

# Chapter 10

## The United States of America: Reflections on the development and effectiveness of compulsory music education

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This chapter consists of an overview of the history of music in compulsory schooling in the United States of America. There are sections on the colonial period, the common school movement, compulsory schooling and the modern era, followed by conclusions.

A few points should be kept in mind. First, the configuration of the British colonies in North America shifted several times before they became states after the Revolutionary War with Great Britain (1775–83). Second, after nationhood was achieved, jurisdiction over education transferred from the colonies to the states, not to the federal government. Specifically, the 10th Amendment to the Constitution of the United States reads: 'The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people' (The Constitution, 1787/1791). Third, individual colonies and states were influenced by each other's laws and practices. Finally, in most instances, the term compulsory schooling is employed in this chapter rather than compulsory education, because the latter refers to educational outcomes and the former to physical attendance.

### Colonial America

The roots of modern compulsory schooling can be traced to sixteenth-century Protestant reforms in Europe. The English 'poor laws', enacted soon thereafter (1563 and 1601), became the basis for early education legislation in the British colonies of North America (see Kotin and Aikman 1980; Melton 1988; Rothbard 1974).

The colony at Massachusetts Bay (now Boston), settled by English Calvinists (Puritans) beginning in 1630, enacted the first education law in the New World in 1642. This law compelled education for children of all social and economic strata in both academic and vocational subjects. It placed the burden of education on parents and the masters of indentured servant children and thus compelled education but not schooling.

However, subsequent laws and amendments enacted in 1647 and 1648 required the provision of education and schooling, respectively, and thereby affirmed the right of the state (colony) to determine the content and scope of education and to expend public funds for those purposes (Jernegan 1918; Kotin and Aikman 1980). The laws of the colony at Boston soon prevailed throughout Massachusetts.

All the (largely Calvinist) New England colonies, except for religiously heterogeneous Rhode Island, adopted compulsory and other education and school laws within thirty years of the enactment of the 1642 law. These early New England colonial laws differed from the earlier Protestant reform and English poor laws in their provision for the education and training of all children, not just the indigent. More generally, scholars believe that the statutes and acts regarding schooling from early Reformation Germany to the Puritans in New England 'were the work of religious oligarchies' (Jernegan 1919a: 24).

Scholars could have mentioned that the first permanent British colony in North America, at Plymouth, Massachusetts (1620), was slow to enact school laws perhaps because its inhabitants were lightly educated religious separatists who had lived for a decade in Leiden, Holland (1609–20), a city then known throughout Europe for its religious tolerance. At the other end of the continuum, the larger colony at Boston was characterized by religious homogeneity and relatively high levels of education and it became the New World's early leader in universal education and compulsory schooling. More generally, Cremin (1970: 92) maintained that 'schooling' in the British colonies of North America 'was viewed as a device for promoting uniformity'.

The North American colonies outside of New England followed suit to varying degrees, including the Quaker-influenced colonies of Pennsylvania and New Jersey and the former Dutch colony of New York. Maryland and (Anglican) Virginia and colonies further south passed compulsory education legislation early on, but they neither expanded the English poor laws model to cover all children nor established public schools (Kotin and Aikman 1980).

After what had been a strong beginning for education in New England, and to a lesser extent in the middle and southern colonies (Jernegan 1919b, 1920), compulsory school laws were weakened after the protracted Indian Wars broke out in New England in 1675, and because of frontier conditions resulting from the expanding geographical perimeters of settlement and increasing religious and cultural heterogeneity. Only Connecticut retained relatively strong compulsory school laws throughout the colonial era, while the other colonies generally maintained them only for indigent children (Kotin and Aikman 1980).

## Music education in colonial America

European-style music instruction in what is now the United States was begun by Spanish Catholic priests following Hernando Coronado's expedition to the present state of New

Mexico in 1540. Thereafter the Spaniards taught music to Spanish and Native American children in dozens of missions in the (present) southwestern United States (Britton 1958). From that point onward, most if not all groups that settled in North America provided organized music instruction. These countless influences notwithstanding, the early British Calvinist colonists of New England played a major role in the widespread establishment of what proved to be long-standing practices in music and education.

The most common form of group musical activity in colonial New England was congregational singing in the Calvinist churches. John Calvin had directed that music play a prominent role in the church service and that the musical aspects of the service be simple enough to allow participation by ordinary churchgoers. Toward those ends, he had eschewed the use of professional musicians and musical instruments in the church service.

Calvin had also commissioned the first 'psalter', a musical setting of the biblical Psalms of David for use in church by lay choirs and congregations. After its publication in Geneva in 1562, the (popularly called) French Psalter was translated into several languages. The Dutch Psalter by Ainsworth, brought to the New World by the first settlers at Plymouth, and the English Psalter by Sternhold and Hopkins, brought by the settlers at Boston, were musically inferior to the original. The English Psalter was further simplified and diminished in quality when it was published in Boston in 1640, only ten years after the first settlers arrived there – the first book published in British North America. Popularly called *The Bay Psalm Book* (after Massachusetts Bay), it contained no musical notation until the ninth edition (1698). The New England Calvinists' simple, egalitarian musical practices and frontier conditions that prevented mass instruction in music and the technological means of printing musical notation led to an alarming deterioration in the quality of congregational singing from the arrival of the first permanent settlers in 1620 throughout the remainder of that century (Birge 1966; Britton 1958, 1961, 1966).

Early in the eighteenth century the singing school arose to address the poor quality of congregational singing and to provide social outlets for the colonists. These schools were commercial classes led by amateur, largely self-taught, mostly itinerant singing masters, many of whom produced instructional materials in the form of tunebooks. The first two tunebooks appeared in 1721, both compiled by New England Calvinist ministers. These and hundreds of later tunebooks contained theoretical introductions describing aspects of notation and singing techniques, followed by 'tunes' compiled from various sources (Birge 1966; Britton 1958, 1966).

Some tunebook compilers wrote some of their own music, including the most famous composer and singing school master of the revolutionary period, William Billings (1746–1800) of Boston. One of Billings' six published tunebooks, *The New England Psalm Singer*, contained all original music composed by Billings, including his patriotic tune 'Chester'. Billings called King George of England a tyrant in the preface of the book, which was published on the eve of the revolution in 1770. Except during the revolutionary period, when there was heightened patriotism and significantly reduced immigration

from Europe, most music used in the singing schools was based on simplified European folk and art music. Many other tunes used during the singing schools era were religious in nature, reflecting the original purpose of the singing schools and tunebooks: the improvement of congregational singing (Birge 1966).

The singing schools, which began in New England and eventually spread south and west, provided the basis for public school music in the first half of the nineteenth century, after which they declined in popularity. Although they were supported by participant fees, not public funds, singing schools were open to the public. The teaching methods appear to have been eclectic. One notable original teaching innovation was shape note notation, where each degree of the scale was represented by a different shaped note head. This system appeared in Boston at the end of the eighteenth century, after the revolution but well before music entered public schools, and came into widespread use before giving way to traditional notation (Britton 1966).

The New England settlers also played instruments and sang outside the church (Britton 1966) and we cannot rule out the possibility that musically inclined teachers led school children in singing during the colonial and early federal periods. Whatever the case, substantial evidence about the poor quality of congregational singing throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries suggests that any music instruction that occurred in schools, homes and churches was insufficient to maintain acceptable standards in congregational singing.

## The common school movement

The number of public and private schools appears to have increased faster than the population from the late seventeenth century through the revolution in the late eighteenth century (Cremin 1970), but the number and prevalence of laws requiring schools or school attendance declined during that period. Soon after the revolution, Massachusetts passed the first state-wide law requiring the establishment of schools (Rothbard 1974). After that, the struggle continued within what had become the traditional dual system: public schools for the poor versus (mostly church-related) private schools.

The period 1830–65 saw the evolution of universally available public schools (Binder 1974), when most New England states established free tax-supported schools, the middle and 'western' (e.g. Ohio) states followed New England, and the southern states, except North Carolina, retained the dual system (Butts and Cremin 1953). During that general period other democracy-oriented shifts occurred, such as the extension of voting rights to men who were not land owners, and the election of Andrew Jackson, the seventh president and the first from a non-aristocratic background (Humphreys 2015).

Free public elementary schools became the norm by the middle of the nineteenth century, due in part to the public's optimistic belief that schools and other social agencies could improve conditions and help pave the way toward a brighter future for citizens of many types. Paralleling this optimism were fears over social problems resulting from

immigration, industrialization and urbanization. Industrialization provided jobs for millions of new immigrants, huge numbers of whom had arrived not from the traditional origination countries of England, Scotland, Germany and Holland, but from Eastern and Southern Europe. These new immigrants tended not only to be poor and uneducated, but they looked and acted differently too (Everhart 1977). Other immigrants were viewed with suspicion due to their Roman Catholic religion (Greenbaum 1974), including the large numbers who emigrated from Ireland during the famine years in that country (1846–51).

Ultimately 'it took alliances of educators, Protestant ministers, social reformers, businessmen, politicians, and even concerned parents to take this strange mixture of hopes, fears, contradictions, and paradoxes, and meld it into legislative action resulting in the evolution of state-supported school systems' (Everhart 1977: 510). Advocates, led by Horace Mann, overcame huge obstacles in their quest to promote the development of universal schooling (see Binder 1974).

### Music in the common schools

Beginning in the 1820s, when the common school movement was gaining momentum, various individuals, some of whom had observed successful music teaching in Europe by followers of the Swiss pedagogue Heinrich Pestalozzi, began to advocate adding music to the common school curriculum. By then experiments in school music teaching were occurring in a number of cities and states (Humphreys 2013, 2015). However, some of the strongest and most visible promotion efforts occurred in Boston, led by school reformer William Woodbridge, musician/educator Lowell Mason and the Boston Academy of Music and its president, Samuel Elliot, who became mayor of Boston (Birge 1966).

Lowell Mason began teaching music on a formal basis in an upper elementary school in Boston on 30 August 1838, an event celebrated today as the beginning of permanent public school music instruction in the United States. Among the many justifications for adding music to the curriculum, religious motives appear to have predominated (Miller 1989). Thereafter, music spread gradually until it became a required subject in many American cities by the end of the Civil War (1865) and in most American elementary schools (Grades 1–8) by the end of the century. Regular classroom teachers provided most of the music instruction, but increasingly in larger cities this instruction was overseen by trained music supervisors. The acquisition of sight singing skills was the primary objective because many music supervisors were former singing school teachers and because little live music was available to the still largely rural populace before the invention of electronic reproduction devices. The focus on sight singing notwithstanding, nineteenth-century school music education was what today would be called general music because it was for general students (Birge 1966; Humphreys 1995).

The first music instruction book intended for public school use was co-authored by Lowell Mason and published in 1831 in anticipation of regular public school music

instruction. Progressively graded music textbook series began to appear in the second half of the nineteenth century. The most prominent series were dedicated to one side or the other of the 'note-versus-rote' controversy, which had begun in Calvinist churches in the seventeenth century and contributed to the emergence of singing schools and tunebooks (Birge 1966).

Many of the first school music supervisors continued the singing masters' practice of teaching simplified European-style folk and art music. Also like the singing masters, early school music supervisors were self-taught or trained in singing schools, and some had attended summer 'musical conventions' such as those offered by Lowell Mason at the Boston Academy of Music. Although Mason and other early leading music educators advocated Pestalozzian methods, like their singing master predecessors they generally eschewed European methods such as tonic sol-fa in favour of eclecticism. Most classroom teachers were trained in normal schools, first private and then public, in which music was a required and often popular subject. The first state-supported normal school was founded in Lexington, Massachusetts, in 1839 (Heller and Humphreys 1991).

The common school movement provided universally available schools, some of which offered music instruction, but many children did not attend school or enrolled for only short periods of time. Music instruction in schools was preceded and then paralleled by other types of musical experiences, such as vocal and instrumental lessons and classes in conservatories, music academies, colleges and private homes and studios as well as through community choirs, choral societies, orchestras and brass bands (Humphreys 1995).

## Compulsory schooling

Colonial and common school legislation had provided for some forms of education, but neither had stipulated specific attendance requirements nor sufficient freedom from labour to permit regular attendance (Kotin and Aikman 1980). By the mid-nineteenth century, however, laws and agencies aimed toward social control were emerging as a result of immigration, industrialization and urbanization. These phenomena contributed to growing social problems such as crime, poverty and general social chaos, which many immigrants had sought to leave behind them, and to the enactment of truancy (i.e. anti-vagrancy) laws in many states, which established a legal basis for compulsory school laws (Everhart 1977; Kotin and Aikman 1980). All these factors contributed to the 'increasing centralization and bureaucratization of school systems, particularly ... in large urban areas' (Everhart 1977: 511). The centralization of school systems was probably the biggest single impetus for new compulsory school laws (see also Katz 1971; Tyack 1966).

At first the common non-compulsory and then compulsory schools were 'viewed as a means of shaping the right character and implanting the right morals for the responsible exercise of freedom – in other words, to produce citizens for the state' (Spring 1974:

140; see also Friedenberg 1965). Also important were a 'majoritarian mood' (Burgess 1976: 202) and the popular concept of a 'melting pot' nation that would 'Americanize' immigrants with 'compulsory school attendance laws' intended as 'means to standardize American behavior' (Richardson 1980: 155). Compulsory schools fulfilled what some today call 'custodial' functions (e.g. Cremin 1980; Ensign 1969; Jorgensen 1997; Kotin and Aikman 1980). Other institutions and legislation aimed toward social control began to appear as well, including child labour laws, which went hand in hand with compulsory school laws. Thus, fears over rapidly increasing immigration, industrialization and urbanization resulted in shifts in the motivations behind compulsory schools and other agencies: from religious to those of social control.

For all these reasons, states began to enact new compulsory schooling statutes in 1852, with Massachusetts once again leading the way. All persons responsible for children aged between eight and fourteen were required to send them to school for at least twelve weeks each year (at least six of them consecutive) (Cook 1912). These statutes were one manifestation of the public's growing confidence in the power of education to ensure the continuation of democracy and reduce social problems, confidence that lasted from the mid-nineteenth century until well into the twentieth (Everhart 1977; Kotin and Aikman 1980). All states and territories outside the South and Alaska passed compulsory school legislation between 1852 and the end of the nineteenth century and all southern states did so by 1918 (Department of Education 2004).

Despite their rapid spread, the new compulsory school laws were conspicuously ineffective in most instances (Everhart 1977). For example, before the Civil War, African Americans generally had not been permitted to attend school in the south (see Binder 1974; Bullock 1967). Other formal exceptions to the laws were common, particularly when a child's family pleaded poverty, but more often the laws were simply ignored (Ensign 1969). In 1890, by which time the majority of states and territories had passed compulsory legislation, Connecticut became the first to enact a full-time compulsory school attendance law with enforcement provisions; by 1900, thirty states had enacted laws that required attendance for specified periods of time for certain age groups. The southern states did likewise between 1900 and 1918, although some of those statutes included local 'opt-out' provisions for towns and counties (Kotin and Aikman 1980). Also beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century, in situations where federal laws prevailed, the federal government required school attendance for Native Americans (Handel and Humphreys 2005).

At no time in the history of the colonies or states was compulsory schooling supported enthusiastically by all segments of the population, but over time the public's faith in education had gradually shifted to the school as an institution (Everhart 1977). John Dewey's (1916) belief that universal schooling was crucial to democracy was shared by many, and the surprisingly low levels of literacy among conscripted soldiers in the First World War led to increased enforcement of compulsory school laws (Everhart 1977; Kotin and Aikman 1980).

## Music in compulsory schools

Music instruction during the common school era (1830–65) was compulsory in the minority of schools where it was part of the curriculum, at least for the small percentage of children who attended school regularly. As compulsory school attendance laws and their enforcement became more prevalent and as music instruction spread to most of the nation's schools, music became a *de facto* compulsory subject, albeit unevenly in different states and localities.

School music changed significantly around the beginning of the twentieth century for two major reasons. First, general music changed as a result of new technology: initially the player piano, next the phonograph, then the radio. These inventions made feasible the teaching of 'music appreciation' through music-listening activities and they provided ready access to music for people who lacked access to live music. From about 1910 the phonograph played a particularly important role in general music's shift from a nearly exclusive focus on sight singing to a mixed approach that included listening and performing, vocally and with newly available toy instruments (Humphreys 1995).

The second factor was the powerful progressive education movement, which evolved in Europe and North America in response to the industrial revolution. Progressives sought to make the schools 'levers of social reform' and to prepare students for what they foresaw as an adult life with copious amounts of leisure time. The movement led to expanded ideas about the purposes of schooling and thus to an expanded curriculum, in part to serve the increasing numbers of students attending high schools (Humphreys, 1988; see also Lee 2014), schools that doubled in number during the twenty-five years between 1890 and 1915 (Rugg 1926; see also Humphreys 2015).

Music education benefited from this public confidence and belief in the public schools during the progressive era, a period when 'devotion to education was strong' (Everhart 1977: 521). Specifically, during this period general music took on its modern forms; performing ensembles (primarily choirs, orchestras and bands) entered the schools and flourished; both general music and ensembles developed stronger roles in school and community life. These changes occurred during a period of major educational reform, much like general music instruction was added to the curriculum during the common school movement (Humphreys 1995).

While classroom teachers continued to receive musical training in normal schools, during the late nineteenth century some music supervisors began to receive specialized training in summer institutes sponsored by music textbook publishers. Normal schools and some church-related colleges more readily embraced both music and teacher education than did state-supported universities. A specialized normal school for music educators was founded by Julia E. Crane at Potsdam, New York, in 1882. However, by the early decades of the twentieth century, when states were partially enforcing their compulsory schooling laws, 'public school music' departments were cropping up in many teachers' colleges and some universities. These departments supplanted textbook publishers' institutes in the production of general music teachers by the end of the First



World War. The earliest orchestra and band directors in the schools were vocal music teachers, teachers of other subjects, professional performers, and students. However, the college- and university-based music departments began to turn out trained instrumental teachers during the 1920s (Humphreys 1989, 1995).

## The modern era

Direct federal initiatives in education began during the late 1950s after the launching of the Soviet space satellite Sputnik. Federal initiatives in the arts, including arts education, began in 1962 under the Kennedy administration (see Gauthier 2003). Most of the responsibility and resources continued to derive from the states, but federal legislation and judicial rulings helped bring about changes in specific aspects of education. Among the most significant changes were the US Supreme Court's decision outlawing racially segregated schools (1954) and Congressional legislation that provided for students with special needs (1975). Other influences, such as accrediting agencies and subject matter organizations (e.g. the Music Educators National Conference, now the National Association for Music Education), contribute to the enterprise in many ways and the states continue to influence each other.

## Music education in the modern era

Educational reform efforts have been continuous since the late 1950s, and presently reform movements continue in all fifty states. Federal legislation called 'No Child Left Behind', through which funds can be awarded or withheld based on various criteria imposed at the state level, continues into the second decade of the twenty-first century under the guise of newer federal 'Race to the Top' statutes. Both federal programmes emphasize standardized testing and are generally seen as detrimental to school music programmes, although school music education has largely been bypassed by the standardized testing movement. To date, most states have aligned most of their respective education systems with federal guidelines. However, some states and teacher and parent groups are beginning to rebel against the latest initiative, national 'common core' standards, in part because they rely heavily on 'high-stakes' standardized testing. Music education organizations developed national standards for music education and some are attempting to align those standards with the new common core standards, but to date the common core standards include only English language arts and mathematics.

All fifty states compel school attendance, typically until age sixteen. All states also require music instruction for at least a portion of the time in Grades K–6, but for an average of less than one hour per week, with some also requiring it for portions of Grades 7–8. Most secondary schools offer ensembles – sometimes orchestras, usually choirs and almost always bands, and, in some cases, other types of group as well – but ensemble participation is virtually never required. Approximately 25 per cent of

secondary students participate in elective ensembles. Thus, most general music classes are compulsory, but ensemble participation is not.

Most public school music teachers hold university degrees and state-issued certificates aimed toward the teaching of music. Some 84 per cent of American elementary schools are served by credentialed music teachers, by far the largest percentage in history, and nearly all public high schools employ one or more credentialed ensemble directors. General music series books, and to lesser extent band method books, include music from wider, more diverse geographical, ethnic and cultural sources than ever before. School and university music ensembles also perform a wider array of music of higher quality, much of it written by competent and in some cases even prominent composers (Humphreys 1995; Wang and Humphreys 2009).

Surveys show that the American public overwhelmingly supports music in schools, but consistently ranks it at or near the bottom in importance among school subjects. This means that the public wants music in the schools, but not too much of it, much like the often quoted dictum paraphrased from Aristotle's writings: 'All gentlemen play the flute, but no gentleman plays it well' (for related writing by Aristotle, see *Politica*, Book VIII in Mark 1982: 36–44). There is also evidence that students, especially boys, are more favourable toward their general music classes in the lower elementary grades than in the higher grades.

## Conclusions

Today, the vast majority of American elementary schools offer general music; a majority of secondary schools offer elective ensembles and a few offer other specialized secondary music courses; and many middle schools offer both general music and ensembles, sometimes required and sometimes not. Therefore, it could be said that music is compulsory only in the lower grades, for an average exposure of slightly less than one hour per week, whereas music is not compulsory in the upper grades despite the fact that young people are compelled to attend school until age 16 in most states. Thus, music is offered in compulsory schools, but in the upper grades it is not a compulsory subject.

Questions remain, however, about the effects of compulsory education and music education. For example, there is evidence that compulsory attendance legislation may not have increased school attendance in the nineteenth century, at least not before the laws were enforced (Landes and Solmon 1972). More troubling are questions about the results of compulsory schooling aside from actual school attendance. Early critics worried about the loss of privacy and individualism inherent in universal, compulsory schooling (see Cremin 1961), and since the 1940s sociologists have seen the schools as perpetuators of existing social classes (Spring 1972). Indeed, studies in political socialization have shown that children learn in elementary school to equate good citizenship with obeying the law – that is, with passivity and obedience as opposed to active citizenship (Hess 1968; Spring 1974; Tyack 1966). Studies also show that local school

boards tend to be dominated by the upper classes, again often in the interests of the status quo (Counts 1969; see also Spring 1972).

In addition to problems that can result from people being compelled to do things against their will, most schools still utilize an industrial-era paradigm. Because the nation has long since moved beyond industrialism and into the information age, this outdated paradigm might be working against student achievement in and of itself. In music, one could argue that the ensemble format itself is a conservative paradigm taken from military (band), church (choir) and élite cultural (orchestra) traditions (Britton 1958; Humphreys 1995, 1999).

There is little solid evidence about the outcomes of the approximately ten years of compulsory schooling on American students, or on society as a whole, except that it is probably fair to credit schools with the nation's very high rate of reading and writing literacy. However, tests of knowledge of subjects other than reading and writing show increasingly dismal results. Whereas public schools were once seen as equalizers for less fortunate elements of society, later commentators began to see them as part of the problem. Some see education as being not about what children need, but instead about the perceived needs of society – that the current system of schooling has been helpful to some children, but 'its long-range effect has been to restrict the options by which most children can be educated' (Everhart 1977: 526). For example, Small (1977) believes that the university music major curriculum limits students' musical options.

Surviving evidence does not permit comparisons in musical achievement among children or the general populace before and after the advent of music in compulsory schooling. We cannot determine how many people learned music or much about what they learned or how they learned it beyond the contents of the singing school tunebooks (Britton 1966). However, much like many children learned to read and write and a few to 'cipher' before the passage of compulsory attendance laws, some children and adults learned to sing and play instruments without the benefit of formal schooling. Judging from the increasing instrument and sheet music sales, number of magazines devoted to musical topics (Campana 2013), and other indicators, including the plethora of singing schools, choral societies, bands, orchestras and widespread parlour piano and organ playing and singing and other musical activities, we can conclude that music learning outside the schools was ubiquitous during the eighteenth and especially the nineteenth centuries (Birge 1966; Humphreys 1995).

In the modern era, results from the three nationwide assessments of achievement in general music are extremely discouraging (National Assessment of Educational Progress 1974, 1981; Persky, Sandene and Askew 1998). Documented contributing factors include too little class time and, in the case of classroom teachers teaching music, inadequate teacher qualifications. What has not been discussed as a possible factor in these dismal results is compulsory schooling itself (including most general music), with its emphasis on middle- and lower-achieving students and therefore minimal standards of achievement (Humphreys 2006).

Perhaps not surprisingly, the elective ensembles are a different story. On the negative side, the ensembles serve only a minority of students, deal with limited types of music and focus primarily on performance skills, not composition, arranging, conducting, listening or other musical activities. Furthermore, school music experiences do not seem to extend into adulthood for most participants (Humphreys, May and Nelson 1992). On the positive side, ensembles offer one of the relatively few truly challenging experiences in schools for students with high levels of ability and motivation (Humphreys 2006), and there is ample evidence that the performance quality of school performing ensembles has improved markedly over the century of their existence. Many teachers and some scholars also attribute significant extra-musical benefits to ensemble participation (Humphreys, May and Nelson 1992). The performing ensembles remain, on balance, a distinctive and positive feature of American music education.

As for repertoire, it was the colonial singing school masters who began the non-working practice of trying to 'reform' the musical tastes of the American public (Britton 1958). Unfortunately, recalcitrant music teacher education institutions have continued the practice as evidenced by their failure to train pre-service teachers in popular and non-Western music (Humphreys 2002, 2004; Wang and Humphreys 2009). Despite these failures, however, persistent attempts by individual teachers, professional organizations and the profession at large to improve the musical repertoire in schools have met with some success.

The American public has lost confidence in the nation's public schools and a few alternatives to the current system of schooling and education are being promoted, such as charter (public but semi-autonomous) schools and home schooling. However, no serious attempts to discontinue compulsory education or schooling loom on the horizon today. On the contrary, the national standards and various forms of related federal legislation and incentive programmes, including common core standards and standardized testing, are attempts to impose even more stringent 'top-down' control over the education enterprise than existed in the past (Humphreys 2002), a phenomenon that continues as of this writing.

It is probably fair to say that compulsory general music exhibits many of the same failings of compulsory education as a whole, including minimal standards of expectations and achievement and lack of student motivation, problems that become worse at successively higher grade levels. Secondary school music ensembles, by way of contrast, are not compulsory even in compulsory schools. Due at least partially to their voluntary, non-compulsory nature, the ensembles appear to be more successful in fulfilling their purposes.

Given the distributed power structure in American education, with authority and influence coming from numerous sources, it is likely that, as in the past, any significant changes to the existing programmes will be driven by economic and social structural shifts, coupled with popular demand and support from the general public.

### Reflective questions

- 1 Which entities have the power to include music in public schools of the United States? Which forces influence those entities? Also refer to any personal knowledge you may have of the public school systems in your own country in this regard.
- 2 To what extent is music instruction compulsory for students in the public schools of the United States?
- 3 What evidence do we have of the success, or lack thereof, of music instruction in American schools – today and in the past?
- 4 What are some ways in which compulsory music education might be extended to a larger proportion of American school students? What about voluntary music education?

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