

***Problem-Based Learning in the College Music Classroom*, edited by Natalie R. Sarrazin. New York: Routledge, 2018. ISBN-13: 978-1138578173, xi + 205 pp. Paperback \$49.95.**

Problem-based learning (PBL) is becoming a widely-used pedagogical technique in higher education settings. The principal goal of PBL activities is to encourage students to use course knowledge to come up with solutions to real-world problems. PBL was originally invented to teach medical students how to solve problems that might come up in their careers, but more recently other disciplines, including those in the arts and humanities, have begun to adopt it. Many college instructors find that PBL improves student learning because it makes the course material applicable to students' careers and helps their critical thinking and research skills. PBL use has come relatively slowly to the music classroom, however. Four articles have been published on the use of PBL in music, but *Problem-Based Learning in the College Music Classroom*—a collection of essays edited by Natalie Sarrazin—is the first book on the subject.¹ The collection aims to help college music faculty understand PBL, and the authors of each essay (who come from multiple music subdisciplines) illustrate how they use PBL in their own classrooms. The goal of the book is to inspire other music faculty to use PBL.

Sarrazin begins the book by differentiating between problem-based learning and project-based learning, which are often confused with one another. According to her description of the book on its back cover, “PBL is

1. Daniel Stevens, “Part 1: Problem-Based Learning in the Music Classroom: A Rationale,” *Engaging Students: Essays in Music Pedagogy* 2 (2014), <http://flipcamp.org/engagingstudents2/essays/stevens.html>; Philip Duker, “Part 2: Applying Problem-Based Learning in the Music Theory Classroom,” *Engaging Students: Essays in Music Pedagogy* 2 (2014), <http://flipcamp.org/engagingstudents2/essays/duker.html>; Kris Shaffer, “Part 3: Assessing Problem-Based Learning,” *Engaging Students: Essays in Music Pedagogy* 2 (2014), <http://flipcamp.org/engagingstudents2/essays/shaffer.html>; Hon-Lun Yang, “Teaching Music History at Hong Kong Baptist University: Problem-Based Learning and Outcome-Based Teaching and Learning,” this *Journal* 4, no. 2 (2014), 329–32, <http://www.ams-net.org/ojs/index.php/jmhp/article/view/139/157>

an effective, student centered approach in which students learn higher-order thinking skills and integrative strategies by solving real world challenges.” She notes that one of the biggest misconceptions about PBL in music classrooms is that there are no high stakes problems to solve. Of the four published studies on PBL in music, Sarrazin points out that only three of them truly represent PBL; the other is project-based. This confusion between problem-based learning and project-based learning is another main issue among faculty, because those who do think that they are doing PBL in their classes often are doing project-based activities. This book not only serves to differentiate the two but also provides useful ideas for creating and adapting PBL activities in different music courses.

The book is usefully divided into four parts, making it easy to find techniques one needs. There is overlap between the sections, however, so the book would best be read cover-to-cover. Part 1, music history and appreciation, contains three essays. In the first, John Tomerson discusses how best to use PBL in the music history class as an adjunct, confronting the challenges that contingent faculty face when abandoning the lecture for a more interactive lesson. Tomerson addresses the specific issues that contingent faculty face (e.g. the need to overcome student resistance, fears about how faculty colleagues and administrators might view PBL techniques, concerns that using these techniques might endanger reappointment) and gives suggestions for how these issues might be overcome. The second essay, by Margaret Leenhouts, and third essay, by Rodney Garrison, focus specifically on PBL in music appreciation courses. These two essays discuss how to engage non-major students in PBL with problems that do not require extensive musical knowledge, such as cultivating a local orchestra’s concert season and compiling the program book for it, including deciding on pieces, writing program notes, and creating advertisements.

Part 2, which focuses on ethnomusicology, contains three essays. The first two, by Gavin Webb and Tiffany Nicely, respectively, discuss the use of PBL in African music classes. Although the essays form a nice complement to one another, the fact that they focus on a single geographic region is a limitation. The third essay of Part 2, by Julie E. Hunter, is broader in that it covers both an African music course and a World Music Cultures course, but it actually illustrates the use of what might be best described as project-based learning. Since Sarrazin is so careful in the introduction to differentiate project-based learning from PBL, Hunter’s focus makes her essay an odd fit for the collection. Taken together, therefore, this section is the weakest of the book.

Despite the African focus of Webb’s and Nicely’s essays, however, the techniques that they present could be modified to any geographic region. Webb’s PBL project has students function as a kind of public relations consultant for countries in Africa, in which they study media depictions of these countries and help to rebrand them in order to correct misrepresentations. Nicely discusses

the use of PBL in an online ethnomusicology class that focuses on Sub-Saharan Africa. Because the course is online, she addresses the challenges that classes in virtual spaces face in PBL. Hunter's essay focuses on the aspect of group learning in PBL and how it is employed for students who are seeking to make music engaging and meaningful for others.

The third part of the book discusses the underuse of PBL in music and movement with two essays by Scott Horsington and Tamara Wilcox. Horsington's contribution presents best practices for the use of PBL in introduction to music classes that incorporate a study of kinesics, while Wilcox's essay can easily be seen as overlapping with those in Part 1 in that it talks about how to use PBL and movement in the music appreciation class. Horsington takes the non-verbal communication of chamber musicians as a starting point for encouraging students to explore the ways that musicians communicate with one another while playing. Wilcox has students use movement as part of their PBL projects in order to help them find their own musical voices.

The final section concerns the use of PBL in music theory and education, with essays by Natalie Sarrazin, Tracy S. Wanamaker, and Rodney Garrison. Like Hunter, Sarrazin discusses project-based learning in the context of music education. Her essay narrates how her course worked in tandem with her university's early childhood education center for the students' project. Wanamaker has an interesting take on PBL, using it for both classroom management and curricular issues. She employs PBL for her teacher education class on special education and has students use it to understand how to fulfill New York State mandates on teaching students with disabilities. Garrison's second contribution to this volume shows how PBL can be used in the first semester of the aural skills sequence. He uses PBL for two purposes: to have students argue for the need for music literacy, and to help them understand how best to teach aural skills to others using skills acquired in class.

The book closes with one more chapter by Sarrazin that lays out best practices for using PBL. She begins the chapter by reviewing the history of PBL and its advantages. She closes the chapter with best practices and methods for employing PBL specifically in music classes, while reviewing what the authors of the essays did in their applications.

Despite the minor issues with the essays of Part 2, *Problem-Based Learning in the College Music Classroom* is a welcome addition to the music history pedagogy literature. Because music history courses are rarely taught in a vacuum, each of the essays in this book is valuable for the music historian. The volume does not address the use of PBL in other music settings, such as

ensembles, some such studies do exist.² Hopefully, this will be the first of many books on PBL in music to emerge in the near future. I recommend that anyone interested in employing PBL in their classrooms read this book.

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2. See, for example, Richard Laprise, "What's the Problem? Exploring the Potential of Problem-Based Learning in an Ensemble Setting," *Music Educators Journal* 104, no. 4 (2018): 48–53.