

1 Background to the Study

1.1 Personal Motivation

In 1985 the Arts Council (of Ireland) commissioned a Report on the state of music education in Irish schools. The seminal finding of the Report (*Deaf Ears?* [Herron])¹ was that ‘the young Irish person has the worst of all European musical “worlds”’. Ireland’s **Music Education National Debate** (MEND) (1994-1996), which I proposed as a response, has been a professionally rewarding project. That, in itself, was, I suggest, evidence of motivation to reform. I am grateful to Dr Brendan Goldsmith, President of Dublin Institute of Technology, for the invitation to have been the sole co-ordinator of MEND. The period since the conclusion of its public phase has been, for me, a time of deep thought. I have wrestled with the copious material it generated, trying to extract some useful parameters to point a way forward in Irish music education. I have attempted, through the agency of the MEND initiative, to define and engage with the Irish music education dilemma² by comparing and contrasting it with the wider contexts of global concerns. A core issue evolved: the need to analyse and rationalize philosophies of music education which seemed to be in direct conflict. The philosophies of David Elliott and Bennett Reimer typified the challenge. I have been highly motivated to identify and affirm some of the realities that must be grasped before reform can be rewarded with lasting success. I therefore saw the focus of my motivation as attempting to reconcile these apparently polar philosophical positions.

1.2 Research Question

To what extent is it possible to rationalize, reconcile, contextualise and apply rival global philosophies of music education, in particular those of David Elliott and Bennett Reimer which, overtly or otherwise, lay claim to a universality which their polar positions vis-à-vis one another seem to call into question?

¹ Donald Herron, *Deaf Ears?: A Report on the Provision of Music Education in Irish Schools*, Dublin, 1985, The Arts Council.

² An itemized list of concerns in Irish music education is given in 6.7.9.

1.3 Hypothesis

It is possible to find a satisfactory level of accommodation between the dissonances and apparent contradictions in current authoritative and highly respected philosophical statements on music education to facilitate effective application in their reconciled format.

1.4 Aim of the Study

This thesis aims to describe the work of MEND and to indicate how it has made possible, through the subsequent reconciliation of rival philosophies of music education, the development of a general yet contextualised philosophy of music education and the definition of key parameters for its implementation.

There are two separate, though cognate, strands in this thesis. In attempting to provide guidelines for the future of music education in Ireland, which was the primary objective of, and need for, MEND itself, a second concern of even more fundamental significance was generated. It was felt that recommendations would have to be anchored by stable philosophical underpinning.³ This plan was inhibited, if not rendered impossible, by the emergence of a 'new' philosophy of music education - David Elliott's *Music Matters* (1995). This publicly disputed the very essentials of Bennett Reimer's *A Philosophy of Music Education* (1970/1989) - a veritable classic which had remained unchallenged for a quarter of a century. Clearly this *cause célèbre* had to be confronted and rationalized. This secondary strand drew away from MEND itself as a discrete study worthy of independent treatment in the context of its applicability to a wider field of influence than that defined by the Irish scenario. The documentation of this line of enquiry became the highlighted subject matter of this thesis, although the two topics remain interpenetrated.

1.5 Research Methodology

The Methodology for MEND, and as it relates to this thesis, is comprehensively laid out in Section 10 of the MEND Report (*q.v.*). In summary it comprises:

³ MEND was a direct response to the alarming conclusions of the *Deaf Ears?* Report. The plausibility of MEND Recommendations hung on the derivation of a workable philosophy of music education. But MEND highlighted major conflict in philosophical pronouncements, especially so as a result of the personal contributions of Elliott and Reimer. The philosophical enquiry and MEND outcomes are therefore inseparably interpenetrated in a theory/practice relationship.

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- An open forum debate, amongst the widest possible spectrum of Irish Music Education specialists, to formulate an agenda for the conduct of the research.
- Three conferences, strategically timed within a two-year period, to encourage and facilitate the participation of Irish and internationally renowned music educators.

Each conference was to comprise scholarly presentations and derivative open forum debates with direct relevance to the agreed agenda.

The proceedings were to be recorded and documented for subsequent analysis

The methodology for this thesis, derived from the MEND research project, is:

- To extract a suitable strand, from the MEND Initiative, which would encapsulate the derived essence of the research outcomes. This crystallized around the philosophical dilemma of having two rationales (those of David Elliott and Bennett Reimer) which appeared, publicly, to be in direct conflict, calling for reconciliation.
- To review a substantial corpus of relevant literature, first to re-establish the salient points of disagreement and, then, to essay the task of rationalization.
- To remove the outcomes from the ambit of theory and mere scholarly pronouncements, as a secondary, though germane, strand; to hold the rationalized material up to the template of a national system of music education (in Ireland), chosen to provide a context to test the applicability of the reconciled stances.
- To test the aspirations towards universality of the philosophies of Elliott and Reimer. In the event of failure of the universality hypothesis, to establish the degree of accommodation required satisfactorily to approximate to the universality aspiration. The level of compatibility of any derived rationale with classical philosophical stances is also to be investigated with a view to matching current expectations from formal music education.

1.6 Notes to the Reader

The reader should note that the subject matter of this thesis is a by-product from a much more extensive analysis (MEND) of problems in the Irish music education system. It thus, initially, proceeds from the general to the specific, in addressing a particular obstacle to the evolution of a strategy of reform.

MEND generated an enormous amount of documentation, not least from the approximately 70 lectures and debates, of which the initiative itself was comprised. The meticulously reported proceedings, together with the documents and secondary source materials (Elliott/ Reimer) associated with the global extension of the MEND enquiry, form the main literature on which the thesis relies. This is

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contained in the MEND Report (mend1.0pdf September 2001; last revision 13 02 04) which is available in CD-ROM form (publication of main text in hard copy pending [Spring 2004]). The appendices of the report (CD-ROM) contain all the transcripts of the lectures/presentations and of the independent reports of debates, together with copies (printed by permission) of all the secondary sources. The content of the CD-ROM, which accompanies the thesis, is considered quintessential to the appreciation of the ramifications of the exchanges which became the focus of this thesis. It is considered important that the reader should have ready access, not only to the material itself but, initially, to title information; this is listed both numerically and in alphabetical order (by author's name) in the List of Sources (Sources Part 1).

Search Mechanisms

The MEND Report (CD-ROM version) is the definitive source for all information on Presentations and Debates.

The Table of Contents is provided with Hyperlinks to enable the items listed to be opened immediately.

Section 17 has a list of Key Concepts for coarse searching for topics.

Section 18 (TOC) may then be used to locate the analysis of the topic chosen.

Section 21 (Appendix) gives an even finer breakdown of the topics into lectures, debates and coding numbers, and may be used to open individual analytical items.

Section 15 (tables) provides further details of lectures and debates with the names of chairpersons, presenters, reporters, panel members and coding numbers.

Documentation is divided into Primary Sources and Analysis.

To open primary source material use the name of any person associated with that session (Tables Section 15). Go to supdocs.pdf and click on that name and session as instructed. The document will open.

To open the Analysis (in Section 18) of any session, if you know the title or code number of that session (available from Section 15) go to Section 21, scroll down and then click on the session and it will open.

If you have a contributor's name go to supdocs.pdf and click on that name for Primary Source document.

If you have a Document number go to docs folder and click on the number for Primary Source document.

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If you have a code Number for a session go to Section 21, scroll down and click appropriately for Analysis.

If you have the title of a session go to Section 21, scroll down and click on the title for Analysis.

The Analytical section within the MEND Report gives cross referencing to the Primary Source, which may then be opened by going to docs.

References, Footnotes and Assertive Language

The footnotes are not the only corroborative means of supporting statements made in the thesis. There is also a system of cross-referencing within the text. This usually refers to a MEND Document (with a number; see above) which may then be consulted readily in the CD-ROM.

It should be remembered that the MEND Initiative was a very public affair. Understandings of the reality of particular situations affecting music education in Ireland came about in general discussion and by consensus, at the debate sessions. These understandings, together with reliably-based but unpublished statistics, will have formed the basis for any assertive statements in the thesis which may seem to lack corroboration.

1.7 Delimitations of the Study

This thesis, which began as a specific analysis of apparently conflicting philosophies of music education, has been a by-product of the MEND Initiative, which was general in scope. Its field of enquiry may therefore seem to be delimited. Its specificity, however, became tendentious in itself as the analysis proceeded. In examining the ‘universal philosophy of music’ hypothesis, a derivative of the main hypothesis, a metamorphosis occurred towards a much more adaptable model. Contextuality, which was eventually to evolve as an arguably acceptable compromise position to replace universality, is proposed as a paradigm for general application, as much to other systems of music education as to the Irish dispensation.

1.8 Value of the study

The research findings of MEND, as a report in the public domain, were intended to be directed towards the widest possible audience of those involved or interested in the future of music education in Ireland (and elsewhere). Specific targets were:

- The main sponsor, the Dublin Institute of Technology, the largest third-level education complex in Ireland. The DIT was also the largest single provider of music education in the state. The urgency of the targeting was sharpened by a growing awareness, at the time, of waning interest (still a concern in 2004), at higher management levels, by DIT in supporting reform in music education in Ireland.
- The Irish Government and, in particular, the official strategists (e.g. the Dept of Education and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment) influencing curriculum reform. At a more pragmatic level it was intended that the research would provide the philosophical underpinning for any proposals for reform going to Government, from whatever source. This latter aspiration has been vindicated in that the only two campaigns mounted since MEND have used the report (by request) to bolster their case. This has been notable in the case of the Music Network report (on the provision of music schools country-wide, published in March 2003 [see MEND 609]) commissioned by Government.
- The music education research lobby. The MEND Report (and by implication in its doctoral thesis format) is intended as an indispensable (Irish-based) enchiridion/resource document for the growing new generation of researchers both in Ireland and elsewhere.

1.9 Layout of the Study

The writer supports eclecticism (implying the optimization of selected sources of influence) in music education and has a lively personal interest in the areas of theory and academic music, musicology, performance, and education. As the director of a large music performance-based school in Ireland, it might have seemed unusual that he should take on the mission of contributing actively to the campaign for the amelioration of *general* music education. Yet the seminal finding of the *Deaf Ears?* Report that 'the young Irish person has the worst of all European musical "worlds"' became for him an epochal revelation, which was to change his whole conception of what priorities in music education should be, if it is to touch all. It is no exaggeration to claim that it changed his life in a very significant way. The MEND Initiative, the response to *Deaf Ears?*, was born; its scope was to occupy the following 18 years. In spite of a carefully planned course to investigate the situation in Ireland, with specific attention to the fundamental premise that school music education was the core around which the enterprise would stand or fall (see Final Recommendations), there were, nevertheless, uncharted

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waters to be navigated. If theory and practice were to be complementary, and if thought were to precede action, it seemed logical that philosophy should first be invoked, and respected stances critically examined to inform the way forward. Philosophy could lead to curriculum in its promulgated, implemented and delivered forms; that is the ideal.

The analysis of the documentation arising from the events of MEND was interrupted at the climactic second phase by the discovery that even in the area of philosophy there were, notably two, important counterpositions that were, at least on a superficial appraisal, polar in tendency. They were those of David Elliott (*MM*, 1995) and Bennett Reimer (*A Philosophy*, 1970/89). Since these purported to take the philosophy of music from its innocuous stage, as pure theorizing to be embraced or rejected at will, to the crucial stage of application in education, they could not be ignored (and would have to be rationalized) if the intent of the MEND Initiative was to be convincingly realized from its basic building block.

It occurred to the writer that a second stream of enquiry, of equal importance to the first but complementary to it, might be undertaken; this was to confront the discipline of music education philosophy with a view to restoring its credibility, threatened by this much publicized and destabilizing disagreement on issues of fundamental import. Thus the two strands of this thesis came about. It not only developed into an exercise in reconciling theory with practice, in terms of plausibility, feasibility, relevance, balance and time management, but it evolved towards the eventual aspiration of the utopian universal philosophy to inform curriculum and its aspirational outcomes. The possibility of the reconciliation of rival philosophies and their adaptability to some formula which accommodated universality were, of course, hypothetical, becoming, as such, the challenge of this thesis.

This challenge is dealt with in Chapters 1 and 2. In Chapter 3 it is necessary to give details of the MEND Initiative itself, to add focus to what follows. Chapter 4 introduces the dissonance of the conflicting philosophies of Elliott and Reimer; these were to have a crucial impact on the progress to the MEND recommendations. The Analysis in Chapter 5 examines a wide sampling of the literature dealing with the Elliott/Reimer case. In particular, the confrontational documented exchanges between them, in the form of Reimer's review of *MM* and Elliott's rebuttal, proved an invaluable resource in attempting reconciliation. Chapter 6 deals with the rationalization from a number of stances. It should be remembered that in the final chapter it is necessary to keep in mind the double-stranded nature of this enquiry. Chapter 7 therefore presents Findings and Recommendations specific to MEND itself, the Irish dispensation being chosen as the template of applicability for the reconciled philosophies; the

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Overall Conclusions then deal with the plausibility of the Contextualism idea as an approach to universalism, leading to Final Recommendations from the study.

In summary, then, the *Deaf Ears?* Report alerted Irish musicians to a malaise; the MEND Initiative was set up to respond to that. The application of the philosophy of music to music education became a prime *a priori* target for enquiry. The resulting discovery of philosophies in fundamental disagreement challenged the writer not only to essay reconciliation but further, to metamorphose the rationalization into a new, more benign and adaptable approach to music education in the new millennium - an approach in which inclusivity, although it might entail compromise, would heighten the sense of responsibility to uphold the highest aims for music in education and as a human pursuit. In this, music considered as art, including its moral/ethic dimension, proved to be a critical dimension in the dialectic. The idealistic marrying of theory with practice - the interrelationship of an enabling philosophy with its enactment - was meticulously targeted as a robust unifying idea in the unfolding of the thesis. This culminated in Findings which evolved from the double targeting, Recommendations for a contextual curriculum, and a proposal (with separate recommendations) that the idea of Contextuality is a highly adaptable approach to music education which conforms to the aspiration of universality and invites further research.