to wish that we (the embodiment of what we teach) will transmit a legacy to our students that will live on in the future.<sup>55</sup>

Also embedded in that powerful cultural moment is the opportunity “to transcend past practice, to go beyond more than merely transmit knowledge of the past, . . . [and] to subvert more than only sustain extant musical traditions.”<sup>56</sup>

*Teacher agency.* A dominant source of hope for the teacher is the belief that one can make a difference at individual and collective levels. Jorgensen asks teachers to lead with a hopeful disposition and to make hopeful openings in pedagogical spaces.

The hope that things can be better than they now are, the faith and trust in young people as well as in those who are older, and the courage to press on in the face of challenges are essential qualities of successful music teachers.<sup>57</sup>

*Student growth and creativity.* Regardless of the circumstances and conditions of teaching, the teacher has every reason to believe in students—their potential, their creativity, their futures, their well-being, and their ability to influence or contribute to the transformation of cultural life. Defining “a discipline of hope” in teaching, Herbert Kohl writes that it is, “the refusal to accept limits on what your students can learn or on what you, as a teacher, can do to facilitate learning.”<sup>58</sup> He goes on to situate the role of hope in teachers’ influence on students:

Through engaging the minds and imaginations of children, teachers can help children develop the strength, pride, and sensitivity they need to engage the world, and not to despair when things seem stacked against them. Even though hope is not sufficient to provide a good life or even guarantee survival, it is a necessity.<sup>59</sup>

The critical engagement of students is foregrounded by many authors, stressing

the development of a mindset that envisions a transformative role for them in society. “So as teachers, we continue to hope for and have faith in our students.”<sup>60</sup>

*Musicing and/as a language of hope.* The language used in and around pedagogical settings can have a powerful effect on how teachers and students perceive the value of what they encounter, how they connect what they do in a content area to living hopefully and with a positive mindset about the future, and how music can embody and express visions for a more democratic society and world. Hansen provides an example of fostering hope through an expanded view of the language of pedagogy, believing that,

some teachers may discover that strictly occupational or functional language is inadequate for describing why they teach. They may find themselves resorting to language with spiritual overtones, speaking, for example, of their hopes for and faith in their students.<sup>61</sup>

Each philosophical approach to the nature and meaning of music draws on a corresponding language of transmission—from the symbolic language of Susanne Langer, the aesthetic vocabulary of Bennett Reimer, the metaphorical and spiritual frameworks of Paul Haack and Malcolm Tait, the language of praxis as adopted by David Elliott and Marissa Silverman, and Tom Regelski, or the language of change, transformation, and openness as espoused by Estelle Jorgensen and Randall Allsup. The ways in which language is used to frame music teaching and learning can influence

the impact of such experiences on those who participate. In what ways, if any, does such language foster hope—now in the moment of musicing, then through recollections of past experiences, or to come, borne on the rays of joy and anticipation stretching out into the future. What is the nature of the alignment and resonance between the words read or spoken about and the artistic essences experienced in listening, creating, and performing? How does language enhance or hinder access to the wellsprings of hope possible in the act of musicing? Jorgensen speaks to this space in “The Artist and the Pedagogy of Hope.”

The wealth of idealistic and hopeful musical expressions indicates the desire among many artists to create a thing of extraordinary rightness or value, even if composed and performed in the context of quite ordinary occasions.<sup>62</sup>

*Teaching as a Vocation.* This source of hope is embodied in the lifelong view of teaching as vocation, as a calling that embraces all dimensions of a teacher’s life—the “range of accomplishments accessible to any serious-minded teacher” and “the opportunities present circumstances afford them.”<sup>63</sup> After Hansen documented the journey of four teachers over two years, he concluded that “having a sense of vocation may enable teachers to identify those very opportunities in the first place.”<sup>64</sup>

## Toward A Pedagogy of Hope

Parker Palmer recently identified hope, of all the virtues, as “one of the most-needed in our time.”<sup>65</sup> Freire regards it as “indispensable for happiness in school life.”<sup>66</sup> Throughout her scholarly career, Estelle Jorgensen has interwoven themes of hope in philosophical writings on music education. In concluding her book of *Pictures of Music Education*, she mused: “I love the possibilities and the hope in these pictures. . . . [They] remind us that as music educators and those interested in its work, we are engaged in an artful, humane, and hopeful undertaking.”<sup>67</sup> She imagined for us the promise and possibility embedded in a pedagogy of hope. She advised beginning teachers about the role of faith and hope as they sow seeds of change:

So I say to beginning teachers, rather than being frustrated with a teaching situation, doing nothing about it, or walking away from it too soon, begin to sow the seeds of changes that need to occur. Remember that there can be no harvest without the effort of preparing the soil, planting the seed, and nourishing it. And then wait in faith and hope for the harvest.<sup>68</sup>

In her vision for a transformative music education, she provided sources of hope for teachers living in an uncertain and changing world by “helping them forge a basis for personal faith and conviction and cope successfully with the changes and uncertainties they confront in their lives.”<sup>69</sup> Her adoption of the stance of “realistic optimism” is resonant of the many scholars who confront the paradoxical nature of hope as “the place where joy meets the struggle.”<sup>70</sup> She draws us into the spiritual dimensions of teaching as vocation and begins to define the unique ways art and the artist in a pedagogical role can cultivate hope through the medium of music education.

In moving toward a pedagogy of hope, Estelle Jorgensen provides a solid foundation and inspiration for opening doors and advancing the dialogue. To honor this aspect of her legacy, I attempted to place her ideas onto the broader canvas of discourse on the nature of hope in education. Voices of many influential scholars add depth and urgency to the profession’s need to bring hope, an important ontological need and existential imperative, as Freire put it, to the center of pedagogy.

## Notes

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  - 17 Jorgensen, "The Artist and the Pedagogy of Hope," 36.
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  - 19 Hansen, *The Call to Teach*, 158.
  - 20 Larry Cuban, in David T. Hansen, *The Call to Teach* (New York and London: Teachers College Press, Columbia University, 1995), xi.
  - 21 Joan D. Chittister, *Scarred by Struggle, Transformed by Hope* (Grand Rapids, MI, and Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), x-xi.
  - 22 Estelle R. Jorgensen, "Religious Music in Education," *Philosophy of Music Education Review* 1, no. 2 (Fall, 1993): 103.

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- 25 Ibid., 104.
- 26 Jorgensen, *Transforming Music Education*, 142.
- 27 Halpin, *Hope and Education*, 60.
- 28 hooks, *Teaching Community*, 12.
- 29 Freire, *Pedagogy of the Heart*, 107.
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- 46 Halpin, *Hope and Education*, 15.
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- 50 Ibid., 18-24.
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- 52 Ibid., 161.
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- 55 Ibid., 203.
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- 66 Freire, *Pedagogy of the Heart*, 107.
- 67 Jorgensen, *Pictures of Music Education*, 270.
- 68 Jorgensen, *The Art of Teaching Music*, 265.
- 69 Jorgensen, *Transforming Music Education*, 140.
- 70 Palmer, <https://onbeing.org/blog/parker-palmer-hope-is-the-place-where-joy-meets-the-struggle/> [Accessed August 17, 2018].

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## About the Author

**Marie McCarthy** is Professor of Music Education at the University of Michigan where she teaches courses on school music, research methodology, and foundations of music education. Her primary area of inquiry is historical, with emphasis music education in social and cultural context. She has written two books, several book chapters, and numerous articles in peer-reviewed journals and has presented keynote addresses internationally. Since 2015, she has served as Editor of the *Journal of Historical Research in Music Education*. She is an Honorary Life Member of the Society for Music Education in Ireland and the International Society for Music Education.

## Project Links

This chapter comes from a book titled *The Road Goes Ever On: Estelle Jorgensen's Legacy in Music Education*. The philosophical essays contained within focus on themes that have intrigued Estelle Jorgensen whose forty years of scholarship have strongly influenced music education research and practice: the transformation of music education in public schools; feminist and LGBTQ voices; mentoring; the unfinished search for new ways of seeing, hearing, and doing; multiple and intersecting musical identities; the tension between tradition and change; and activist practice in music education.

The complete book can be found at the following link: <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/jorgensen/>