

Sam Brown

## My Philosophy on Music Education

Building from the ground up, one might want to ask: What even *is* music? Bennett Reimer asserts that Music is “sound-think,” while the act of describing is very much about “language-think.” (Reimer<sup>1</sup>) Like the saying goes “writing about music is like dancing about architecture.” (Quote) So I will do my best to give the barest of descriptions: Music is a multifaceted art-form based on organized sound.

But what is the value of music? Like all value systems, the answer to this question varies from person to person. In addition to the individual variance, music cannot be succinctly confined to one value. In my view, music is a unique learning experience in that (1) it integrates multiple dimensions (Intelligences, other educative subjects, the self, etc.), (2) it is inherently creative, and (3) it is an excellent vehicle for self-exploration.

Music educator Richard Colwell implores music teachers to ask themselves “What do we want our students to be like?” (Colwell) This is a great way to reflect on what one values on education. As an educator, I want my students to be (1) compassionate humans, (2) diverse thinkers, (3) musically sensitive, (4) imbued with a childlike curiosity, and (5) fearlessly creative. Considering the aforementioned values of music, how do musical values meet the practice my goals for my students?

### ***1. Compassion.***

Teaching is a symbiotic relationship. David Elliott asserts that “to teach” is a transitive verb, and that teaching of any kind “always involves five interdependent dimensions.” (Elliott) There is a (1) teacher who (2) facilitates (3) “something” to a (4) student with the (5) intent of empowering

“the learner(s) to construct their own knowledge.” He reminds his readers that “students are people - not simply empty containers waiting to be stuffed with... knowledge... and drilled and skilled as future job fillers.” Elliott also acknowledges Nel Noddings and her “ethics of care.” (Smith) Noddings has made her career in direct correlation with core beliefs of Johann Pestalozzi. The most clear of these connections is the view of “the home as the primary educator.” Both Noddings and Pestalozzi argue that love and maternal caring are crucial to a rich learning environment.

Elliott’s notion of treating students as people, and Noddings and Pestalozzi’s notion of treating students with a familial love, is a means whereby compassion can be taught. Through the act of modeling, teachers can “show in their behaviour what it means to care.” Noddings states that “we [educators] do not merely tell them [students] to care and give them texts to read on the subject, we demonstrate our caring in our relations with them.” Maybe if teachers treat students as people and care for them, they may learn to care and treat others as people.

## ***2. Diversity of Thinking.***

Howard Gardner, the first identifier of seven different intelligences<sup>1</sup>, believes that thinking musically is one of the seven intelligences. I would argue that music teaching and music learning is a unique subject in that it can be accessible to all of Gardner’s modes of learning. Any musician that needs to move their hand or limb in space towards a point (string players with shifting, trombone players, percussionists) engages in “visual-spatial” and “bodily-kinesthetic” intelligences. (Lane) Singers often have an incredibly subtle sense of bodily awareness as well. “Interpersonal” and “intrapersonal” intelligences can be engaged in any performing group in

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<sup>1</sup> Visual-spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, intrapersonal, interpersonal, linguistic, and logical-mathematical. (Lane)

dialectic conflict with each other; students interact with one another and privately pursue their own musical goals. Musicians like Pedro de Alcantara asserts that intention in music comes from language. It is clear that understanding music “linguistically” was important in Alcantara’s own education. Students who are learning music theory or to perform engage a “logical-mathematical” intelligence, as there is an inherent logic to music theory and practicing for a performance. One can learn, through the exposure of different intelligences through music, to solve solutions in a multitude of different ways.

How does one connect these different intelligences? David Elliott states that students and teachers must develop their “critical thinking” and “critical reflection.” He goes on to say that “critical thinking and critical reflection are central to linking the theoretical and practical dimensions of teaching, music making, music listening, and creativity.” (Elliott) In essence, critical thinking and reflection are crucial to understanding the whole of music. I would take it a step further and say that critical thinking and reflection are crucial to making sense of each individual’s reality. It is apparent, particularly in today’s political climate, that the world needs more critical thinkers and critical reflectors.

### **3. *Musical Sensitivity.***

The concept of musical sensitivity comes directly from the concept of Aesthetic Education, championed by Bennett Reimer. He described aesthetic education as “the development of sensitivity to the aesthetic qualities of things.”<sup>2</sup>(Reimer<sup>2</sup>) Why is sensitivity important?

Sensitivity to the many layers and inner-workings of music are important to developing a

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<sup>2</sup> In Reimer’s article, *Putting Aesthetic Education to Work* (1972), he gives “a few words” on the terms “development,” “sensitivity,” aesthetic qualities,” and “things.” I will only give “a few words” on why sensitivity is important.

personal connection to music, no matter if that music is popular music of today or music written by men long dead. Music is relevant in most everyone's lives, but understanding isn't as universal. Through understanding, music is even more vibrant and alive. Everyone should experience this vibrancy.

#### **4. *Childlike Curiosity.***

Curiosity is something that is innate in humans. Johann Pestalozzi and Jean Jacques Rousseau believed it to come from what Pestalozzi calls a human's "'sensual' nature," (Bruehlmeier) or it's intuitive, "animal," nature. John Dewey elaborates: "the native and unspoiled attitude of childhood, marked by ardent curiosity, fertile imagination, and a love of experimental inquiry, is near... to the attitude of the scientific mind." (Dewey) This is a skill that mustn't be squandered and must be cultivated by educators to the best of their abilities.

#### **5. *Fearless Creativity.***

Creativity has become more and more desirous since the unfortunate post-sputnik era science craze. Sir Ken Robinson believes that "creativity... is as important as literacy, and we should treat it with the same status." ("Do Schools Kill Creativity?") Robinson also asserts that children are "educated out [of creativity]," and out of their fearlessness of "being wrong." CEO Tim Brown asserts that it is fear of "judgement from our peers... that makes us conservative in our thinking." ("Tales of Creativity and Play") He goes on to say that "[one] might have a wild idea, but we are afraid to share it with anybody else." So, how is it one educated out of fearlessness? I would contend that fear of judgement from one's peers is a staple of adolescence. That being said, music educators can make a concerted effort to make their class environment a safe place for students to fail and explore their "wild idea."

Music education is a unique and broad educational experience. It can be used as a vehicle to teach compassion, diverse modes of thinking, sensitivity to the world's music, curiosity, and the absence of fear necessary for creativity. Students with these skills will make the world a better place.

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