

# “Students can have a really powerful role...”

## *Understanding Curriculum Transformation Within the Framework of Canon Critique and Critical Pedagogy*

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### Abstract

Educational practice needs to continuously update the curriculum in line with both current theoretical frameworks developed within academia and the lived reality of the coming generation. This article takes the student perspective on this issue, investigating a case from secondary music education in England. In 2015, Jessy McCabe initiated a successful campaign for the inclusion of women composers on the A-level syllabus, in order to create a more gender-balanced curriculum. Drawing on a qualitative interview with Jessy McCabe, the author elaborates on the significance of the campaign within the framework of canon critique and critical pedagogy. The case shows that balancing the curriculum no longer needs to be a “future position” as Lucy Green suggested in 1997. The qualitative data underscore the importance of the teacher as a role model and the effectiveness of the student as co-investigator within the process of curriculum transformation. In both cases, a gender perspective can be an appropriate and significant tool to achieving a more balanced curriculum.

**Keywords:** *Social justice; activism; woman composer; music education; gender*

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A gender perspective can provide key insight and knowledge into the situatedness and performance of social and cultural categories (Butler, 2004; Halberstam, 2013). More specifically, the gender lenses, as theorised by Sandra Lipsitz Bem (1993), are an effective tool to reveal imbalances in power relations. This has been shown particularly in music education (Green, 1997). In this article, I focus on the importance of an individual student’s campaign as a step towards a more balanced curriculum

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including music composed by both men and women. I choose the campaign of Jessy McCabe as a specific case study (Yin, 2009) in order to discuss curriculum transformation from a student’s perspective.

My aim is to investigate how a gender perspective affects critical thinking and critical action, and how both can lead to the transformation of the curriculum in secondary music education. The empirical data includes a qualitative research interview with Jessy McCabe, conducted via e-mail in August 2016. It is approximately 2500 words long and contains 15 structured questions, centring around 7 different topics, which primarily concern: educational practices at school; the role of the teachers; and the student’s motivation to lead into the campaign. How is it that the student’s campaign had such a high impact that it resulted in a specific curriculum transformation? And how was Jessy McCabe empowered to conduct the campaign? I will use the theoretical framework of canon critique and critical pedagogy to suggest possible explanations and answers to these questions.

### **Canon Critique and the Search for a More Balanced Curriculum**

“Canon critique”, as I use the term in this article, is rooted in feminist theory. Marcia Citron (1993) elaborates on a variety of social factors that are responsible for the formation of the musical canon in Western societies. She argues that compositions by men have a greater chance to become part of the musical canon “for reasons concerning men’s and women’s social and historical positions and opportunities rather than their ability as composers or the quality of their compositions” (Citron, 1993, p. 235).

The composer is one of the most vital categories to address when gender is debated within music history. Already in 1987, the *International Encyclopaedia of Women Composers*, edited by Aaron Cohen, documented more than 5000 international women composers. Besides the importance of making women composers visible in the first place, feminist musicology has analysed several historical categories that lead to the exclusion and marginalization of women composers. Furthermore, research on women in music history has suggested different strategies to write a more balanced history (Mittner, 2016).

Deconstructing music history as a story of great men and great works, and creating awareness of the normativity of periodization and the standards of white masculinity are some major impacts of canon critique. Hence, canon critique is not just a tool for making women visible, it is a tool for challenging traditional historiographies and creating a more justified representation of women and men in historiography. Narratives of music history focusing on white male composers and their works are still more dominant than those based on, for example, places, networks, or cultural practices. After asking “Where are the women composers?” we could for example ask, together with our students: Do we need a female Beethoven? What are the constellations of power that shape the musical canon of Western music? What kind of heroes and aesthetic values do we want to present to the next generation?

With a gender-balanced curriculum music education contributes to the wider project of social justice (Benedict et al. 2015). Feminist musicologists have elaborated in many different ways on the question of how women composers actually can become part of a curriculum that is built upon the premises of masculinity. Sally Macarthur points out that “the neoliberal instruments of gender mainstreaming and the ‘exceptional woman composer’ syndrome neutralize music and strengthen the hegemony of music by male composers” (Macarthur, 2014).

In her book *Music, Gender, Education* (1997) Lucy Green puts forward a pragmatic view of how to balance the curriculum and illustrates the wider cultural politics of such an intervention. She proposes three positions to achieve an alternative curriculum: the *first strategy* involves a positive discrimination of women, which, however, would lead into a misleading representation; the *second strategy* suggests a special curriculum besides the standard texts that focuses solely on women, which would rather perpetuate than challenge the marginal position of women in history; the *third strategy* strives for a more balanced curriculum that takes account of the achievements of both men and women (Green, 1997, p. 232). The case of Jessy McCabe, as I will show, can be seen as an example of the third strategy. Its success highlights that balancing the curriculum no longer needs to be a “future position” (Green, 1997, p. 234).

### **Curriculum Transformation and the Empowerment of the Student**

In the anthology *Women’s Place in the Academy: Transforming the Liberal Arts Curriculum* (1985) Marilyn Schuster and Susan Van Dyne develop six stages of curriculum transformation (fig. 1). The model is an appropriate tool to reflect on educational content and has been used to show the importance of a more balanced curriculum (e.g. Kreutziger-Herr, 2009, p. 45). It can be useful to analyse and describe educational practice on a macro level, for example to understand the emergence of established courses on women in music over the last 50 years. But it can also be used in order to analyse curriculum transformation on a micro level as the case of Jessy McCabe will show. In practice, the stages are not as discreet as figure 1 represents, and often overlap.

These stages of curriculum transformation as proposed by Schuster and Van Dyne start out from a total invisibility of women (stage 1) which leads to the search for missing women (stage 2). In addition to important encyclopaedias and anthologies (e.g. Cohen, 1987; Pendle and Boyd, 2010), the continuing emergence of related internet databases and platforms (e.g. kvast.org, manymanywomen.com or music-theoryexamplesbywomen.com) show that the search for missing women has not yet come to an end. Stage 3 embraces the study of women as a disadvantaged, subordinate group, for example in the writings of pioneers on women in music history like Eva Rieger (1981) in Germany or Cecilie Dahm (1987) in Norway. The study of women on their own terms is an indispensable premise for a more balanced curriculum (stage 4). Expanding the body of scholarship dealing exclusively with women,

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STAGES	QUESTIONS	INCENTIVES	MEANS	OUTCOME
1. Invisible women	Who are the truly great thinkers/actors in history?	Maintaining “standards of excellence”	Back to basics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pre-1960s exclusionary core curriculum</li> <li>• Student as “vessel”</li> </ul>
2. Search for missing women	Who are the great women, the female Shakespeares, Napoleons, Darwins?	Affirmative action/compensatory	Add to existing data within conventional paradigms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Exceptional” women on male syllabus</li> <li>• Student’s needs recognized</li> </ul>
3. Women as disadvantaged, subordinate group	Why are there so few women leaders? Why are women’s roles devalued?	Anger/Social justice	Protest existing paradigms but within perspective of dominant group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Images of women” courses</li> <li>• “Women in politics”</li> <li>• Women’s Studies begins</li> <li>• Links with ethnic, cross-cultural studies</li> <li>• Women-focused courses</li> <li>• Interdisciplinary courses</li> <li>• Student values own experience</li> </ul>
4. Women studied on own terms	What was/is women’s experience? What are differences among women? (attention to race, class, cultural difference)	Intellectual	Outside existing paradigms; develop insider’s perspective	
5. Women as challenge to disciplines	How valid are current definitions of historical periods, greatness, norms for behavior? How must our questions change to account for women’s experience, diversity, difference?	Epistemology	Testing the paradigms Gender as category of analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Beginnings of integration</li> <li>• Theory courses</li> <li>• Student collaborates in learning</li> </ul>
6. Transformed, “balanced” curriculum	How can women’s and men’s experience be understood together? How do class and race intersect with gender?	Inclusive vision of human experience based on difference and diversity, not sameness and generalization	Transform the paradigms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reconceptualized, inclusive core</li> <li>• Transformed introductory courses</li> <li>• Empowering of student</li> </ul>

Figure 1. Stages of Curriculum Change (Schuster & Van Dyne, 1985, p. 16).

women's experiences and differences among women leads to more epistemological questions that challenge the discipline (stage 5).

The sixth and last stage differs from the other five stages in its focus on the teacher-student relationship, the empowerment of the student and a raised self-confidence and awareness "that all knowledge is historical and socially constructed" (Schuster & Van Dyne, 1985, p. 27). The authors stress that at this stage the "student's experience and learning process [becomes ultimately] part of the explicit content of the course" (Schuster & Van Dyne, 1985, p. 28). These aspects can be directly related to the paradigm of critical pedagogy, and it seems to be a precondition to work within this paradigm if the 6th stage of curriculum transformation should be reached.

### **Critical Pedagogy and Social Change**

The theoretical framework of critical pedagogy, as it is theorised by Paolo Freire, Henry Giroux and bell hooks, can be seen as a project of participation and liberation. As Giroux put it: "In opposition to the instrumental reduction of pedagogy to a method – which has no language for relating the self to public life, social responsibility, or the demands of citizenship – critical pedagogy illuminates the relationships among knowledge, authority, and power" (Giroux, 2011). A hierarchical division between teacher and student is set aside, and while differences in terms of age, generation, position or experience are acknowledged, the focus lies on the dialogue and an encounter on equal terms (hooks, 2003). This means that, unlike in Freire's description of a banking education, students are seen as "co-investigators" (Freire, 1970), which means they become active agents in the classroom and dialogue partners equal to their teachers. Constellations of power within the classroom become more transparent, and instead of being performed reiteratively and unquestionably, they can be scrutinised and negotiated.

Democratic and dialogical processes in the classroom are crucial within the framework of critical pedagogy. Both students and teachers are supposed to become aware of standards, boundaries and the contingency of concepts defined by humans. While Freire imagines in his writings a "real world" that is to be unwrapped by the process of conscientisation (Freire, 1970, p. 7ff.), it is, after the postmodern turn, more about seeing things differently and becoming aware of the unstableness of seemingly unchallengeable preconditions. Thus, in this article, critical thinking is understood as a mode of asking questions that benefits from the gender lenses at the same time as a gender perspective benefits from the ability to think critically about seemingly elementary assumptions.

Education is often criticised for not catching up fast enough with developments in society, and as Giroux (2011) states: "One of the challenges facing the current generation of educators and students is the need to reclaim the role that education has historically played in developing critical literacies and civic capacities." The recently published *Oxford Handbook of Music Education and Social Justice* (Benedict et al., 2015)

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shows the relevance of this topic. It sets new standards in research on music education and provides a “new language”, as Giroux requested in 2011. Students and teachers are supposed to become active agents of social change within and outside the classroom. With the following case study of Jessy McCabe’s campaign for women composers, I will exemplify how this can be done in practice.

### Jessy McCabe and #just1woman

In 2015 Jessy McCabe, then a 17-year-old high school student in England, initiated a campaign striving to correct a lack of music by women composers on the A-level music. She approached the multinational examination board Edexcel, a for-profit company run by Pearson and the largest organisation in the UK that awards A-level qualifications. After four months of intense media activism, the invention of the social media hashtag #just1woman, an international petition on Change.org, and several open letters, Jessy McCabe persuaded the board to make changes in their A-level requirements: the examination board revised the selection of obligatory musical works for the exam. While previously none of the 18 works on the list were composed by women, from September 2016 music students were required to study works composed by Clara Schumann, Rachel Portman, Kate Bush, Anoushka Shankar and Kaija Saariaho (fig. 2). In addition, one third of the extended listening

Area of study	Set works
<b>Vocal Music</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• J. S. Bach, Cantata, Ein feste Burg</li> <li>• Mozart, The Magic Flute</li> <li>• Vaughan Williams, On Wenlock Edge</li> </ul>
<b>Instrumental Music</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vivaldi, Concerto in D minor, Op. 3 No. 11</li> <li>• Clara Wieck-Schumann, Piano Trio in G minor, Op. 17: movement 1</li> <li>• Berlioz, Symphonie Fantastique</li> </ul>
<b>Music for Film</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Danny Elfman, Batman Returns</li> <li>• Rachel Portman, The Duchess</li> <li>• Bernard Herrmann, Psycho</li> </ul>
<b>Popular Music and Jazz</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Courtney Pine, Back in the Day</li> <li>• Kate Bush, Hounds of Love</li> <li>• Beatles, Revolver</li> </ul>
<b>Fusions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Debussy, Estampes</li> <li>• Familia Valera Miranda, Caña Quema</li> <li>• Anoushka Shankar, Breathing Under Water</li> </ul>
<b>New Directions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cage, Three Dances for Two Prepared Pianos</li> <li>• Kaija Saariaho, Petals for Violoncello and Live Electronics</li> <li>• Stravinsky, The Rite of Spring</li> </ul>

Figure 2. Syllabus to study for students taking the A-level exam in music provided by the English national examination board Edexcel from autumn 2016 (Pearson, 2015).

repertoire consists of women composers (12/36), among them Ethel Smyth, Cecilie Chaminade, Fanny Mendelssohn and Amy Beach (Pearson, 2015, p. 84).

The campaign received widespread national and international attention. Already the day after the petition was launched Jessy McCabe appeared live on BBC Radio 4 evening news, with subsequent stories published in several national newspapers such as Daily Mail, The Sunday Times and Evening Standard, and a feature in The Guardian. In spite of the critical comments that commonly accompany feminist action (Thompson, 2015), the unexpectedly high media attention indicates both the urgency and effectiveness of Jessy McCabe's campaign.

The student, who describes herself as previously being rather shy, quiet and invisible to most of her teachers, was suddenly empowered to step out of the sphere of the voiceless and staged an impressive campaign rooted in a deeper understanding of social justice.

Most teachers didn't find out about my campaign until May 2016 when my music teacher asked me if I would do an assembly to the whole school about my campaign and I did. My teachers therefore found out mainly through this assembly and many came up to me and said that it was great and they really supported it. Most also said they were shocked I had done it as I was so quiet but that they thought it was a great campaign! One teacher and I began to discuss feminism and social change and he ended up saying "this is the problem with you being so quiet, I didn't realise I had someone with strong opinions in my class who can articulate them really well!"

The interview data reveals in addition how the teachers at the school acted as important role models and from which background Jessy McCabe started her search for women composers. The student succeeded in an area where musicologists and school teachers only had managed to achieve limited success during the last 40 years in terms of the representation of men and women in the national curriculum. Already in 1997, Lucy Green pointed to the possibility of replacing a Robert Schumann piano trio in the music curriculum with one composed by Clara Schumann instead, if the aim was to demonstrate compositional techniques of 19th-century instrumental music (Green, 1997, p. 239). It took about 20 years until academic knowledge entered educational practice on a more structural level.

### **Teachers as Role Models**

Asked about her educational practice and if there were any role models who challenged public values among her teachers, Jessy McCabe recalls two episodes which inspired her critical consciousness and thus can be seen as a form of empowerment. Both episodes were experienced at school and can be related to Jessy McCabe's own critical action in 2015. The student refers to two teachers in the interview, both female. Analysing the interview data through a gender lens makes the gender of the teachers even more relevant to the student and their function as role models (Green, 1997, p. 242).

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My history teacher (who taught me from age 12-16) was certainly a role model for me. She [...] was the first person to really teach me the importance of history and how it influences the modern day. When we were learning about the American Civil Rights Movement she also told us about how she writes letters to Hamley's Toy Store over their gendered separation of toys, therefore showing me how she challenged public values.

The teacher's initiative for more social justice in a day-to-day situation and her critical comments and action in and outside the classroom were remembered by the student. Writing letters to a toy store regarding gender segregation, a deeply rooted facet of Western society, is a kind of activism that marks the bottom line of critical action. At the same time, it is a simple measure that students can engage with and try themselves. The second episode example Jessy McCabe recalls demonstrates the possibility to comment on and supplement school curricula.

My biology teacher, [...] the school year I started my petition, also mentioned the fact that on our A Level Biology syllabus they claim Watson and Crick as the scientists who discovered the DNA double helix, ignoring the vital work of Rosalind Franklin. She told us about how much this annoyed her and so taught us about her too, even though this was not on the syllabus. I found this really interesting and this thought definitely stayed with me.

Teaching beyond the syllabus, reflecting on it, commenting on it, providing students with additional critical remarks and taking a position on norms and standards can be important ways to demonstrate the constructedness of the curriculum. In this way students become aware of the possibility of intervention and crucially that alternative narratives are conceivable. Within the framework of critical pedagogy Jessy McCabe's remark – “this thought definitely stayed with me.” – is of special interest. The teacher's critical reflections concerning gender imbalances were not linked to an immediate student response or task. They were not intended as facts to be learned by heart, but instead as personal experiences that opened up alternative perspectives within the student's minds. It took some months before the effect of the teacher's statements unfolded in the action of Jessy McCabe's campaign, and her recollection of this specific episode shows its impact.

It seems to be symptomatic of higher music education that Jessy McCabe recalls episodes about teachers in history and biology, but not in music. What Lucy Green stated in 1997 seems to be still valid: “The normality and ubiquity, the invisibility and the unquestionability, of the masculine delineation of music are again proven by the fact that the lack of women composers remains barely remarked by teachers and thoroughly ignored by pupils” (Green, 1997, p. 245). Performances of critical consciousness by teachers, as the two examples show can have a huge impact on their students. These instances can remain with students and shape how they act and how they think; it is for this reason that teachers as role models are so important to critical pedagogy, as in performing such critical thinking can disseminate these skills to their pupils.



When it comes to questions of syllabus, study plans, course descriptions, reading lists and exams teachers can ask together with their students: Why was this composer chosen by the textbook editors? Who is missing? How was the selection made? By whom? How can it be revised? What is our practice currently and what should it be? Seeing repertoires and reading lists through the gender lenses can be an effective exercise in terms of canon critique as a wider project of social justice, for both students and teachers.

### **Students as Co-Investigators**

By promoting women composers in order to achieve a more balanced syllabus, Jessy McCabe became a co-investigator in a Freireian sense. She timed her campaign strategically to match Edexcel's planned revisions of the qualification requirements in autumn 2015. Jessy McCabe contacted public authorities and conducted several meetings with representatives of Pearson, censors, researchers and composers. A major investigative element was her call via social media to collect examples of women composers who would match the A-level requirements. #just1women became a widespread hashtag during the campaign and the student received more than 150 relevant suggestions. Moreover, on the petition platform Change.org, her campaign was signed nearly 4000 times and drew support from organizations such as the Incorporated Society of Musicians and Sound and Music.

The interview data reveal that an important precondition for the campaign was the fact that Jessy McCabe found out about the imbalance by herself. By investigating the lack of women composers in the syllabus independently and from her own perspective, the student challenged a whole set of formal educational settings. Being a woman made the lack of women even more relevant to her; and the notion of solidarity can be considered as an important motivation for the campaign. The student wondered not only about why she did not encounter any women composers in the course, but also why none of the music teachers had told the students that there are in fact many, they are just not as part of the musical canon and the curriculum taught at school.

[...] a key reason I found it shocking was because no one else had mentioned it, or realised. If a teacher mentioned it, I still would have been shocked and annoyed but would have thought that nothing could be done about it as teachers often complained about the rapid changes to the education system (e.g. changes to exam structure) and yet nothing changed and so I would have probably thought this would fall into the same bracket.

One of the most significant surprises for Jessy McCabe was that she could not find a reason to legitimise the omission of women composers. In addition, she was obviously much more disturbed by the results of her own effort than if a teacher had pointed out the lack of women in the curriculum. The investigation into the vast field of musical culture that exists outside school and the realization of an existing repertoire that is not part of the curriculum made Jessy McCabe think even more critically

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about the constitution of the syllabus. She became aware that the curriculum was not only problematic, but might actually lack an important corpus of knowledge.

The student’s self-awareness as an important mode of learning does not excuse the failure of her music teachers to discuss the lack of women in the curriculum; it could be beneficial in various ways for a teacher to open up such a discussion for critical interrogation, to enable and facilitate critical awareness of the lack of women composers in the national curriculum. Facilitating students’ personal investigations is a significant act of empowerment, and such an empowerment, through conscientization and co-investigatorship, lies at the very heart of critical pedagogy.

That Jessy McCabe as a result of her experience ascribes a lot of power to the student can be linked to the concept of empowerment that is both a result of and a precondition for the sixth stage of Marilyn Schuster and Susan Van Dyne’s model of curriculum transformation. Jessy McCabe, however, criticises schools for not better emphasising the importance of critical thinking and the empowerment of the students.

I think students can have a really powerful role in changing the education system as we’re the ones going through it! However, I believe the lack of critical thinking skills taught in schools and the heavy focus on exams makes it currently very difficult to do as students are not taught that it’s ok (and really important!) to challenge what you’re being taught and in fact by challenging either your understanding of the material will improve or you will find a major flaw in the national curriculum!

The “heavy focus on exams” Jessy McCabe refers to remind us of the banking-concept that Freire (1970) elaborates on in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and the “testing mania and its pedagogical forms of oppression” (Giroux, 2011), which national examination boards can be considered to be a part of. Still today, educational systems are much too often organised in a way that makes students regard them as fixed systems of knowledge formation that cannot be challenged. That a student acts openly as a co-investigator and an agent of critical thinking has an important impact on the educational practice at school; if a student, rather than a teacher, puts gender-imbalance on the agenda, it certainly accrues more significance, both with the student’s peers and beyond.

If students of all genders who can think and act critically are to become important agents in curriculum transformation, as a critical pedagogy approach would entail, it is the responsibility of the teachers to empower them to develop these critical thinking abilities, a development that can be achieved through the teacher’s status as a role model. It is the dialogue in a Freireian sense between the teacher’s and the student’s lived realities that can lead to changes in the classroom.

In the case of Jessy McCabe, the curriculum was not discussed at all and did not seem to be negotiable. However, if the selection of works to be studied is more transparently defined by standardised parameters which consistently refer to the contingency of the categories forming the selection criteria, such as quality and relevance, the curriculum will become more negotiable and contestable. Nevertheless, Jessy

McCabe's campaign shows that students are both willing and prepared to intervene in more rigidly fixed structures and to challenge both the educational and canonic systems.

Even though Jessy McCabe's search for women composers can be understood in terms of compensatory action (stages 1 and 2 in the model of Schuster and Van Dyne), the outcome of her campaign resulted in an empowered student and a transformed syllabus where compositions by men and women were treated equally within a given historical framework.

In order to achieve a more balanced curriculum, a whole set of paradigms needs to be reconceptualised and transformed. However, a reconceptualisation of the curriculum as such was not pursued by Jessy McCabe, and even though the list of examination requirements has become more balanced, both genre and periodization are maintained. Would a balance of 50/50 be at all possible if the central categories of music historiography continue to be upheld, such as for example genre hierarchy, focus on compositional techniques and a dominant value system which favours complexities and stylistic purity? Since the current historical framework is based on the experiences of male historians and critics, these are clear methodological challenges within music historiography waiting to be solved (Hambro, 2008). If we understand curriculum as "all the spoken and unspoken principles of selection and organization that govern course structure and content" (Schuster and Van Dyne, 1985, p. 279) it becomes clear that the consideration of women will be a long-term process. And "because knowledge is historical we will need to revise the curriculum continually." (Schuster & Van Dyne, 1985, p. 13).

## **Conclusion**

In this article, I have discussed a specific curriculum transformation of the English secondary school examination system within the framework of canon critique and critical pedagogy. I have argued that gender as an analytical category has the potential to make students and teachers aware of social injustice and power relations. The case of Jessy McCabe exemplifies the benefit of the gender lenses when addressing imbalances concerning the representation of men and women in school curricula. Referring to the stages of curriculum transformation developed by Schuster and van Dyne, I show the connection between an empowered student and a more balanced curriculum. Within the framework of critical pedagogy, the student is supposed to gain the status of a co-investigator, which in the present case means to articulate a demand (listening to music composed by women) and to become an active agent and social activist. In light of these theoretical positions, the importance and significance of Jessy McCabe's campaign is openly apparent.

After Jessy McCabe's success, there were at least two more student activists who started similar campaigns, which respond to the need for such critical actions led by students. June Eric-Urdorie launched a petition to include specific references to

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feminism in a politics A-level syllabus, and Zishi Zhang started a campaign to include more female thinkers in a philosophy A-level syllabus. Hanna McCloskey (2016), founder of Fearless Futures, argued in a Huffington Post article, *Why 17 Year Olds Campaigning for Women in the Syllabus Must End*, that students should not have to fight for a more balanced curriculum. However, from the perspective of critical pedagogy, which calls for a reflecting, active and investigating student, it is entirely positive when students express their demands, become critical co-investigators, take initiative and use their expertise in order to achieve social change on the basis of their own experience.

If students’ critical action is effective in leading to the implementation of a more gender-balanced curriculum, educators will need to find out how they can give support to this kind of activism. Hence, the practical implications of this study concern the provision of advice on how teachers in higher music education can empower their students to think and act critically, with specific regard to the musical canon but also generally. Teachers could for example encourage students to discover new repertoire, take them to music libraries, use balanced reference lists and examples of music by women composers in exams, show their own involvement and personal concerns, prompt critical discussions, and provide a language, a set of words that can be used when talking about music made by women. Finally, students can set out to become critical co-investigators, and teachers can act as role models through both enhancing and rewarding good practice. Together, they are a powerful team, able to challenge and change educational practice, the musical canon and, last but not least, society.

## Forfatteromtale

**Lilli Mittner** studied musicology, and media and communication at the University of Göttingen and the University of Oslo. In 2014, she received her Ph.D. from the University of Music, Drama and Media in Hanover with a dissertation on women composers in Norway, professionalism in music and gender sensitive historiography. She is currently project coordinator for the state-funded project “Gender Balance in Art Education” at The Faculty of Fine Arts, UiT and holds a postdoc position in feminist art intervention at the Centre for Women’s and Gender Research, UiT.

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