

---

## EDITORIAL

By

John Kratus, *guest editor*  
Michigan State University

I am grateful to Frank Abrahams and the staff at *Visions of Research in Music Education* for inviting me to introduce the articles in this special issue featuring papers given at the New Directions in Music Education conference in October 2011. The conference was the sixth of its kind to be held at Michigan State University, and the topic was “Revitalizing Middle and High School Music.” Juliet Hess, Tamara Thies, Janet Cape, and Frank Martignetti et al. were among the 50 international educators, scholars, and musicians to present their ideas at the conference.

The guiding aim behind all the New Directions conferences is to provide a venue for the integration of scholarship and practice in music education. Most of the conferences in music education are one of two types: (1) small, scholarly conferences attended by mostly college professors and doctoral students, in which the list of presenters and the list of audience members are roughly the same, and (2) large, practice-based conferences of hands-on workshops for K-12 music teachers, led primarily by seasoned educators. This bifurcated system of conferences may satisfy the immediate professional needs of the attendees, but it also, unfortunately, can isolate the scholarly community from the community of practice, and vice versa.

The New Directions in Music Education conferences attempt to bring together the experts from music classrooms and college campuses to share their ideas and learn from each other. Conference sessions alternate among the presentation of scholarly papers, practice-oriented

sessions that sometimes involve demonstration groups of children, and panels addressing a common theme. Michigan State University undertook a gamble whether the collegiate faculty giving scholarly presentations would be interested in attending and learning from workshops given by practicing music teachers, and that K-12 music educators would care to attend and learn from the scholarly presentations. Happily, the gamble has paid off. The six New Directions conferences that have been held since 1997 have each attracted between 120 and 220 persons, nearly equally divided between college faculty and practicing music educators.

Many of the leading scholars in music education, including Bennett Reimer, Edwin Gordon, Sandra Stauffer, David Elliott, and Pamela Burnard, have presented their work at New Directions. In addition, many outstanding educators, including Heather Shouldice, Brian Franco, Elizabeth Hankins, and Nick Jaworski have demonstrated their teaching practices at the conferences. As the conferences have progressed over the years, the distinctions between the practice-based clinics and the research-based papers seem to have melted away, with each presenter stimulating new thoughts among the varied audience members.

Perhaps one of the greatest joys in organizing these conferences has been to provide a public stage for those persons who are relatively early in their academic careers and who have big ideas to share. The four papers in this special issue of *Visions* were written by persons who possess these qualities. The authors are assistant professors, secondary music teachers, and doctoral students. In a conference on “Revitalizing Middle and High School Music,” the stories these authors tell are compelling.

Juliet Hess examined the ways that a Ghanaian music ensemble she established in a Toronto, Ontario school affected the students’ perceptions of the music and of the culture from which it originated. She provides “caveats and possibilities” for ethnic music ensembles in

schools and suggests that music education may have a significant role in contributing to a more just and equitable world.

Exploring student's perceptions of a guitar class, Janet Cape interviewed five students participating in such a class in a Winnipeg high school. Her informants eloquently described their personal and musical growth and their strong sense of belonging to a community of musicians.

Tamara Thies examined the perceived benefits from a curricular change in a high school band program that granted greater empowerment to student leaders. She found that the autonomy given to the student leaders resulted in a self-sustaining community of practice that set high standards and provided a mechanism for innovation and change.

“A Hopeful Model for Music Education in Urban Schools” presents the work of Frank Martignetti, Brent C. Talbot, Matthew Clauhs, Timothy Hawkins, and Nasim Niknafs. The words “hopeful” and “urban schools” do not often appear together in the same title. Yet these authors suggest to the music education profession a way forward through the exploration of four simple questions: Who am I?, who are my students?, who might we become as individuals?, and what might we become together? The authors weave a beautiful tapestry of hope tempered with realism and borne from experience.

Each of the authors in this special issue shares a powerful image of a music education that is grounded in its locality yet connected to the world, that is open to new ideas about what constitutes appropriate music in schools, and that reexamines the meaning of musical experience to young people. It is highly appropriate that their work appears in a journal that begins with the word “visions.”

**John Kratus** is professor of music education at the Michigan State University College of Music, where he teaches secondary general music methods, music education foundations, philosophy of music education, sociology of music education, music education research, and songwriting. He is published in the fields of creativity, philosophy, and curriculum development in *Music Educators Journal*, the *International Journal of Music Education*, *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education*, *Psychology of Music*, *Canadian Music Educator*, the *Quarterly Journal of Music Teaching and Learning*, the *Journal of Research in Music Education*, and numerous book chapters. He has presented his ideas to audiences of educators and scholars in Great Britain, Ireland, Sweden, Germany, Italy, Greece, Egypt, Japan, Malaysia, China, and across Canada and the United States. In 2004, he was contracted by the U.S. Department of Defense to provide in-service education for all music teachers working in schools on American military bases around the world. Kratus founded and coordinated the Michigan Honors Composition Contest and Concert, featuring the original music of students in elementary and secondary schools. At Michigan State, he has coordinated conferences for the International Society for the Sociology of Music Education and the MayDay Group in Music Education, as well as six New Directions in Music Education conferences. Recently, he was honored with the 2013 Award of Merit from the Michigan Music Education Association for "service to the cause of music education."