

The Exploration of a Holistic, Interpersonal, and Expansive Music Education Philosophy

When framing why a teacher is called to the profession, there are many considerations to be addressed: intrinsic motivations, methods of implementation, and the philosophical grounding for these beliefs. Without an understanding of the pedagogue's fundamental purpose, instruction will ultimately be lackluster and devoid of substance. Accommodating each and every student that comes into the music classroom is a never-ending quest for teachers, and it is not enhanced by limiting a scope of influence. A philosophy of music education does not have to track a singular outline of prescriptive thought, but rather, it should be informed by a cohesive package of current theory. My philosophy is firmly rooted in the belief that music is a transformative medium through which students take ownership of their own education using the emotional connection of the aesthetic approach to music education as well as the Finnish concept of "Bildung." This paper champions a view of philosophy of music education that reflects a multi-faceted, open classroom in an effort to address the socio-emotional and educational needs of all students.

In this field, we are not strangers to a *mélange* of thought processes. Consider the eclectic approach with regards to music methodologies, a hybrid of many different methods all mixing in a common instructional space. Engaging active participation and deep understanding from all students often requires addressing the same concept from many angles and through many lenses. Addressing *why* students are in the music classroom should inform *how* they are instructed, or better yet, how their learning is facilitated, by the teacher. The philosophy of music education explored by Randall

Allsup (2016) directly acknowledges this fact and makes it salient by suggesting that “the danger of teaching a traditional art form can be the danger of mistaking induction for education” (p. 20). While the concept might seem simple, music educators must realize the educational call-to-action in these words. We cannot continue teaching in the way that we were taught. It is our obligation to open the door to innovation in the classroom, and if we do, our students will show us the way forward. A personal relationship with music is not generated by surface-level attention, rather it is nurtured through embodied communication fostered by the teacher and perpetuated by the students. Catering to the individual and distinguished needs of our students on the minute level is best achieved by providing each student with a learning space through which to explore their own interests in the musical realm.

These aforementioned ideas can be attributed to the foundational side of a philosophy of music education while the concepts of aesthetics and Bildung provide the socio-emotional impetus for the creation of a personal philosophy. While there exists a somewhat vitriolic relationship between the factions of practice and aesthetic theorists, it would benefit the discerning music educator and her class to incorporate the best elements of both philosophies. In my pedagogy, aesthetic theories hold a true connection to the emotional side of music by positing that the sound of music engenders universal, cultural, and individual understanding (Reimer, 2003, p. 11). Unpacking that statement distills down to the root aspect of my drive to become an educator, the hope that we can embolden the transformative qualities of music and use them to enact positive change in our students. Using aesthetic theory through a student-centered approach to music education ultimately serves the individual's

connection to music as an life-enriching practice.

As much as the enhancement of the individual is a key tenet of my music education philosophy, it is essential to include consideration for cooperative enhancement as well. This social imperative is apparent to me in the study of the Finnish concept of “Bildung.” While the idea is many-sided, its core lies in the Finnish principal that personal development is directly linked with self-determination and liberty not only at the individual level, but also in the cooperative sphere (Heimonen, 2014, p.194). Music education is nothing if not a shared experience, and my philosophy emphasizes the humanistic import of what we do in every interaction with music. Frede V. Neilsen, the man responsible for adapting Bildung for music education, stressed the idea that philosophy is the building block upon which one can engage in educational activity (Heimonen, 2014, p.189). The emphasis on this concept combines the idea of transformative aesthetics with the view of the teacher as a facilitator of learning rather than someone who deposits knowledge into the students. In order for that paradigm to operate well, the teacher must be an expert in the material to act as a reflector of thought and encourager of alternate interpretation. I have always believed that a teacher who is unable to perform to the best of their ability on the material being discussed is guilty of furthering the deranged notion that “those who cannot do, teach.” Therefore, another fundamental principle of Bildung is the ideal of teaching from an “ethos of versatility” (Heimonen, 2014, p.194). In this paper, I will discuss how my own philosophy is informed by and expands upon these concepts to form who I am as an educator and who I want my students to become as empowered citizens of the world through music.

EXPLORING A FOUNDATION

Teaching, as a profession, mandates a critical outlook on the world. This is not to be confused with pessimism, but rather an outlook that must inspire a vision of continual reframing of curricula, teaching persona, and content. Music education, perhaps more than any other subject area, is perfectly positioned to enact the paradigm of context-dependent education. My philosophy stems from a democratic, student-centered focus in which each student is engaged in the process of shaping their own education.

A foundation of inclusion manifests itself in three ways: acknowledging, destigmatizing, and embracing the variable differences of students in our classrooms. We will simultaneously be charged with educating children who share our proclivity for musicking as well as those who are not naturally inclined to engage with the art form. An integral step in the forming of a music educator is recognizing that it is possible (and necessary) to address both types of students without bias and resentment. Too often, music educators are concerned with a narrow definition of *literacy*: the ability to read and create music as the Western canon has practiced for hundred of years. Randall Allsup (2016) helps to redefine this elusive, often-contested idea by suggesting that “[t]eaching literacy is helping students learn to say what they want to say, the way they want to say it” (p. 47). When this principle is internalized, we acknowledge that the learning outcomes of each student will be dissimilar, and they must be this way to retain the legitimacy of teaching music. We must give our students the musical tools to enhance their lives through differentiated learning.

Destigmatizing and embracing sociological and educational differences in the

Lindsey Reinhard
History and Philosophy of Music Education
Dr. McBride

music classroom should look different depending on the context of the students. Elliott and Silverman (2014) succinctly acknowledge the paradox in the common phrase about music functioning as a universal language when, in fact, it most certainly is not (p. 71). When we insist that there is a concrete definition of what the language of music is, then we (however unintentionally) instill a belief system into our students. Our students each come to the table with their own predilections for music, just as we do. Becoming, or maybe unleashing, the best pedagogue inside each music teacher requires us to validate the musical knowledge and passion that our students innately possess. Only then can we meet them at a place where they are comfortable enough to expand their boundaries. In this process, critical pedagogy is engaged; both the teacher and the student learn. Breaking down that archaic teaching model of induction is the first step in destigmatizing sociological differences in the music classroom towards a democratic view. Meeting students where they are and giving them the tools to lift them to where *they* desire to be is my greatest goal as a humanistic educator.

All of these means work toward the same end of an *open classroom* as outlined by Allsup. Modern society includes such diverse ways of thinking about the world and so many different mediums to explore these divergent thought processes. Allsup notes the phenomenon that “[t]here is no education without innovation. There is no education without tradition. In the case of music education, each contradicting concept is equally magnetic and equally valuable to the growth of a new generation of students” (Allsup, 2016, p. 40). This particular dichotomy illustrates the importance of philosophy in music education. Our profession has historically been predicated on tradition and long-held values that guide what we do today. Personally, there are aspects of that idea that I

find to be very beautiful from an ethos standpoint. This art form, though ancient, is constantly reformed and renewed through our students. Even so, there must be a margin that allows for exploration of the “next,” what is to come in the way we understand music and share our knowledge with one another. Allsup sees this as an open view of music education, and it is one that I share. Traditions are well and good, but our responsibility in democratic teaching is to encourage different traditions based on the student population sitting in that room.

Embracing sociological differences in the music classroom towards a multicentric ideal is one of the most impactful and most difficult aspects of teaching that exists. Dewey (1990) discusses the idea of “compensations — the increase in toleration, in breadth of social judgment, the larger acquaintance with human nature” in order to yield “greater accuracy of adaptation to differing personalities” (p. 12). This encompasses ideas spanning from differentiated content in individual lessons to the awareness that we should not shy away from clumsy conversations. The teacher is in a position of power, yet this power is sacred and must be checked constantly. I envision a toolkit that all educators possess. It is vast, and there are many different subsections: human connection, musicianship, intellectual facility, and all of these “compensations.” We must remain cognizant of the fact that we are responsible for all that these compensations listed by Dewey enact. Juliet Hess (2015) suggests that the “recognition of distribution of privilege” is an essential component of reaching students on a playing field where justice is a Law, and all musics are considered legitimate and welcomed (p. 74).

SOCIO-EMOTIONAL IMPORT

Education is a fundamentally humanitarian field. It is predicated upon growth and interpersonal interactions that ultimately transport people from one realm of being to another. Without a philosophical grounding, this concept sounds grandiose and intangible. My philosophy envelopes a concept of “more complex, more muddlesome, and more unholy” music education (Allsup, 2016, p. 24). Taking daily risks in the classroom to encourage meaningful communication between and amongst students demonstrates the most foundational principle of caring deeply for the people in your room. This Postmodernist take on music education seizes the potential to channel chaos and its effects into an enriching classroom dynamic.

In my view, humans should be valued for who they are unequivocally. This idea should be shown in the music classroom at every possible moment, from the music that is chosen to the vibe of the rehearsal or general music class. Growing as *people first* and musicians or lovers of music *second* will be my top pedagogical agenda item. Renowned philosopher, Wayne Bowman, suggests that “music teaches us things about our common humanity that are worth knowing” (Bowman qtd. in Elliott and Silverman, 2014, p. 74). A holistic approach to music education is characterized by interpersonal relationships. We recognize that we will be teaching students with a wide variety of interests in musical interaction and that every level is valid. This includes teaching to the future “yous” *as well as* those who will ultimately appreciate and feel immersed in the ethos that music creates without making it their profession. There is so much emotional support that the creative release of music fosters, and we must recognize its ability to affect all students.

What I find most important (even magical) about music is the inherent quality of

Lindsey Reinhard
History and Philosophy of Music Education
Dr. McBride

community that it engenders, an inclusive feeling that draws me to be a music educator. Making music with others has been a touchstone of human activity forever, and the natural community that it yields is like no other. This idea is wrapped up in the Finnish concept of *Bildung*. We do not have a perfect translation for this term in English, which may be a commentary on where we place the value of community-building and art in Anglo-American cultures. Essentially, *Bildung* means that everyone has a right to a well-rounded, inclusive education that develops students' interests. There is an emphasis placed on personal growth through collaboration, always in the pursuit of leading us to an elevated state of well-being. A visual sense of *Bildung* is akin to a spiral that carries knowledge higher and higher through occasional coils and perseverance. Marja Heimonen (2014) synthesizes the meaning of *Bildung* in Finnish culture by explaining that "personal growth is especially connected with autonomy and freedom, both individually and especially collectively" (p. 194). All of these aspects are wrapped up in music education.

At this moment in time, choral music education stands out to me as the most conducive way to augment the socio-emotional capacities of our students by building community in each and every rehearsal. Some people may argue that the master-apprentice model is unavoidable when teaching choir. However, if the conductor approaches the choral rehearsal like they would approach a general music classroom, there are numerous opportunities for greater democratic processes from the students. Elliott and Silverman (2014) stress the idea that "[m]usic's evolutionary efficacy centers on its support and advancement of human sociality and its power to motivate group bonding..." (p. 81). I've been reflecting on the meaning of *conductor* in the public

Lindsey Reinhard
History and Philosophy of Music Education
Dr. McBride

school sphere. There is a Merriam-Webster definition of the term that refers to “a material capable of transmitting another form of energy.” It is my core belief that music educators are that material; we are responsible for enlivening our students with art and allowing ourselves to learn and grow from their energy and efforts.

Immersing oneself in the emotional aspect of music is a branch of the aesthetic experience. While some may argue that aesthetics are a passive study of art, I believe that they have a serious impact on the development of emotional maturity and growth—these are the long-lasting effects of music education. Bennett Reimer was the pioneering music educator who advocated for this type of instruction, citing the characteristic wedding of theory to practice as the greatest benefit. In his view, “[a]n experience-based philosophy of music education is one that focuses on and cherishes all the many ways music can be experienced and all the many musics offering the special experience music provides” (Reimer, 2003, p. 69). That aligns with my idea of an inherently inclusive view of music education that allows for students to experience music in whatever way moves them. Perhaps it will be listening to great performances (regardless of genre) or singing in a choir, but whatever the experience, the teacher must emphasize the relevance. Students who feel that their way of listening to and making music is legitimate will be more likely to continue interacting with it and building their creative freedom. That development is the importance of aesthetic education in my philosophy.

GROWTH MINDSET

The final cornerstone of my philosophy touches on the advancement of growth mindset through music. Music deals with the interplay of time and sound, an ebbing

and flowing representation of growth. There are no two performances that will ever be exactly alike, and this is the beauty of the art form. There is always room to improve, to rethink, to renew. Education and learning can follow these same principles. Bildung shows us that education can be conceptualized “as a natural growth that happens in freedom, in which the role of an educator is active, although his or her duty is only to help and to remove the barriers to achieving education” (Heimonen, 2014, p. 192-193). The pedagogue must think of their role as creating space for students to succeed, always encouraging new perspectives and welcoming feedback as material unfolds. This opens the form, as Allsup encourages, and leaves the advancement of learning in the hands of students. Teachers can only give students tools and benchmarks for their education, it is the responsibility of the students to use them to further their own interests within the scope of music.

Finally, I must reiterate the unique positionality of music in shaping people’s lives. The reason I chose to become a music educator was a result of the socio-emotional immersive experiences that I gleaned from music education, and I think that everyone can benefit in some way from the same. Allsup (2016) said it best by positing that “we are more than makers of music; we are made by the music we make” (p. 11). For me, music education is so much more than ensuring that our students can accurately sing notes on a page or wield a perfectly legato line. It encompasses the whole person: their relationships to others, their desires to learn, and their unique abilities. By placing a value on interpersonal relationships, knowing our students, and allowing space for transformative experiences, we show the developmental impact that an arts education can create.

Lindsey Reinhard
History and Philosophy of Music Education
Dr. McBride

Music education has the power to transform, empower, and uplift students when enacted in an open sphere. The insightful music educator is responsible for intuiting their students' needs and catering to each of them individually. It is of paramount importance for students to feel embraced in the music classroom, regardless of sociological background, natural ability level, or any other perceived barrier. Creating an open classroom that is influenced by the aesthetic experiences of music and the encouragement to autonomously explore personal interests through Bildung will ultimately shape students as not only musicians and musically-impacted-persons, but also as citizens of the world. Addressing socio-emotional needs of young people through music education is my calling in this world, and the best way I can conceive of it is through the support of an open concept of music education that lends itself to constant renewal. After all, the modernity of music depends upon its relationship to the present-day, and music education must follow suit.

Lindsey Reinhard
History and Philosophy of Music Education
Dr. McBride

References

Allsup, R. E. (2016). *Remixing the Classroom: Toward an Open Philosophy of Music Education*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Dewey, J. (1990). *The School and Society*. London, UK: University of Chicago Press.

Elliott, D. J., & Silverman, M. (2015). *Music Matters: A Philosophy of Music Education* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Heimonen, M. (2014). 'Bildung' and Music Education: A Finnish Perspective. *Philosophy of Music Education Review*, 22(2), Fall, 188-208.

doi:10.2979/philmusieducrevi.22.2.188

Hess, J. (2015). Upping the "Anti-": The Value of an Anti-Racist Theoretical Framework in Music Education. *The ACT Journal*, 14(1), 66-92.

Reimer, B. (2002). *A Philosophy of Music Education: Advancing the Vision* (3rd ed.). London, UK: Pearson.