

4 The Emergence of Philosophies in Conflict

As the title suggests, this chapter marks a crucial transition point: the focus changes from general concerns about the malaise in Irish education (the main strand of MEND itself [see 1.4 Aim of Study]) to its root causes, treated in philosophical terms (the secondary strand). It marks, too, a change in emphasis of the respective strand roles in this thesis. In other words, the interpenetration of the Irish ‘context’ with identified philosophical positions in conflict demands, predictably, that they be rationalized, to find a route around a debilitating impasse. It is necessary to present a shortened version of MEND discoveries in this chapter in order to show the logic of this transition.

MEND concerns were foreshadowed in its Agenda. From the most cursory examination it can be asserted that its content forms a unique gestalt, related to but different from the collective problems of other systems. The gestalt may be termed the ‘context’ of Irish music education. It gathers together a variety of problems related to balance, relevance and time management in the curriculum; the bicultural/multicultural issue; music as art; the conceptual confusion about performance; dichotomies and discontinuities in the system including the ‘pop’/high culture divide²⁹; the relevance of American practice ... and so on.

It was inevitable that a philosophical enquiry would be seen as offering a rationalization yielding the parameters of a dependable and balanced curriculum. It came as no surprise that the global philosophical field was, coincidentally, seriously dichotomized into seemingly incompatible positions of asserted mutual exclusivity. The gravity of this discovery halted, as it compromised, the MEND analysis. A satisfactory outcome could not be envisaged without plausible reconciliation of these rival stances, both of which engaged with the components of the Irish gestalt, though not specifically.

The remaining chapters move climactically from the review and analysis of the literature defining the counterpositions, to their reconciliation, their applicability to the context of Irish music education and to a definition of how the aspiration towards universality in music education philosophy might be met.

²⁹ It should be noted that in listing the documentation used for the review of literature (footnote to 5.1) it comprised more than the philosophies of Elliott and Reimer as offered in their respective books (*MM* and *A Philosophy of Music Education*). In fact, the Elliott/Reimer exchange in the Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education, and the tripartite documentation, Elliott/Reimer/White, in the College Symposium are, if anything, more crucial and searching as far as the arguments presented in the thesis are concerned. Harry White’s paper (A book of manners in the wilderness [MEND 308]), which was exhaustively reviewed in the MEND Report, is also discussed thoroughly in the thesis, together with the responses from Elliott and Reimer (5.1 and 5.2). In all of these five documents the ‘pop’/high culture divide features prominently. Since the applicability of the ‘reconciled’ philosophies is seen by the author as at issue (the two-stranded approach), curriculum, syllabus (literature selection) and, indeed, valuing and judgement (the relevance of the ‘music as art’ approach) come into play. The ‘pop’/high culture divide is less relevant to a philosophy of music than to a philosophy of music education, which, as the author suggests, is concerned with applied philosophy.

4.1 Key Concepts

Because of the streaming of the MEND debates, it would not have been possible for anyone to have participated in the entire proceedings. With a small number of exceptions³⁰, hard copies of all the material generated by MEND were made available to the writer. In attempting to analyse this wealth of documentation in a manner which would be accessible to a reader with specific interests, the topics treated were segregated into categories. These were made to correspond with the Agenda under its eight headings. Each heading was then subdivided to embody a number of evocative key concepts drawn generally from the titles of the formal presentations and the debates themselves. Each of these key concepts is considered separately and any implicit or overt recommendations resulting from the proceedings are added at the end of each analytical treatment. The numbering is from the MEND Report, Section 18 (see also Notes to the Reader 1.6).

18.1 Agenda I. Philosophy of Music Education

- 18.1.1 Overview of Music Education Philosophy.
- 18.1.2 Contextual Philosophy.
- 18.1.3 Composing (Creativity): Performing: Listening.
- 18.1.4 Time Management.
- 18.1.5 Dichotomy.

18.2 Agenda II. State of Music Education in Ireland.

- 18.2.1 General Provision.
- 18.2.2 Music in the Community.³¹
- 18.2.3 Private Enterprise and Semi-State Provision.
- 18.2.4 Materials for Music Education.

18.3 Agenda III. Continuum in Music Education.

³⁰ In the case of a small number of debates, for which the gathering subdivided into interest groups, relocated away from the main auditorium, the recording facilities are known to have failed to produce audible tapes. This was particularly troublesome during Phase III. However, the material available, exclusive of these lacunas, is considered to be generally adequate for the analysis. It should be remembered that the formal presentations and the debates were very closely related in thematic relevance.

³¹ References to community music (in Ireland) in this thesis are to music as experienced outside the school ambience. This gives rise to the well-recognized dichotomy which separates the traditional emphasis on western art music, in education, from public taste, which tends more towards popular forms. The need to address this anomaly is one of Reimer's three dilemmas (see *Through Irish Eyes* [MEND 402]). As such it is a context of Irish music education.

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18.4 Agenda IV. Performance.

18.4.1 Performance and Elitism.

18.4.2 Specialization.

18.4.3 Music Schools.

18.4.4 Performance in Third Level.

18.4.5 Professional Training in Performance (incl. Academy of the Performing Arts).

18.5 Agenda V. Assessment.

18.5.1 General Comments on Assessment.

18.5.2 Assessment in the National Curriculum.

18.5.3 The Leaving Certificate Crisis.

18.5.4 National Standards (US).

18.6 Agenda VI. National Culture Biculturalism versus Multiculturalism.

18.7 Agenda VII. Music Education at Third Level.

18.7.1 Options.

18.7.2 Professional Training.

18.7.3 Teacher Training.

18.7.4 The Conservatoire Aspiration (Academy of the Performing Arts).

18.8 Agenda VIII. Forum for Music Education.

4.2 Overview

It was anticipated by the organizers of MEND that if the initiative was well attended by the teaching profession, their day-to-day concerns would dominate the discussions at Phase I; the proceedings were tailored to allow this to happen. It was predicted that there would, however, be many philosophical resonances in expressed wishes eventually to confront the fundamental parameters underlying difficulties rather than to be satisfied just with identifying them or with proposing random short-term solutions.

Thus the field of philosophical thought, and the insecurity of Irish educators in relation to it, was invoked and loomed large in the collective mentality as it was articulated at Phase I. But it is all too easy for practitioners to be suspicious or even dismissive of scholarly pursuits which they perceive to be remote from the cutting-edge of the class situation or the individual lesson. The claim that music was there before musicology, and that music education existed long before its multifarious possibilities were charted and exhaustively analysed by philosophers keen to pronounce on the subject, can easily lead to the spurious assumption that music and music education can exist and survive well enough without such scholarly inputs. As it transpired, the issue of philosophy in general, and performance in particular, transmuted the MEND *mise-en-scène* into a battleground where the first skirmishes of a much more global encounter were engaged in; two titans - Bennett Reimer, the reigning champion, so to speak, and David Elliott, the pretender - mounted the stage. Nor was this a coincidence. Elliott's iconoclastic book had just been published, following a series of well-aired 'trailers' indicating that it was going to throw down the gauntlet to the revered wisdom of Reimer, which had dominated the scene, virtually without challenge, for a quarter of a century.

But it was not merely the eminence of the participants that aroused interest. It was rather that performance was such a burning issue in Irish music education on a variety of aspects - availability, accessibility, continuity and affordability in education; its presence or otherwise in schools; the notion of élitism in relation to it; standard; assessment ... and so forth - that the idea of its new claims to dominance as a topic on the first-world stage was intriguing. Although the high profile publicity given to this struggle was played down by several of the visiting specialists, its significance for Ireland, in focusing on philosophy and performance, each *per se*, should not, in the writers' view, be underestimated. When this proximity debate (for the two never did engage in face to face disputation) was enlivened by Harry White's melodramatic intervention at Stage III (Ref. III P viii; Document 308), it had already produced a corpus of literature and this was further expanded in a way which now offers valuable scope to probe these two issues (philosophy and performance) and others in their Irish context. In addition there was the contribution of Richard Colwell in acting as the moderator of the whole international conference (MEND Phase II), apart from offering his own deeply penetrating papers (Documents 209a and 209b), which were also a fund of philosophical wisdom.

4.3 Introduction to the Elliott/Reimer Case

Why might it be helpful to analyse rationales which are known to be so publicly polarized? Who can arbitrate between them? How can they be made to converge in a way which is worthwhile? These questions would acquire more urgency if it were hinted that one more than another is now, arguably, a preferred approach to general education in Ireland, albeit in its own characteristic guise. Have we

made the right choices? Are these the only choices available to us? What are the possibilities for eclecticism? The International Society for Music Education engaged this same problem when it invited Bennett Reimer to give a paper entitled *Should there be a universal philosophy of music education?* at its biennial conference held in Amsterdam in 1996, only months after MEND Phase II. ‘No such universal philosophy of music has been articulated and has been recognized by the world’s music educators to be universally acceptable. ... Lacking such a philosophy, claims for the universality of music have no firm foundation. Yet the intuition that there is, indeed, a universal dimension of music education remains persuasive or at least attractive’.³²

Already the notion of flexibility is being predicated; in other words, if the strategies of music education could be adaptable to their contextual demands, areas of disagreement might be reconciled, and universals could be applied without being threatened or invalidated by circumstances. In Ireland, to name but two burning questions, the place of performance in music education, and the degree or definition of multiculturalism that we apply to our endeavours, are two areas that need to engage flexibly with philosophies that address these areas, as most philosophies will and must, if they are not to appear bland and diffident in the face of these supremely challenging issues.

4.4 Reimer’s Universal Philosophy of Music Education (*Should there be a Universal Philosophy of Music Education?*)

In this epochal paper³³, *Should there be a Universal Philosophy of Music*, Reimer, not without celebrating his own idea that philosophy is itself an ever-changing discipline, constantly responding to fertile ideas and renewing itself, laid out a most compelling contemporary vision of the many ways in which philosophy of music can work, the options that are available within the wider matrix of possibilities, and their interrelational (in)compatibilities. Coming from the acknowledged doyen in the field, this has profound implications for all thinkers about music and music education. The theorizing in this paper is admirably succinct and provocatively innovative. In brief, Reimer notes four philosophical approaches, condensing the traditional triptych of Formalism, Referentialism and Expressionism into the first two of these, and adding Praxialism and Contextualism; this last, almost by its very name, suggests the sought-after multi-adaptable model, if its fructifying interconnection with the other three in a balanced way (the *gestalt*) is also accepted and respected.

³² Abstract of paper by Bennett Reimer, *Should there be a universal philosophy of music education?*, delivered in Amsterdam in July 1996 (International Journal of Music Education Conference Edition No 29 1997), 4-20.

³³ Note that much of the précis draw, verbatim, from Reimer’s ISME paper, *Should there be a Universal Philosophy of Music*, read in Amsterdam in 1996.

The writer contends that this paper from Reimer's pen should be essential reading for all musicians, but especially for those who have any involvement in the pedagogical field. It is an impressively craftsmanlike assembly of the facts of music education that need to be correlated to make any sense of such a seemingly incompatible array of stances, all of which lead to specific but diverse practices within the global community. Even when Reimer constrains his still unrefined model of a universal philosophy (based on a co-existing relationship between the non-extremist norms of yet potentially dogmatic positions) to search for 'what is common at the level of our deepest values and fundamental beliefs', he does not lose contact with the reader. He makes a compelling case for understanding that ultimate involvement in the mystery of music which underlines its universality, and reconciles differences, whether music is experienced as 'light-hearted and momentary entertainment of modest proportions, or understood to offer the deepest, most profound satisfactions and meanings available to *homo sapiens*'.

4.5 Commonly-held Values about Music Education (Reimer)

Reimer has a three-tiered approach. The first is to suggest a range of commonly-held values about music. These are:

1. That music is a positive force in life.
2. That music and musical learning are worthy of support.
3. That there should be access, typically by the young, to music through education.
4. That comprehensiveness in music education (as for example the inclusion of offerings from a range of cultures) is a desirable goal; this is perhaps the most controversial of Reimer's claims (see MEND Report 17. 13. 2).
5. That support for music education should come from the culture.
6. That music education should be continuous and systematic.
7. That talent must be selectively nurtured without negating the aspiration of 'music for all'.

Note that 2 and 5 (above) are not the same.

This list of values, even allowing for differences of opinion in some areas, leads Reimer to the question as to 'Why, exactly, is music positive for people, or essential for people?' This is the point at which philosophical stances become important. The most difficult challenge to philosophy is in attempting to understand and provide principles for how humans can lead more fulfilling lives. It is tied into valuing, and must explain, in relation to music and music education, what their nature and

most significant values are. The idea that a universal philosophy may be a questionable ideal is not, in Reimer's view, persuasive enough to cause philosophers to retreat from trying to define its commanding parameters. 'We want to make ... a coherent whole, because we ourselves rejoice in the contemplation of a unity. Man loves unities'.³⁴

4.6 Four Philosophical Positions

Reimer's second tier comprises a brief treatment of four philosophical positions that must be accommodated and reconciled within a *Gesamtphilosophie* before testing its canons in the crucible of human experience. This last challenge is a highly cerebral one. However, Reimer's insights into the differences and possible interactions between the component stances of the gestalt philosophy are, at a pragmatic level, most valuable as outstandingly user-friendly guidelines for bilateral testing of embryo strategies and practices against the spectrum of possible philosophical underpinnings. The philosophical stances explored are Formalism, Praxialism, Referentialism and Contextualism.

4.6.1 Formalism

Formalism, Reimer explains, emphasizes the *products* of musical creativity as being the key component in understanding what music is and does, and why it should be valued. Music is the making of particular kinds of events, different from all other events because they exist to do the particular thing music does - to create, with sounds, significant or intrinsically meaningful *forms*, embodying sets of interrelations capable of yielding musical responses by those able to be engaged appropriately with them.

Pure Formalism insists that the experience of art is essentially unconnected to *all* other life experiences. These *aesthetic* experiences are dependent for their occurrence and enjoyment on inherent talent and/or concentrated education. It is this approach to aesthetics which is so vulnerable to attack from more liberal philosophies. Formalism may be associated with a focus on the great works of art as exemplars of artistic form suitable for study; it supports talent education, attempting to elevate, but not without pejorative insinuations, the taste of the masses for better listening; it recognizes and condones the high/mass dichotomy as an irreconcilable reality.

Reimer mitigates extreme Formalism by suggesting that intrinsically significant forms *musically* created, albeit explicable as to their total meaning by other philosophical approaches, can still be

³⁴ Carlos Chavez, *Musical Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961), 28.

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construed as supporting Formalism. Clearly, however, Formalism is typically implacable in its judgements and exclusivist too, and establishes hierarchies in which *optimal experiences* are reserved for the few. Its tenets, emphasizing the craft of music-making, must nevertheless be included as a force in the gestalt.

4.6.2 Praxialism

Praxialism, in contrast to Formalism, emphasizes the doing, the acting, the creating involved in music as being the essence of music. The products of the process are decidedly secondary. Music should be construed as a verb - 'musicing' to use Elliott's term. Reimer warns, as he does in relation to Formalism, against fundamentalist tendencies. His interpretation of the approach to Praxialism espoused by David Elliott is that it is too extreme and doctrinaire, too radical in its overwhelming focus on process. The process is paramount, and he believes that Elliott concentrates exclusively on performance as the major goal, purpose and value of music and music education.

Reimer establishes such a case for the inseparability of product and process that it might have been more prudent not to have attempted to isolate them in the first place. 'Formalism, when understood as calling attention to the products created by musical processes and how these products can be experienced, and praxialism, when understood as calling attention to the processes by which musical products come into being and are shared, are not, except in their extremist versions, incompatible. Indeed, music cannot exist without products and processes as completely interdependent.' It seems that praxialism, thus emaciated by dependence, would have been better served as an adjunct to product or as being seen as a functional *context* of 'musicing'. But Reimer's classification is not without plausibility, particularly as he eventually includes praxialism, however conceptualized, as a necessary though insufficient component of the gestalt.

4.6.3 Referentialism

Bennett Reimer's thesis about a universal philosophy of music education cannot be easily construed as propaganda for his own philosophical position as expounded between 1970 and 1989, the dates of publication and revision of his own book. Treatment of the aesthetic idea, with which his name has been associated as being a staunch proponent, if not the architect, of the so-called Music Education as Aesthetic Education (MEAE) Movement in the US, appears only in the section dealing with fundamentalist Formalism - an unlikely ambience for Reimer philosophy. And its greatly mollified

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and much more adaptable version, known generally as Absolute Expressionism,³⁵ is nowhere to be found, except by implication, but is seemingly concealed in the section dealing with Referentialism.³⁶ It is here that Reimer is, in the writer's view, at his most subtle and brilliant; and his detachment is singularly effective in enabling him, with consummate clarity, to classify a considerable array of stances under one species. This is peerless philosophizing. He begins with the innocuous claim that 'under the heading of Referentialism I mean to include a variety of positions about the essential nature and value of music and music education different from those focusing on either music as product or as process'.

Again borrowing copiously from Reimer's succinctness of exposition³⁷, 'in Referentialism the values of music are gained less from conceiving music as significant form or significant action than from conceiving it as a powerful instrumentality for achieving values to which music can lead us. The referentialist listener attends to the sounds being heard (the product) and to the sounds as they are made (the process), with the assumption that those sounds contain a message or messages not unlike those communicated by the sounds of language. 'Musical sounds, like words, refer. They point outside themselves to meanings, images, ideas, emotions [note that Reimer uses the word emotion, which is not aesthetic], descriptions of places, things, people and so forth' (MEND 401, 7). [In] (m)usic without words more imagination has to be exerted to locate and identify the meanings, ... the listener must 'interpret' its meaning by seeking a variety of clues, inside the music. Referentialism proposes that musical experience be conceived as the recognition of such meanings and their incorporation as an essential ingredient in one's experience. Music is a particular way in which 'communication' occurs, the language model of communication being the paradigm.'

Since Reimer, in first and correctly defining philosophy as a search for nature, meaning and value (*inter alia*), is subsequently attempting to evolve to a universal philosophy, he scrupulously decides that extrinsic values cannot be ignored. Reimer articulates his awareness and concern here that, by

³⁵ This interpretation of the most natural placing of Reimer's own stance is purely authorial and does not in any way affect the line of reasoning adopted in the universal philosophy essay. It is hoped that Bennett Reimer may concede that this reading is possible. In relation to Formalism he claims that '[at] one end of the continuum the focus on formed products can be so narrow as to exclude many important dimensions of music not entirely attributable to the form of musical works. At the other end of the continuum formed sounds continue to be understood to be an essential component of music, but additional dimensions, such as represented by the three other positions I will explain [Praxialism, Referentialism and Contextualism], are seen to be important in establishing the nature of music as a way of bringing a particular kind of meaning into being through intrinsically significant forms musically created'. The writer sees this as a suggestion that the symbolic nature of music, especially in relation to the 'forms of feeling', to use a Langerian phrase, is a relevant value which, nevertheless, fits better in a referential than in a formal sense (MEND 401, 7).

³⁶ Reimer's reference on p 23 (as published) of the Universality essay could, however, lead to a different view. Here he refers back to Formalism: 'Musical products, and their intrinsically *expressed* (writer's italics) or significant forms, on which formalism focuses, always exist in the context of particular cultures and times, so they are contextualized by necessity' (MEND Document 401, 8).

³⁷ As already acknowledged, much of this précis is drawn verbatim from Reimer's Amsterdam paper.

recognizing a plethora of non-musical results (such as growth in self-discipline and self-esteem, optimal experience and ‘flow’) from musical activities as referential values, he is rendering music vulnerable to being rivalled or supplanted by other occupations offering the same extrinsic benefits, thus partially disabling a purer philosophy from pursuing the more refined ideals of *sui generis* worth. But, it seems that political correctness does enjoin caution, prudence and inclusiveness. So music’s instrumental utility is, rather uncomfortably, included under a referentialist view of its value.³⁸

4.6.4 Contextualism

The boldest step in Reimer’s exposé of a fully adaptable philosophy is to construct the backdrop against which the three approaches (Formalism, Praxialism and Referentialism) can engage, individually, interdependently and collectively with the essentially human milieu they purport to empower and explain. It was not a simple matter to envision the binding force of *context*, in which a *Gestalt* psychology creates, from the interactions between the components themselves and with their contexts, a new dimension in which the result is greater than the sum of the parts; the interesting correlation established between the workings of the philosophy of music education and those of music itself is elegantly conceived.

4.7 Functional/Utilitarian approaches to Music Education

Imaginative approaches to music education theory representing significant departures from the currently controversial ones of Elliott and Reimer are extant, notably and typically those of Merriam and Fowler (1996), stressing the *functions* of music. Although these may stray at times from the purer motives that might be more appropriately attributed to the modified versions of Formalism, they are very much concerned with that vital link between music and life as lived, from its most mundane and prosaic manifestations, through its pragmatism/utilitarianism and eventually to the upper reaches of optimal experience and to those all-too-rare instances of complete identification with the *sui generis* qualities of music. These approaches tie in very comfortably with the notion of context.

Contextualism stresses that the sociocultural functions of music are the focus of attention. Music is, first and foremost, a playing out of, or manifestation of, or aural portrayal of, the psychological, emotional, political and social forces of the human

³⁸ The range of inclusions, under the heading of Referentialism, resembles a *Gestalt* rather than a continuum. The highly aesthetic concept of Absolute Expressionism, with its subtle interplay of the artistic, craft, feelingful, mimetic, expressive and symbolic significance of human perception (the referent), on the one hand, is set side by side with such utilitarian considerations as the attainment of discipline, social skills ... self-growth, enjoyment, self-esteem and optimal experience on the other.

context in which it exists; ... it is the function music plays in cultural participation which most explains its nature and value. Music must be issues-orientated, value centred, sociologically and politically involved in the culture's ongoing life.³⁹

Reimer's ideas on Contextualism dovetail very well with his statement that the three commanding issues in current music education dialectic - multiculturalism, the high/mass culture dichotomy and performance training - are, precisely, both sociologically and politically involved in our culture's ongoing life.

In conclusion Reimer argues against the extremist rejection of the aesthetic ideal, a scenario in which 'music is whatever a culture's institutional policy-makers decide to call music'.⁴⁰ He proposes, rather, that a carefully constructed *Gestalt* philosophy, typically as he has attempted to construct one within the aspiration of universality, can guide us to a secure position where 'we can recognize the essentiality of context in our construals of what music is and does, while at the same time recognizing that what music is and does has to do with something identifiably musical.'⁴¹ Relinquishing his claim to have the last word, Reimer quotes Roger Scruton, the British aesthetician, in a passage of provocative relevance. '... the work of art is designed as the object of a certain response ... Responses depend upon prevailing psychological and social conditions. And if a response is to be significant to the person who feels it, it must bear some relation to his life as a whole: it must be part not only of his enjoyment, but also of his *concern*'.⁴² This all-embracing *aesthetic*, simply as a response to things perceived and intentionally value-free as enfranchising no particular stance to the exclusion of another, is a helpful way of rescuing the art work response from the realms of esotericism, and firmly establishing it as an almost domestic experience and resonance. In his *Universality* essay Reimer takes a giant step in seeking to accommodate the widest spectrum of musical experiences as worthy of consideration in the music education menu.

4.8 Bennett Reimer in Ireland

In a different forum⁴³ Bennett Reimer had this to say:

I feel more than just academically interested in the dilemmas facing Irish music education ... having found myself deeply immersed ... on Irish turf (an unlikely but welcome occurrence) but also, I admit, [with] a certain sense of frustration. This stems

³⁹ MEND Document 401, 8.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Roger Scruton, *Musical Understanding and Musical Culture* (in *What is Music?*, ed. Philip Alperson [New York; Haven]).

⁴³ Bennett Reimer, *Through Irish Eyes* (College Music Symposium, Journal of the College Music Society, Volume 38, 1998), 74.

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from the assumption on the part of the organizers of the (MEND) debate that voices from the U.S. could add something meaningful to it. ... Surely the glaring gaps between the two cultures were at least equally a limitation to what we could offer as our seeming similarities enabled us to be of some help.

In the face of this polite self-effacement, the decision to invite Bennett Reimer to Ireland should be explained and defended. Reimer has probably influenced more music educators than any other living music-orientated philosopher. His lecture in Dublin was, for many, a revealing introduction to one very sophisticated theory as to how music works as a human endeavour. The engagement with David Elliott, suitably distanced and muted by the logistics of the MEND timetable, added a fascinating if confusing dimension to the ongoing debate. The exposé in Amsterdam represented a giant step forward in significance for MEND outcomes. Reimer was already the richer for the Elliott challenge; his gift for clarity had an even sharper focus. He had moved on from his 1989 and MEND positions and was forging a new matrix of ideas in which he both questioned his own position and simultaneously reaffirmed it in a progressive way; the consequences for MEND analysis were spectacular in the clarification of the contextual approach. It may be claimed that, apart from the contextual ‘spin’, there was nothing new in the ideas propounded in Amsterdam, but it is in the synthesis that Reimer has scored his triumph, not for the corpus of his own evolving philosophy, but in the comprehensive philosophical formula advanced, a yardstick against which local strategies could be effectively measured for their contextual applicability.

In further defence of the MEND strategy to involve the American philosophical lobby in the debate, Ireland was ready for the novelty of personal inputs and further international fertilization, but from a pool not just defined by her British neighbours, whose thinking had dominated Irish music education from its inception in the nineteenth century and through both the colonial and post-colonial eras. As a cursory reference to the International Directory of Music and Music Education Institutions⁴⁴ will reveal, 40% of all third-level activity in music education in the world takes place in the North American continent.

4.9 The Irish Context

Ireland has a colonial, post-colonial and modern democratic history. In none of these epochs was a liberal attitude to arts education a feature. That ‘music is a positive force in life’ would certainly resonate in the Irish subconscious mentality as a commonly-held value. That music and music learning are worthy of support; that the support should come from the culture; that there should be access,

⁴⁴ See Graham Bartle, International Directory of Music and Music Education Institutions (Callaway International Resource Centre for Music Education [CIRCME], The University of Western Australia, 2000.

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typically by the young, to music through education; that it should be continuous and systematic - all of these are embraced in Ireland more in theory than in practice, arising from deep socio-economic and politico-economic forces. Here is quasi-virgin soil for the application of contextual philosophy to music education provision.

Comprehensiveness in music education as a desirable goal is perhaps the most controversial of Reimer's *values* (as he himself describes them) and is certainly a significant context in Irish strategy, especially as influenced by MEND. The topic is confronted systematically under the National Culture Sections (Agenda Item VI) throughout this report; it is a complex and ongoing question which is not helped or even clarified by the plethora of options and variants by which the global scene of music education in developed societies is currently being bombarded.

Ireland may be located on the ethnomusicological continuum as responding to ethnic, popular and art cultures, with certain hybrids also contributing to patterns of general consumption in music. But this classification is not entirely typical; nor are the details of its internal composition uniform or predictable. Because of the familiar norms of educational practice, the music and the so-called aesthetic ideals of western culture maintain dominance, though much-threatened, in educational thinking; this is being diluted by responses (to sometimes polar philosophical stances) that have, arguably, not been fully-informed as to their consequences. Ireland is in the throes of the high/mass culture dilemma and is no nearer to a solution of its devastating dichotomization of the school/community relationship than any other known system battling with the same dissonance. The ethnic/traditional seam is a healthy subculture of oral/aural/non-literate community-based activity; its classification as a subculture may seem pejorative, but is factual, since the music has not yet been fully normalized within the formal education system.

Since judicious infusion of educational practice with values drawn from the traditional subculture is a desideratum, because of its scale and its cultural significance, a genuine contextual problem arises. Should the implied biculturalism, however defined (trad/pop, trad/art, non-literate/literate and there are other versions), be allowed temporarily to arrest mainstream philosophical persuasions while Ireland comes to terms with its characteristic mix of cultures? In particular, can all the plausible advocacy for music of the world's cultures prevail in the face of such a major indigenous concern, and sweep aside its claim to prior solution? To invoke the Reimer treatment of contextual philosophy, the 'psychological, emotional, political and social forces of the human context in which music exists' find here a challenging subject for serious consideration, simply because it is 'issues-orientated, value centred, sociologically and politically involved in the culture's ongoing life'. As will be seen in the denouement, discussions at MEND and the subsequent analysis of the Proceedings were inconclusive

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in suggesting an immediate way forward on this issue of the choice between biculturalism and multiculturalism.

Talent Education, even in its more narrowly-construed sense of specialization in performance, which is the more usual instance of the need in young musicians, is another of Reimer's *commonly-held values* which must be confronted and accommodated in music education philosophy. It is, like the world-culture issue discussed above, highly controversial in the sense that it is invaginated in the whole performance issue. This is apparently too fundamental and intrinsic a concept in relation to music, and therefore might even be deemed to transcend the need for consideration as a commonly held value (that music should be performed!). It is nevertheless and surprisingly a major sticking point in inhibiting agreement in philosophical terms.

This is yet another issue in which there is undoubtedly an Irish context. The claims of American talent educators, as to provision in the US, may incite envy, but the Irish can learn much from the widespread confusion within American practice in relation to performance. Reimer boasts, with irrefutable justification, that 'at present, estimates of the number of students in middle schools and high schools taking advantage of our [US] unmatched generosity in this regard [performance training] range from 9-15%. I regard that as an achievement of which the profession deserves to be very proud. And the quality achieved by many young performance groups approaches the astonishingly good, especially given that most participants have no intention of pursuing performance as a career after high school.'⁴⁵

This sense of ownership of an idea must be viewed, initially, against Reimer's claim that Elliott is now insisting that *all* learners should perform, which is at the core of the Elliott/Reimer dispute, as indeed it isolates the whole problem with performance as a skill-based activity. And, around the same time, Reimer is recorded as saying that 'there seems to be, around the world, a growing recognition that we have served students poorly by being so narrowly focused on performing'.⁴⁶ Paul Lehman, speaking of performance in American *schools*, puts it pragmatically: 'vocal music gained universal acceptance in the 19th century because kids enjoyed singing. Instrumental music became a fixture in the early 20th century because kids enjoyed playing instruments. If it hadn't been for that emphasis on performance we wouldn't be in the strong position we're in today'.⁴⁷ Both claims are couched, and are further commented on in context by the authors, in terms that recommend a cautious attitude to claims for the manifold benefits of performance-rich programmes in schools. The contrast with Ireland could not be more provoking; but the enunciation of the problems of America, especially as to recent attempts to

⁴⁵ Bennett Reimer, *Through Irish Eyes*, Response to Harry White, *A book of manners in the wilderness*, 78.

⁴⁶ Bennett Reimer, *Universal Philosophy* (ISME; Proceedings from Amsterdam 1996 [MEND401, 6]).

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address them (National Standards), clearly define the underlying principles, which are of universal application.

Here we are being asked, at last, to confront and demystify the realities of what music in education means in terms of product and process when construed in their performance/performing context. The context invites clarification in terms of the nature of the skills demanded and the critically significant timescale of their acquisition, between rudimentary, competent, proficient and advanced achievement outcomes, *inter alia*. North America presents the notion of 9-15% of school-going students with free access to performance and performance training, guaranteeing, at best, 'astonishingly good quality'. The cohort is typically and euphemistically portrayed as mounting 'the challenge to expand that emphasis into analysis, music of other cultures and so on'⁴⁸, implying that the empowering musicianship (Elliott's admirable aspiration) is, somehow, currently being neglected. This 'privileged' minority is offset by the approximately 90% majority who have, voluntarily it seems, relegated themselves to the mercies of the Music Education as Aesthetic Education Movement, where their low prioritization of music in their stated interests is being rewarded with dry-as-dust acquisitions of literacy and passive listening skills; or so it is implied selectively.

The two models of music education are sketched provocatively here but are, in the American system, juxtaposed as positive or negative options in general music education. The significant point is that the majority have volitionally declared their non-performing option with the naïve but accurately-divined wisdom in observing that to perform satisfactorily takes time and effort; they are reluctant performers only in their mature sense of prioritization and time management. A philosophy of music education which essays to change those biases significantly faces a daunting challenge, not least in defining performance potential in terms of time spent and skills required.

No such options, approaching the American dream, have been available to the typical Irish school child. Solo possibilities as a freely accessible school facility have been and are virtually non-existent, and ensemble insignificant. Other offerings, where they have been available, have been literacy-based rather than listening-intensive; performance has played virtually no part in them. The teaching force has mirrored that bias; in fact it might even be claimed that they have been mutually determining. In primary education the child-centred model, as distinct from the specialist system widely in operation in America, has failed the system - and for reasons that cannot be laid at the door of the music teachers or *their* trainers. In secondary cycle the subject is largely examination-oriented, further consolidating the information (objective) base over the subjective. Talent education is not a desideratum in Irish

⁴⁷ MEND Document 303, 6.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

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schools, if that is taken to imply that the official support system of the culture recognizes its claims to free education through a school network.

The American and Irish systems of school music education are not directly comparable; the one is not a paradigm for the other.⁴⁹ The American system dichotomized school music education cohorts in the past, but there is room for grave doubts as to whether the homogenized stream now mooted will serve the united cohorts with the benefits of universally satisfying challenges. There is also the paradoxical realization that, in the historical context, it was performers (the high interest group) who were being marginalized by inattention to their wider musicianship needs. However, the admirable aspiration of the new National Standards (if they succeed) seems to be redressing the balance in widening the scope and the prescription of desirable musical experiences across the board.

Nevertheless, side-by-side with all this putative progress, it is almost certain that the mechanisms for identifying and nurturing talent of all kinds will still be securely in place in the US. The sheer weight of scholarly input to the National Standards⁵⁰ defines a system which is unlikely to countenance mandatory imposition of particular philosophical stances advancing curricular, pedagogical or methodological statements as to how general aims are to be achieved, especially should they attempt simultaneously to sweep away or supplant the celebrated achievements of past method. It is thus irrelevant to conjecture as to how the application of a praxial philosophy, such as that advocated by Elliott, would empower the comprehensive system, even if it were possible to arrive at agreement as to what exactly he is proposing in terms of what is pragmatically achievable.⁵¹

As far as talent education is concerned, it is thus also irrelevant, unless someone undertakes to metamorphose its strictly philosophical approach into a suitable rationale for specialist applications. There is encouraging evidence that the American National Standards have been accepted. If their aims are achieved, with the flexibility to enrich the so-called musicianship experiences of performers while attending to the purely musical experiential involvement of the volitional non-performers, they must be counted as an outstandingly significant advance on previous efforts. It is to be hoped that the

⁴⁹ Detailed discussion of the Irish curriculum would have increased the length of this thesis inordinately. The specifics are dealt with in the MEND Report under the various headings of the 8-point Agenda. The reader is referred to the 'Hyperlinked' version of the Report (Analysis [II]) contained in the CD-ROM which is the mandatory support provenance for the thesis

⁵⁰ The National Standards in the US had just been promulgated in 1994, when MEND was mooted. Time has moved on since then and the primacy of state autonomy has asserted itself in the standards becoming known as Voluntary National Standards

⁵¹ The plethora of statement and counterstatement in relation to Elliott is confusing. But it is on the question of the pragmatic applicability of his philosophy that most questions arise. The ongoing prolix exchanges are as much evidence of Elliott's impotency as they are proof that reigning philosophies have been dealt a body blow, demanding that both sides continue to clarify their position and reach détente for the benefit and credibility of the profession. This continuing dialectic is enthusiastically supported by Elliott in his writings.

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application of standards of such intentional flexibility will not produce a dull homogeneity, but will continue to accommodate a range of options that can still selectively minister to the comprehensive needs of students, and to the collective requirements of the total socio-cultural music endeavour which it hopes to serve. As far as the United States are concerned, the now magisterial presence of the National Standards and the favourable, and not just sanguine, reports as to their general acceptance and implementation leave the impression that:

1. There will continue to be two distinct categories of music learners to be serviced - performers with high motivation and non-performers with correspondingly more modest aspirations in music studies. This is a broad categorization which covers the majority.
2. Using the criterion of the 'product of numbers and motivation' as democratically compelling, the above are, thus, two equally important cohorts.
3. The philosophy of music as 'product' (a version of Formalism) is still persuasive for the performing stream, but the notion of performance as process - a totally different approach (Praxialism) - should not be ruled out as capable of informing all other musical endeavours in general education, including the broadening in outlook of committed performers. There has, however, been insufficient time since the publication of Elliott's book to develop a convincing statistic that his particular version of Praxialism is gaining ground.⁵²

Defined thus, it can be seen that there is potentially complete agreement, derivable from analysis, between the ideals of the American and Irish music education systems; and it is a simple matter to appraise the overall Irish implemented curriculum and to search for its shortcomings. It appears that, in general music education in Ireland, there is a sincere effort being made, not only to meet the demands of a so-called well-rounded musical education, giving appropriate weighting to composing, performing and listening, but also to enshrine continuity of that education as a desideratum. The system stubbornly denies any leanings towards particular methodologies, but the underpinning philosophical stance evident in the syllabus literature can easily be aligned to a hybrid of Praxialism and Referentialism; music as product (in the sense outlined by Formalism) is conceptually outside its brief, as it is also outside its capability, and there is already concrete evidence of a levelling out to lower overall standards. The system therefore still falls down, in ignoring the committed performing stream, and in effectively banishing it to the realms of private enterprise. This is culpably discriminatory, as it is to create and perpetuate the notion of elitism.

⁵² When the source material for this thesis was being generated (c 1997-99), this was true. The writer has no knowledge of how this may have changed since 1999, but it is not relevant to the pure logic of the arguments being made.

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Furthermore, it is accurate to trace, and now consolidate, its origin as being not totally in prevailing socio-economic perceptions, but in the mentality of official Irish music education itself and of general education strategists, too, who are creating this sharply-etched dichotomy in the first place. Once this crucially important cohort is removed from consideration in general education, it raises important questions, truths and considerations:

1. Is serious performing so time-consuming that it has no place either in the ‘school’ ambience or aspiration; must its status as a component in examination-driven syllabi be questioned?
2. If the answer to this question is yes, is it still accepted that it is an important component in overall education (typically for a significant minority), and where should the responsibility for its promotion lie?
3. Is the cost of suitable practical training an inhibitor in politico-economic terms and how can this cost be met?

MEND deliberations unequivocally and unanimously confirmed that performance is quintessential to the whole music and music education endeavour. If it is culpably ignored in general education provision, then undesirable tensions are set up, not least owing to the separation of the school subject, music, from its most natural manifestation, performance (at proficient and expert level); this cannot be healthy. The fall-back position is that other agencies must be found equitably to minister to the need, especially if that need is a matter of public concern. Here MEND reinforced the many previous statements that provincial Ireland is particularly deprived. Outside the urban areas, a questionable standard has always been the norm and this is, to a large extent, self-perpetuating, because a professional cadre of teachers cannot accrue from such an indifferent base. Availability, accessibility, quality and continuity of performance training are problematic in rural Ireland. It may be claimed that Ireland did not have the resources to provide for quality music performance in state schools⁵³, but it is high time that attention be drawn to the state’s neglect of music education, in its broadest sense, and that positive mitigation of its devastating effects be sought.

If potential success in music education endeavours in Ireland is measured by the possibilities enshrined in the ‘common denominator’ nature of current syllabus revision; if the establishment of an Academy for the Performing Arts (APA) is to be taken as a positive step towards professionalism; if these two ends of the spectrum are seen to have been addressed sincerely, there is but one area that

⁵³ There can be no doubt that there is an economic dimension here. It appears that, in the US, the state system traditionally values performance to the extent of absorbing its costs in general education on the basis that the subject is a core option and not sufficiently ‘minority’ in uptake to warrant its separation from mainstream education. At least in this respect the American system seems ideal.

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remains the Cinderella in the piece. If performance (in the nature of specialist) education is not now taken seriously as an area that cries out for development on a nation-wide and equitable basis, it will continue to act as a reproach to the otherwise worthy efforts of school music education strategists and will make a mockery of the ambitious plans to develop a super-structure (APA) on a diminishing or virtually non-existent base.

The above summary of Irish attitudes to Reimer's list of commonly held values of music education may help to explain why there are continuing problems about a healthy, caring and democratic response to established needs in Ireland. Apart from a history of patchy provision, music education in Ireland has a variety of contexts within which to engage the traditional philosophical approaches. There is a distinctive character about the diversity issue which first begs for strategies to incorporate it meaningfully in the school experience in a phased programme which moves from the urgency of biculturalism to a more modestly-paced multiculturalism availing of the hindsight benefits of the more successful projects and methods. The bifurcated (general/ specialist) question of performance studies needs to be addressed in the contexts of urgently-needed provision of product-centred (specialist) performance (in schools or suitably subsidized in the private sector), in some cases *ab initio* - and careful monitoring of the process-centred provision calls for vigilance, especially as it arises in secondary school experience. And all of these concerns need to take into account the time constraints, so that curricula are not overloaded, and that achievable goals are being set which will maximize experiences and the artistic growth which accrues from them.

In the case of traditional (specialist) performance studies, should the system be boosted, the most likely philosophical positions may very well outgrow current perceptions and begin to respond to universal criteria with linkages to Formalism, Praxialism and Absolute Expressionism (the form of Referentialism expounded by Reimer), and subconsciously also to the deeper implications of a humanistic universality engaged at philosophical levels by both Reimer and Elliott and by a host of other luminaries.