

**Ireland's Music Education National Debate:
Rationalization, Reconciliation, Contextuality and
Applicability of Global Philosophies in Conflict**

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To be sure, music is a miracle. ... What miracle wants of us is not that we, as thinking beings, shall capitulate to it, but rather that we shall do justice to it in our thinking. Precisely because music is a miracle, incomprehensible in the framework of the dominant mode of contemporary thinking, impossible to fit into the current conception of the world - a miracle not only in its greatest and most splendid, its most exceptional, manifestations, but in its plain fundamentals, precisely because of all this it is our duty to think about it. The purpose is not a rationalization, a setting aside of the miraculous. Thought that is true to its subject does not annul miracles. It penetrates the fog around them; it brings them out of darkness into the light.

Victor Zuckerkandl
Sound and Symbol p.6

Abstract

‘The young Irish person has the worst of all European musical “worlds”’. This seminal statement was discovered to be symptomatic of a general malaise. The Music Education National Debate (MEND 1994-1996) was a three-phase response to *Deaf Ears?*, the report from which the above statement was taken. The eventual aim was to set up a forum for music education which would systematically address the difficulties in Ireland. The scope of MEND was, thus, general, *ab initio*. Its progress was, however, inhibited by a specific concern, which was fundamental to the whole process of reform. It soon became apparent that consensus on a philosophy of music education to inform evolving strategies would be a *sine qua non*. Coincidentally, this was a time of debacle in the global field, instanced by the publication of a ‘new’ philosophy of music education (David Elliott’s *Music Matters* [1995]) which threw down the gauntlet to the undisputed classic - Reimer’s *A Philosophy of Music Education* [1970/1989]. This challenge amounted to a veritable counterposition and demanded a separate, albeit derivative, study before the MEND Report could be completed. This study was to become the substance of this thesis.

The aim of this work is to analyse these polar philosophies with a view to reconciling them. Beginning with some commonly held values about music education, the relevance of American music education practice to a wide range of global systems is suggested. The dominance of a western art (music) mentality is called into question by giving prominence to multiculturalism and popular music. Music Education as Aesthetic Education (Reimer) is compared with the praxial approach (Elliott). They yielded to rationalization, albeit posing residual questions of balance, relevance, and time constraints within the curriculum. The indispensability of performance and listening as a complementary pair is re-established. The ascendancy of artistic criteria in defining the music programme is affirmed. Finally the failure of the universal philosophy hypothesis is redeemed by sketching the compromises necessary to convert it to the adaptability of the contextual idea, leading the study to a conclusion of general, rather than specific, application.

Keywords

Music education; Music listening; Music performance; Music curriculum; Philosophy; Aesthetics; Contextualism; Multiculturalism; Ireland; USA.

Dedication

For a life in music together I gratefully dedicate my work to

My wife, Ann, and children, Aisling, Paul and Ann.

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To the participants of all nationalities at MEND, and to all who hold music and music education dear, be assured that this is your book too.

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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

APA	The (National) Academy for the Performing Arts
DIT	Dublin Institute of Technology
ISME	International Society for Music Education
ITM	Irish Traditional Music
LC	Leaving Certificate
MC	Multiculturalism
MEAE	Music Education as Aesthetic Education
MENC	The Music Educators' National Conference (US)
MEND	The Music Education National Debate (Ireland)
MM	Music Matters: A New Philosophy of Music Education (D Elliott)
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (Ireland)
RIAM	Royal Irish Academy of Music
TCD	Trinity College Dublin
WAM	Western Art Music