

*Music for All:
A Philosophy of Music Education
By Hannah Lemont*

While I have only been formally teaching music for a handful of years, the way I create lessons and go about teaching them changes for every different group of students I encounter. While I have learned an immeasurable amount of information, and gained an equally large amount of compassion and empathy, for the hundreds of students I have worked with, I had not yet taken the time to think and develop a series of ideas and goals that apply to most (if not all) of my teaching situations. Over the course of the last four months of reading the philosophies of music education that Bennett Reimer and David Elliot hold, I have gained an appreciation for their insights, and recognize the value in having core ideas and goals that will lay the foundation for all of my teaching decisions. It makes a lot of sense to me that the more time I spend thinking, reading, discussing, and writing about my personal philosophy of music education, the more I will be able to “act with confidence, knowing that whatever (I) choose to do will be in consonance with the values of the domain they represent.” (Reimer pg 5). While I am sure that my philosophy will evolve and change over the course of my career, I am looking forward to the improvements in my teaching practices that will inevitably follow from developing a core philosophy of music education.

The notion that music education should be available to ALL people is the foundational idea that has stayed constant in my musical career thus far. While both Reimer and Elliot espouse this concept, Reimer’s philosophy seems to support the implementation of music for all people leaps and bounds above Elliot’s philosophy.

Like Reimer, I find the current music offerings in public schools disappointing. The current model has traditional performing ensembles (i.e. choir, band, orchestra) dominating the class offerings, yet only around 15% of public school students are involved in these ensembles. If we truly believe in a world where all students should have the opportunity to have a music education that reaches them at their academic, emotional, socio-economic, and even physical level, we need to offer a *much* wider variety of courses in the public school system. Music history, music technology, smaller ensembles focusing on less classical repertoire, general music, music listening and critiquing, guitar, ukulele, composing, conducting, and improvising are all subjects worthy of their own, specialized classes. Elliot's philosophy, while claiming that music education should be for all, spends so much time focused on the idea that performing is the only *real* way to be musical that his ideas do not seem to line up with each other. While active music making (performing) is an incredibly important and efficient way to develop musical skills and understanding, music educators need to help students who are less interested in the performing aspect of music find a way to develop their inherent musical abilities.

This concept that a wider variety of musical offerings can help more students find a way to develop and demonstrate their musically intelligence is supported by Reimer's discussions of musical intelligence in chapter 7 of his book, and more broadly by Howard Gardner's work on multiple intelligences. If one subscribes to the idea that humans have a variety of intelligences, it is not a far leap to suppose that individuals can have strengths and weaknesses within a smaller break down of these intelligences. I see this in my general music classroom often. For example, I

have students who seem pretty apathetic and average/below average in their singing and musical literacy skills, and then when I introduce recorder they suddenly are leaps and bounds above everyone else. Other students who sing incredibly well have a terribly difficult time remembering dance steps and moving their bodies in a way that is musical. This is one of the reasons I really push myself to offer a wide variety of ways for students to be musical, and to be honest, one of the things I have to remind myself of every year when I'm tempted to throw all of my recorders in the trashcan.

An integral part of teaching a creative art is helping students be creative. Both Reimer and Elliot discuss creativity, define their own terms, and claim that students can be creative to some degree, but not all people can be capital C "Creative" the same way Mozart or Led Zeppelin were. I fall into the camp of viewing creativity as something that all people can experience, and I do not think that it is a "lesser" form of creativity than famous creative individuals. The idea of only considering an elite few capable of being truly creative goes against my beliefs in the potential of ALL of my students. It is interesting (and frustrating) that the idea that musical and creative skills are something you are born with (or not) is so prevalent in our culture. Through careful planning and teaching, musical skills and creativity are something that can be taught and developed throughout ones lifetime.

Both the philosophical work of Gardner and Reimer, along with the antidotal evidence provided (I'm sure many other music teachers could provide similar stories) lead me to believe that the only way to reach *all* students is to offer a wide variety of music education opportunities. By providing general music classes that

touch on as many concepts as possible in a K-8 setting, and then offering more specialized classes in grade 6-12, we could help students explore many musical opportunities, and then later allow them to choose to focus more on what interests them.

An integral part of offering a wide variety of music courses is teaching music from across many cultures. Both Elliot and Reimer's philosophies involve discussions of teaching "world music," but neither of them draw a clear, decisive conclusion on how to best present this music to our students. Traditionally music education in the United States has centered itself around the western classical tradition, which is beautiful, complicated music (in my opinion), but does not even come close to representing the music of the entire globe. One of the biggest obstacles that music educators in the U.S face in teaching music from different cultures is finding ways to do so respectfully and authentically; we often get a bad reputation for "watering down" music from other cultures. While this was true in the past, the 21st century has brought so many technological advances that it has never been easier to find resources to help teach music from around the globe.

One great example of this is the Smithsonian Folkways nonprofit record label that is a part of the Smithsonian Institution. Smithsonian Folkways has a website with resources including field recordings, lesson plans for teaching music from other countries that have been approved by musicologists, and ideas for how to teach respectfully and authentically, as well as offering week-long courses in the summer that focus on teaching world music. (<http://www.folkways.si.edu/tools-for-teaching/smithsonian>). As we as a nation become more aware and sensitive to

other peoples' traditions, I am confident that even more resources for learning and respecting others' music will become more widely assessable.

While Elliot and Reimer disagree on the idea of how and when to teach music from a variety of cultures, both of them recognize that it is important to teach these musics. This is one of the many times when Elliot and Reimer have a similar outlook, but refuse to admit it. There are so many philosophies, approaches, techniques, and opinions about music education that it can be easy to find one you agree with and dig your heels in. This, however, is counter productive to our profession; we need to have discussions, ask hard questions, and be introduced to new viewpoints. As Reimer pointed out in his introduction of his 1991 article: "...there has been far too little philosophical discussion in music education, and I have missed the pleasures of a lively community of colleagues specializing in the kinds of ideas that intrigue me, and with whom I could have shared the benefits of debate."

While both Reimer and Elliot preach the concept of educational discussions with those who may disagree with you, their actions seem to say otherwise. Often they seem so determined to prove the other wrong that they fail to see the similarities in their positions. I see this same travesty in music education circles all over the country; Kodaly vs Orff, Music Learning Theory vs Fiereabend, Music K-8 vs Music Express. It is an easy mistake to fall into, as most of us in this field are passionate about what we do; the problem is when passion turns into unreasonable stubbornness.

If we all hold on to a certain dogma and only have productive conversations with those who agree with us, our opinions will only grow more and more extreme.

The best advice that my supervising teacher gave me when I was student teaching was that I could learn something from *every* teacher I met. While I am not shy about offering a differing viewpoint than those around me, I do try to remember to keep an open mind and express my opinions respectfully. While I certainly have room for improvement, I truly believe that this should be a common practice in our profession. Elliot reminds us in chapter 3 of his book that “the purpose of philosophy is *not* to destroy our confidence in our beliefs, but to *question our reasons* for holding them.” If we don’t learn from each other, how are we going to improve? If we don’t ask hard questions, how are we going to find great answers? Music teachers are often isolated in their day-to-day jobs, sometimes the only music educator in their building. As a profession, we need to actively find more ways to collaborate, have discussions with, and learn from music educators with a variety of backgrounds. If we do not, we cannot and will not progress as a profession.

One of the hot button issues that Elliot and Reimer spar on is the effect that music has on us as humans. While Reimer refers to this as “aesthetic moments,” and Elliot uses different terms, it seems to me they both agree that music can be associated with an emotional response. Personally, I think that it is clear that music evokes and expresses emotions. Both philosophers have created their own definitions of terms such as “feelings” “emotions” etc. I like Reimer’s ideas of emotions vs feelings more than Elliot’s, but to me they are both more of a metaphor rather than definitions. I believe that music can both bring up past emotions and memories in someone, as well as evoke new feelings and emotions. Music does this through a variety of methods: sounds, visual stimulation, the atmosphere where the

music is performed, the cultural norms and expectations of and about the music, and previous experiences (both musical and non-musical) of the listener. With the arguable exception of programmatic music, each music listener experiences something completely different when listening to the same piece of music. As music educators we should discuss possibilities (both musical and non-musical) of what evoked and/or expressed those emotions, but we should not try to declare that "Piece X makes EVERYONE feel Y because Z." To do that would be to deny the individuality of the human experience.

The human experience is what we need to keep at the forefront of our minds when we are teaching. Music is important, but more important are the children we are teaching. Elliot spends over a chapter discussing his humanist views and how he believes music can help teach those essential human skills (compassion, empathy, etc), but Reimer sums it up nicely in chapter 7: "We need to be mindful of... our deep, close kinship with all humans if we are to achieve a world where our common humanity, recognized and cherished, allows us to share worldwide positive values, values of peace, mutual respect, mutual sympathy, openness of intercommunication, and all the other values that enhance our membership in the larger world community in which each of us must live." This. This is what we must remember as we teach music to our children, our friends, and our neighbors. We are teaching music, but more importantly, we are teaching music to *people*. Music has a unique power to help heal, strengthen, and unite people. While other activities (visual arts, sports, etc), can also have this power (a point that Elliot disagrees with), let us celebrate what music can do for us. Let us teach our students to do their best as they

develop their musicality, joining together with others to create beautiful sounds. I
end my short, incomplete philosophy of music education with the English
translation of a 16th century German tune that captures my hopes and dreams for
music education, *Harmonia Mundi*:

We gather here together, with joyful heart and mind.
We raise our voices ever, our distant souls to bind.
To remember in this moment, of friendship love and joy
That music made together, may one day heal mankind.
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