Jazz education has had a sometimes awkward relationship with the larger field of jazz studies. Despite the marked growth of critical scholarship on jazz that began in earnest in the late 1980s, few scholars attempted to grapple with the nature of jazz education as a musical and cultural practice, though some limited references can be seen. Such perspectives are reflected in the introduction to Krin Gabbard’s landmark edition *Jazz Among the Discourses*, still a seminal work in the development of New Jazz Studies. Gabbard writes that there were (at the time his essay was written) “a number of schools that train young musicians to play the music,” citing the Berklee College of Music, William Patterson University, and the University of North Texas as examples (Gabbard 1995, 4). Yet by the mid-1990s, jazz education, as a function of university and college level music programs in the United States (US), was a thriving enterprise, with dozens of jazz programs in the US and around the world; even by this point, it was somewhat unusual to find a post-secondary institution in the US that did not have, at the very least, a jazz ensemble as part of the curriculum. The annual conferences of the International Association of Jazz Educators (IAJE) regularly drew thousands of attendees, drawn mainly (despite the “I” in IAJE) from the US.

Prior to the last two decades, the vast majority of scholarly work devoted to jazz education emerged mainly from the ranks of its own practitioners, or from researchers in allied fields like music education. What has often been missing from much this discourse is a sense of the “why” of jazz education, or any real meaningful critical reflection about the nature, practice, and culture of the field. As a result, jazz education has often been viewed as a being largely isolated from, and at odds with, the “real world” of jazz. In his entry on the subject in the *New Grove Dictionary of Jazz*, Gary W. Kennedy reflects such a view of jazz education, writing that it “has yet to reach any of the serious artistic goals that the term would imply” (Kennedy 2002, 398).

Nevertheless, jazz education programs remain an important site where issues of identity, canon, and the very nature of the music itself are negotiated and renegotiated in different ways and in different contexts. Increasingly, scholars of jazz have begun to engage more deeply with the significance of such activities, both with respect to their illumination of important aspects of institutional culture and in their relationships to broader jazz communities. In this chapter, I wish to focus on two main topics. First, I will address some particular historical perspectives on jazz education. This discussion includes both the conventional developments of institutional programs but links its emergence and growth to developments *outside the academy*, which have often been overlooked in commonly read histories of the field. The second part of the chapter will focus on an assessment of critical, interdisciplinary efforts to situate jazz education as an important site of
aesthetic and social contestation. In particular, I view the emergence of these discourses as a logical extension of the efforts of scholars aligned with the New Jazz Studies initiative over the last quarter century, whose aims are to apply critical, interdisciplinary methods of inquiry to jazz's historical narratives and musical practices. My aim is to demonstrate that jazz education must not be thought of as an isolated pursuit within the confines of academic music programs, but rather understood as inextricably linked to broader extra-institutional jazz communities, practices, and discourses. Just as scholars within the New Jazz Studies movement have called for a greater understanding of jazz's relationship to issues of race, gender, class, nationality, and so forth, so too have like-minded researchers recast jazz education as a site where the history and identity of the music are being continuously debated and contested. Neither of these discussions is intended to be comprehensive; rather, I wish to reflect on particular issues which reflect jazz education's links to broader, extra-institutional developments.

Historical Perspectives on Jazz Education

At the risk of stating the obvious, there has been jazz education as long as there has been jazz music. From its earliest days in the streets and clubs of New Orleans, jazz has been learned, taught, and codified for transmission from one person to another. Oral histories of early New Orleans musicians are replete with references to important influential teachers, and while the specifics of these pedagogical interactions are often unclear, what is clear is that the learning of this music was far from a random, haphazard enterprise. As jazz spread across the nation, and indeed across the globe, pedagogical materials and methods spread with it. In the last few years of the 1910s, the ability to play in this new idiom became a highly marketable skill. One notable early attempt to capitalize on these new trends can be seen in a 1919 book written and published by Henry Fillmore, an American composer best known for producing a very popular (and arguably somewhat racist) series of “trombone smears,” whose novelty drew on the use of exaggerated glissandi. For Fillmore, the new jazz style was closely linked to these humorous effects, and his method book attempted to codify their nature and application. A number of similar books followed (a few of which were arguably direct copies of Fillmore's work), demonstrating that there was a receptive market for musicians to learn this new style.

During the 1920s, more written materials began to appear, some of which moved beyond the application of novelty effects and into more in-depth discussions of “hot” playing, a term which is roughly analogous to improvisation. Lawrence Gushee, writing in an essay on the discourses of “middle-period” jazz improvisation, devotes some attention to the topic of method books. Most intriguing about Gushee's essay is his argument that such resources implicitly (and perhaps explicitly) sought to define what improvisation was. As Gushee notes, by the mid-1920s, “dozens of publications appeared” to provide instruction for nascent jazz musicians, and many of these texts were produced by leading jazz artists of the day, including Miff Mole, Jimmy Dorsey, Red Nichols, Joe Venuti, and Louis Armstrong (Gushee 2009, 271–272). The exact role and influence of such works is unclear, but given the active publishing market for them, which would continue into the 1930s and 1940s (and beyond), they were undoubtedly playing a role.

With the launch of trade publications in the 1930s, especially *Downbeat* in 1934, jazz learners had yet another avenue to learn the ins and outs of the music. *Downbeat* in particular understood that its readers, who were largely professional musicians, wanted to learn the “tricks of the trade,” and the magazine obliged. Its pages were filled with “how to” articles on various topics, from better instrumental technique, to overviews of the styles of particular players. *Downbeat*’s relationship to pedagogy and learning continues to the present day, with the magazine still featuring transcriptions and educational materials; probably most significant is the magazine’s sponsoring
of its annual Student Music Awards, established in 1976, which has become the most recognized scholastic jazz competition in the US.

At the same time that pedagogical publications in jazz were starting to gain steam, there were sporadic efforts in institutions of higher education in the US to incorporate jazz into the curriculum. In particular, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) became important sites where efforts to include jazz were underway. One of the most notable examples could be found at Alabama State University in the early 1930s. The school’s top jazz group, the Bama State Collegians, began touring throughout the Midwest and eventually performed in New York in 1934, where they caused a sensation. Eventually the members of band left the school; one of the trumpeters of the band, Erskine Hawkins, would take over the reins, and the band started touring and recording professionally under Hawkins’s name. What is most notable about the Bama State Collegians’ story, I would argue, is their deep connection to the professional jazz world, even as a student group.

Formal training was beginning to be felt in the community of professional jazz musicians in other ways. One of the most famous examples from the pre-war era can be seen in the work of Coleman Hawkins who, as a high school student in Topeka, Kansas, enrolled in some music classes at nearby Washburn College. For Hawkins, his relatively advanced knowledge of music theory and harmony was something of a badge of honor; in one particular exchange, Hawkins gently chided trombonist Jimmy Harrison for the latter’s perceived lack of knowledge about the intricacies of music:

While still with the [Fletcher] Henderson band, [Hawkins] made a show of mocking his band mate and close friend, trombonist Jimmy Harrison, for [Harrison’s] alleged ignorance of harmony: “I used to tell him, ‘Doggone shame the way you’re fooling people. You ain’t doing nothing! You’re not playing the changes, you’re missing the changes. Look at this—you see this change right here? This change makes this other one sound better because it resolves into the other one.”

(DeVeaux 1997, 84)

Hawkins is, of course, widely regarded as a technically intricate improviser. The extent to which his formal training influenced his approach is not certain, but as his own comments demonstrate, he certainly was aware of the advantages of such training, and that they set him apart from his peers.

Yet conventional histories of jazz education have often overlooked such developments, focusing instead on the role of a small number of jazz programs, most notably the Berklee College of Music, established in 1945 in Boston as the Schillinger House, and North Texas State College (now the University of North Texas) in Denton. The latter program offered what is generally believed to be the first college level degree in jazz studies in 1946, based on a curriculum developed by M. E. (Gene) Hall as part of his master’s thesis. A third program, the Westlake College of Music in Los Angeles, was also influential in the immediate postwar era but ceased operations in 1961. Berklee and North Texas have often formed two poles in discussions of the history of jazz education, with the former seen as being deeply linked to the contemporary jazz and popular music scenes, and the latter emphasizing the traditions of the big band. And it is this point, the central role of the big band, that perhaps makes North Texas’s influence so profound. Hall, and his successor Leon Breeden, developed a close relationship with “progressive jazz” bandleader Stan Kenton, and indeed, Kenton’s fingerprints remain on both the program in Denton (the primary rehearsal and recital venue is named for Kenton) and, arguably, given the large number of North Texas-trained jazz educators, on the field as a whole. Kenton’s own influence on jazz education was enormous, particularly through his “stage band camps,” starting in 1959, and his patronage of the Notre Dame Jazz Festival, a leading collegiate jazz competition. Without diminishing the
importance of these schools, it should be understood that they formed only one part of a larger system of jazz learning.

As jazz education moved into the 1960s, more and more programs would be established, most notably at the University of Miami and Indiana University in Bloomington. While Miami’s program was largely of the model established at North Texas, the program at Indiana was led by David Baker, one of the few African American musicians to achieve a high-profile as a jazz educator during this period. Taking over the program in the mid-1960s, Baker’s approach was highly systematic from a pedagogical perspective (he had been a protégé of George Russell, whose *Lydian Chromatic Concept* was highly influential on Baker), but he also was extremely sensitive to the unique nature of jazz as an African American art form. Along with traditional coursework in jazz, Baker’s program emphasized the music’s connections to other vernacular and popular idioms, and was deeply invested in the role of jazz as a vital marker of black identity. In an essay on Baker by J.B. Dyas, Baker stresses the importance of such connections:

I felt it was inappropriate for a student to come here, whether it was in music or whatever, and the only course they could take that had anything to do with the Negro in American and black music was jazz. . . . I really felt they needed to have a much broader spectrum than just jazz.

(*Dyas 2011, 87–88*)

Baker’s emphasis on a unified approach to black music was relatively unusual in jazz education, at least within the context of white-dominated music schools and departments of the time (though arguably this is still the case). But it had an important parallel in other kinds of programs, which are again, often overlooked in discussions of jazz education’s history.

At the same moment that Baker was working to build his program at Indiana, a radical transformation was taking place at American universities. Students (and many faculty) rebelled against institutional structures that they saw as being very conservative and focused too squarely on white histories and perspectives. This call for greater inclusion led directly to the institution of the first programs in Black Studies, beginning in 1968 at San Francisco State University. Jazz education would also benefit from such changes; indeed, the establishment of the National Association of Jazz Educators in the same year speaks to this idea. Yet most jazz programs, at least in major music schools, were still dominated by white faculty and were predicated on a model in which jazz was systematized and instruction was formalized in ways that paralleled the core music curriculum, drawing on the standards and traditions of Western classical music. But there were some important exceptions to these developments. For example, both Archie Shepp and Max Roach began an affiliation with the University of Massachusetts (UMass), Shepp in 1971, Roach the following year. Both men were affiliated with the university’s African American Studies program (although they also had relationships with the music department as well). Shepp’s experience is particularly illuminating, as noted by former UMass student and saxophonist/composer Fred Ho. Reflecting on his time as a student of Shepp, Ho describes Shepp as an “intensely contradictory character” in the classroom, but one whose approach provided an alternative to the standard approaches to jazz education:

Shepp allowed anyone to play in his classes, from the most proficient players to the least experienced. Shepp would give everyone a chance to solo, and never say anything about how people played. Mistakes would simply be dealt with by repeating over again the difficult passages. While one could complain about the lack of formal rigor in Shepp’s classes, his method of teaching was extremely democratic and “proletarian” since it was
totally inclusive and antihierarchical, welcoming everyone’s participation and contributions regardless of formal training and expertise.

(Ho 2009, 172–173)

In a way, Shepp’s “alternative” jazz education is a reflection of Black Studies’ “alternative” position in academic study generally. Other African American musicians, such as Bill Dixon, Yusef Lateef, Marion Brown, and Stanley Cowell filled similar roles at other institutions, yet their efforts have gone largely unnoticed in the literature of jazz education itself.

Since the 1980s, jazz education has grown significantly and now forms a core component of American musical academia, with coursework and degrees offered at the undergraduate, master’s, and doctoral level throughout the country. While it might be too much to say that the field is no longer marginalized in relation to the Western European canon, it is likely no longer “the academy’s neglected stepchild,” as David Baker noted in a 1965 essay. Indeed, since this period, jazz education has begun to make its way into the pre-college level as well, with numerous high school and middle school bands active around the US. By 1994, there were at least 120 “bona fide” jazz programs in the US (Jazz in America 2017). The current online database of jazz education maintained by JazzTimes lists more than 2,200 programs; although some international programs are included, the vast majority of these are in the US (JazzTimes 2017). Of these, nearly 500 are university or college level programs, with the remainder at the high school level, or community arts programs. And while most scholarly work on jazz education has focused on the field’s impact on the educational institution, it should also be noted that jazz education’s impact on jazz at large has been, as David Ake notes, “among the most powerful forces shaping understandings of jazz” in the US (Ake 2002, 112).

This is not to say the jazz education is an entirely American enterprise. Indeed, jazz programs have become an important part of music education in a number of countries. Canadian, British, and Australian institutions have been especially active in establishing courses of study in jazz. Many major Canadian university music programs now offer some kind of instruction in jazz. In the United Kingdom, jazz programs have been established at some of the leading arts conservatories in the nation, including the Royal Academy of Music, Guildhall, and perhaps most notably, the Leeds College of Music, whose jazz offerings began in the 1960s. Similar initiatives can be found in numerous institutions both in Europe and around the globe. And with such developments will come different perspectives on how jazz is learned and taught.

Jazz Education and the New Jazz Studies

Given the intense activity in jazz education, and its increasing impact on different jazz communities, it is somewhat surprising that more scholarly attention has not been paid to these developments. Indeed, the intersections of jazz and formal institutional learning structures provide a rich field of inquiry. And yet, as I discovered when embarking on my initial doctoral research on this topic in the late 1990s, little critical work was being done in this area. Over the course of the last fifteen years or so, however, this has begun to change. In the remainder of this chapter, I will examine this emerging literature, with an eye toward identifying and analyzing major trends and themes in what I refer to as “critical jazz pedagogy.” Many of these works have drawn explicitly on earlier work that critically engaged with musical learning; studies by Henry Kingsbury (1988), Bruno Nettl (1995), and Christopher Small (1977) have been particularly influential on this literature.

One of the first works to critically engage with jazz education in a sustained, systemic manner was written by David Ake, a pianist who completed a doctorate in musicology at UCLA under the guidance of Robert Walser (among others), one of the leading figures in the “new musicology”
movement of the 1980s and 1990s. Ake’s dissertation, which was later turned into his widely read book Jazz Cultures, contains a chapter which addressed the place of John Coltrane in the academic context. Specifically, Ake argues that jazz educators have largely misread Coltrane’s overall artistic output, focusing on works such as “Giant Steps,” while largely ignoring his later avant-garde focused efforts. Noting Coltrane’s “exalted position” in jazz education programs, Ake argues that those aspects of Coltrane’s work that do not reinforce specific, measurable standards of performance are often “brushed aside as aberrations or ignored altogether” in the pedagogy of jazz (Ake 2002, 113). Ake’s study, I suggest, had enormous implications for both jazz education, with its pointed (and apt) critique of prevailing practice, and for New Jazz Studies, which had largely avoided jazz education as a topic of inquiry to this point.

On a personal note, encountering Ake’s scholarship as a doctoral student in ethnomusicology who had been trained as a “jazz educated” musician was something of a revelation, and was very influential on my own work in this area. Ake’s work led to my own dissertation (Prouty 2002) on the culture of jazz education. This in turn led to several articles in which I explore different aspects of jazz education from a critical viewpoint, including new perspectives on the field’s history (Prouty 2005), the problematic nature of understanding of jazz as oral tradition (Prouty 2006), the dynamics of power within jazz education (Prouty 2008), and issues with the production of jazz history textbooks (Prouty 2010). Studies such as these formed the core of the discussion of jazz education in my 2012 book Knowing Jazz.

Another notable study appeared in Music Education Research in 2006. Written by Tony Whyton, the article is a call for jazz educators, and music educators broadly, to approach their subject with an understanding of the uniqueness of the music and the problems that it poses for formalized instruction, to be “critically aware,” as Whyton himself states (Whyton 2006, 67). In particular, Whyton tackles the notion of jazz’s pedagogical “mythology,” a set of deeply held beliefs about the music that seem to place it at odds with formal study. At the same time, Whyton’s critiques established discourses in jazz education as potentially limiting a broad-based perspective. In the conclusion of his article, he calls for “a more inclusive, comparative, and interdisciplinary approach to jazz studies, where the canon is subject to continual appraisal and discursive methodologies” (Whyton 2006, 80), which is, I might suggest, an admirable goal for both jazz education and jazz scholarship.

Whyton’s article is, like Ake’s study, an important intervention into the discourse of jazz education. In particular, there are two areas where I suggest Whyton’s work is of importance. First, it is aimed at educators themselves, as evidenced by its appearance in a major music education journal. Second, Whyton, as a British jazz scholar, connects the discourse of the field to a non-American context, making reference to developments in the UK. As noted above, the majority of the literature on jazz education focuses on developments in American institutions; Whyton reminds us that this is only part of the story, and his work thus serves as a model for other non-American scholars to turn the lens on their own institutions and learning systems.

In 2010, David Ake returned to the topic of jazz education in his second book, Jazz Matters. In his chapter “Rethinking Jazz Education,” Ake addresses the critical discourse of jazz education emerging from within jazz studies (old and new), highlighting what could be regarded as a tendency toward dismissal and derision. Like Whyton, Ake also engages in a critical discussion of “myths” that are employed to marginalize jazz education, from jazz being an exclusively “urban” music, to the perceived “unhipness” of formal study, to notions of jazz and innate creativity, and finally to attitudes toward subsidization of the arts. For Ake, criticism of jazz education that are derived from such discourses are misplaced; more to the point, jazz education and jazz are largely one and the same, and efforts to create a bright line between them miss important connections between “school” and “street.” As Ake notes near the end of the chapter, “We need not fear that formal education somehow undermines or embarrasses ‘real jazz’ or, as Christopher Small suggested, marks the end of jazz as a ‘living force’” (Ake 2010, 119).
More recently, Eitan Wilf’s *School for Cool* might be the most expansive and focused critical study of jazz education yet produced. Based on his doctoral work in anthropology at the University of Chicago, Wilf’s book is a penetrating ethnographic portrait of jazz education, centered on the Berklee College of Music and the jazz program at The New School. Wilf is not reluctant to point out what he sees as a fundamental problem in jazz education, namely, that the enterprise tends to restrict creative practice (the title of Wilf’s dissertation was “Swinging Within the Iron Cage”). In particular, he points to what he sees as a “paradox,” in that students strive to inform their playing with teaching and traditions, ideologies, myths, and ideals that they associate with great jazz, in an institutional environment that often entails highly different traditions, ideologies, and ideals.

(Wilf 2014, 13)

Much of Wilf’s account is concerned with the ways in which various actors in the institution (most notably students and faculty) attempt to negotiate this paradox, as well as the attendant limitations and difficulties with doing so. Wilf’s study is deeply informed, meticulously researched, and deeply grounded in cultural and social theory. Given its somewhat narrow ethnographic focus on Berklee and the New School, two programs which might be said to lie outside mainstream musical academia, its applicability to other contexts might be questionable. Nevertheless, Wilf’s study is extremely valuable, addressing important issues facing the field, and grounded in the lived experience of students and teachers.

Other scholars have begun to address jazz learning and teaching in critical, systematic ways. In 2007, *Critical Studies in Improvisation* devoted an entire issue to improvisation and pedagogy; Stephen Lehman and Roger Mantie contributed articles on jazz education-related topics (Lehman 2007; Mantie 2007). In a recent issue of *Jazz Perspectives* Alex Rodriguez writes of his experiences with facilitating an improvisation ensemble as a doctoral student at UCLA, drawing on the work of pioneering ethnomusicologist Mantle Hood and free jazz icon Ornette Coleman (Rodriguez 2015). It is my hope that other scholars will continue to pursue such lines of inquiry, which will benefit both practitioners of jazz education and scholars of jazz more broadly.

**Conclusion**

Today, jazz education is both firmly established as an integral part of musical education and an important site of study for jazz scholars. That is not to say that the field does not face critical challenges. There is little question that jazz education is overwhelmingly white. It is also overwhelmingly male. These are problems that the field must face up to if jazz education is to be truly inclusive and relevant to future generations of students and teachers. Both of these challenges are widely recognized within the field, yet solutions to such disparities are not seemingly forthcoming. Others point to jazz education’s tendency to focus on a relatively narrow range of the music’s history (namely, musical developments from 1945 to 1965 or so). These are indeed valid criticisms of the field. That said, canonical narrowness is not unique to jazz. Western art music performance has its own issues of inclusiveness. I would caution against critiques of jazz education that might be more appropriately aimed at institutional musical education at large.

But what is clear is that jazz education can no longer be dismissed as an insignificant side project of a few teachers and students with an interest in the music. Jazz education is inextricably intertwined with jazz outside the academy, and just as there has always been jazz education from the music’s earliest days, so too is institutional jazz study fundamentally linked to non-institutional histories and communities. Musicians, students, and teachers should keep this in
mind; distinctions between “school and street” often serve to only further divide an already fragmented jazz community. And jazz scholars will find jazz education to be a rich, deep subject for inquiry, much like the music itself.

Notes

1. The use of the term “jazz studies” itself might be clarified. While many writers have employed the term to refer to humanities-based scholarship (see Gabbard 1995, 2), in the academic context the term has generally been used to refer to performance-oriented programs of studies. Put another way, to major in “jazz studies” at a typical American university, for example, is to major in jazz performance, and to a lesser extent, composition. This convention has been in common use since at least the mid-1970s, when an influential doctoral dissertation by Walter Barr outlined a proposed “jazz studies curriculum.” Barr’s work laid the foundation for guidelines that would eventually be adopted by the National Association of Schools of Music, the main music accrediting body in the United States. See Barr 1974. In this chapter, I refer to performance-oriented courses of study as “jazz education” to avoid confusion between the two applications of the term.

2. The IAJE got its start as the NAJE (National Association of Jazz Educators) in 1968; in 1989, the name was changed again to reflect the growing international nature of the field. In the late 1990s, the name would change yet again, to the International Association for Jazz Education, a subtle but (I would suggest) important shift. The IAJE ceased operations in 2008 due to a combination of financial management issues and reduced revenue. I discuss the organization’s history and significance in the final chapter of my book Knowing Jazz: Community, Pedagogy, and Canon in the Information Age.

3. David Ake also addresses this topic in his book Jazz Matters (2010), which I discuss later in this chapter.

4. Downbeat during this period was arguably aimed more directly at an audience of musicians, perhaps more so than today. Its format at the time resembled more of a trade paper than its current manifestation.

5. This name is a reference to Joseph Schillinger, a noted theorist and teacher whose students included Lee Berk, founder of the school.

6. Baker had also been a student at the Lenox School of Jazz, a summer institute held in Western Massachusetts from 1957 to 1960. Lenox attracted a number of young musicians, and its faculty included such figures as George Russell, John Lewis, Jimmy Giuffre, and Bob Brookmeyer, as well as scholars such as Marshall Stearns and Gunther Schuller.

7. Baker’s systematic approach to pedagogy is easily observed in the numerous pedagogical publications he authored during his long career. One of Baker’s protégés was a saxophonist by the name of Jamey Abersold, who himself would go on to become arguably the leading producer and publisher of jazz-related teaching and learning materials in the world.

8. For a further discussion of these and other artist-educators, see Hardin (1987).

9. I would suggest that the highly visible and influential neoclassicist movement, spearheaded by Wynton Marsalis and Jazz at Lincoln Center, had a major influence on these developments.

10. I received my M.M. in jazz studies from the University of North Texas in 1997.

11. Indeed, recent presentations on pedagogical topics at conferences such as those held under the auspices of the Rhythm Changes research consortium have demonstrated this, featuring papers devoted to jazz education around the world.

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