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Music Education in Broad Perspective

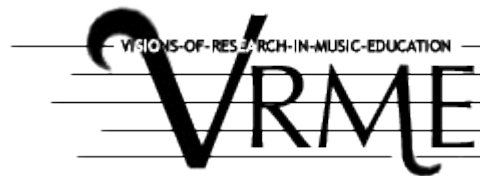
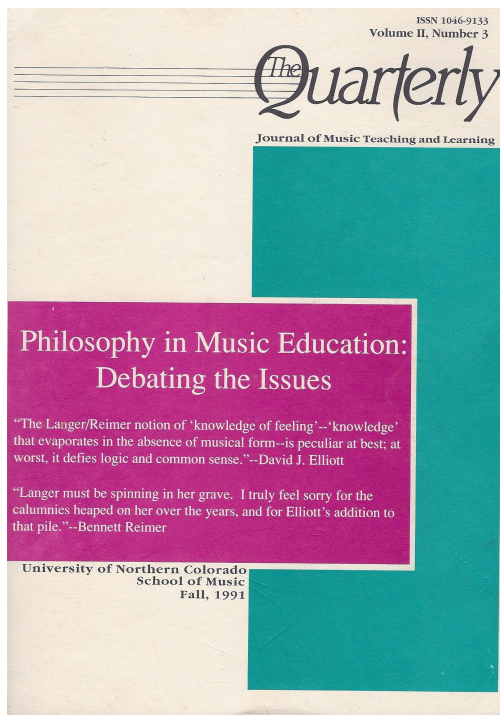
Estelle R. Jorgensen
Indiana University

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Author(s): Estelle R. Jorgensen

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Music Education in Broad Perspective

By Estelle R. Jorgensen

Indiana University

In his recent essay, “What Should One Expect from a Philosophy of Music Education?,”¹ Phillip Alperson explains that philosophical thought in music education may employ at least three different aesthetic strategies: the “aesthetic formalist,” resting on the work of such philosophers as Edward Hanslick and preoccupied with internal musical structure and meaning; the “aesthetic cognitivist” derived from the writings of Susanne Langer, among others, and highlighting the interrelationships between mind, and especially feeling and music; and the “praxial,” drawing on the ideas of such writers as Francis Sparshott and emphasizing musical artistry and practice.² While the formalist and expressive cognitivist aesthetic views have been explored by modern philosophers of music education, the implications of the praxial view have yet to be fully mined.

None of these philosophical perspectives, however, offers a sufficiently broad view of music education. It is not enough to cast a philosophy of music education in musical terms alone. Music education is a marriage of music and education, and as such, one at least would expect to see a philosophy of music education grounded in educational as well as musical assumptions. Education likewise witnesses at least three philosophical perspectives: education as apprenticeship, illustrated in Edward Myers’s study *Education in the Perspective of History* and emphasizing oral transmission and imitation; education as experience, exemplified in the work of John Dewey and highlighting the holistic nature of education; and education as cogni-

tive process, evident in Israel Scheffler’s writings and focusing on the role of reason and symbolic function in education.³

Again, not only do these educational perspectives overlook the specifically musical aspects of music education, but even if musical and educational perspectives are taken together, music education may still not be understood sufficiently broadly as an historical, global, and cultural phenomenon. This may suggest that a philosophy of music education should be essentially interdisciplinary and should incorporate insights from philosophy, psychology, sociology, physiology, musicology, anthropology, history, archeology, and popular culture as well as other related fields. Such a philosophy would be much broader than those based only upon music and education.

In this essay, three sets of considerations for developing a philosophy of music education in broad perspective are offered—those relating to music, education, and philosophical method, respectively—along with a sketch of some implications. Throughout, an interdisciplinary perspective maintains. I present these as propositions and emphasize their exploratory and illustrative, rather than definitive and exhaustive, roles. Indeed, if the perspective these considerations represent is to be named, we might call it an *interdisciplinary view of music education*.

On Music

The musical event is socially embedded and contextually understood. Musical meaning is not universal, nor is it grasped only by abstract principles. Rather, it is understood within the framework of the particular sets of rules, expectations, beliefs, and practices to which composers, performers, listeners, and all the actors involved in music-making gen-

Estelle Jorgensen is Professor of Music and Adjunct Professor of Women’s Studies at Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana.

erally conform. These expectation-sets shape the plethora of circumstances in which music takes place—the times and places in which it occurs, repertoire and performance practice, the interaction of all of the participants—and give meaning to the musical events.

That is, music is not disembodied from all the circumstances in which it is performed. It is ultimately expressed in the context of *making* or *taking* music, an active process of “musicing” (or its variant spelling “musicking”). Moreover, the cultural context in which music appears is integral rather than ancillary to an understanding of musical meaning. To describe the internal structure of a particular piece of music without also taking account of the particular context in which that structure appears is to miss its main point.

While music is grounded in praxis, and its touchstone is the community of those who comprehend its significance and participate in its making and undergoing, in whatever particular roles they fulfill, it is also understood formally or theoretically, spiritually, and philosophically as encompassing significant beliefs and ideas. Of all the arts, music exemplifies a particularly close affinity to spirituality and morality. It also involves practical skills and theoretical understandings and encompasses a broad range of diverse musical experiences such as composition, performance, and listening. To experience music is to grasp its artistic and aesthetic aspects—to participate in both its doing and its undergoing. This breadth and diversity of musical experience finds its parallel in the process whereby people come to know music.

Music is dynamic, in process of continually becoming. It is not static. It is not freeze-dried as the eternal, immutable canon of masterworks preserved for all time. Rather, music

takes on a life of its own that is intimately related to the people, things, and events that surround it and of which it is a part.

Musical works are not only born and live; they also die. They may become irrelevant to the life of the society. The societies of which they are a part may also become obsolete or dysfunctional. Throughout the life-cycles of civilizations, music may become increasingly formalized and sometimes fossilized as great

traditions grow increasingly out of step with the societies they once represented. Such fossilization occurs especially when the canon comes to be regarded as a static rather than dynamic phenomenon, as fixed rather than in process of becoming, where works are regarded as established for all time instead of re-evaluated and reconsidered in the light of changing circumstances.

The making of the canon is ultimately a political and social as well as musical process. Some works, musicians, and groups in society are under represented, marginalized, and even oppressed by it. Recognizing this, the music educator's task is one of musical and social reconstruction as well as transmission. Teachers not only transmit the canon—they help make and revise it, as they do society. In so doing, they play a central role in the dynamic process of musical and societal development.

The variety of value systems underlying music making and undergoing internationally requires music education to take a global view of musical tradition that eschews gender, ethnic, age, and other biases that separate people one from one another. Consequently, rather than view the Western classical tradition as the epitome and rationalization of all musical development, music educators value it as one of a plethora of musical

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traditions that comprise the rich heritage of world musics. In the world of the “global village,” they recognize music’s contribution to international understanding and cooperation, and the importance of understanding this heritage as part of the music educational process. They also incorporate popular and mediated musics, folk musics and “little” traditions, as well as classical musics and “great” traditions as important aspects of the music curriculum.

Music is understood. It is not only felt. It is known not only as sense-data but through an act of mind. It constitutes an articulated symbol system, a language of its own unique sort that is understood musically. As such, it draws on the understandings, skills, freedoms, and constraints that comprise what we might think of as the “discipline” of music. It is grasped perceptively, imaginatively, rationally, and intuitively, among other ways. It is expressive of, and even arouses emotion. And it calls on and may evoke bodily response.

Musical experience is holistic rather than atomistic. Rather than constitute a variety of distinct elements working more or less independently—construed in terms of prevailing educational-psychological notions of the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains—musical experience incorporates emotion and cognition, divergent and convergent thought, thinking and feeling, intuition and reason, body and mind in a unity where all the elements become fused into one. We may therefore speak of cognitive emotions, emotive cognitions, imaginative reason, rational imagination, and of people as individual members of communities, thereby bringing together a complex array of elements that are in tension one with another and that paradoxically belong both together and apart.

Moreover, the study of this experience calls on scientific and nonscientific ways of knowing, on an array of interdisciplinary approaches that accommodate the complexity of the musical experience. Psychological understandings are insufficient. Philosophical, religious, anthropological, physiological, and sociological ways of knowing, among other ways, are necessarily involved in understanding the nature of the musical experience and how it can or should be developed.

In whatever tradition—folk, popular, or classical—the ambiguity of musical text and tone invokes imagination as a primary way whereby people understand music. Music’s meanings are multilayered and multidimensional, understood literally and figuratively, with reference both to the music itself and to the other things, persons, and events to which it refers. Whether worked out in reason, or grasped intuitively, musical ideas and skills are imaginatively employed in making, taking, or reflecting about music. Even in such oral musical traditions as that of the Hindustanis in North India, where teachers demand that their students copy them in certain respects and where there might seem to be little room for imagination, music teachers seek to ensure that their students exemplify imaginative musical thinking in their improvisatory techniques and development of the *rag*, or musical melody or mode.

On Education

Education is a complex process. It is not just *schooling*, or what happens in schools, particularly public schools. Nor is it only *training*, or the development of skills. *Eduction*, relying on the metaphor of growth, does not incorporate the range of other metaphors that education evokes. Nor does *socialization*, or the ways in which a group or institution ensures that its members adhere to certain corporate expectations about beliefs and actions, take sufficient account of the sometimes conflicting expectations of these groups and institutions in a modern, multicultural, and complex society. Even *enculturation*, whether conceived anthropologically (in the sense that its subject matter constitutes a significant part of what it is to be a human being—the sum of one’s history, artistic traditions, politics, and religion, among other things) or idealistically (in similar vein to the Greek *paideia* expressing an ideal to which people aspire—that of the superior human being characterized by such virtues as justice, love, truth, or the like), may not fully encapsulate the concept of education. Rather, when taken together, these notions capture something of the complexity that is education.⁴

This complexity is dialectical and even

“Educators both know and do not know what they are doing.”

paradoxical. Among other things, education conveys knowledge about particular subjects and inculcates an entire way of life. It develops individuals as well as members of society. It instructs in formal as well as informal ways. It is process- as well as product-oriented. It constitutes doing as well as undergoing. It is situated within an array of societal institutions besides public schools, such as the church, family, musical profession, and business. It takes place throughout a lifetime as well as especially during youth. It reconciles future potential and present reality. Education is holistic and atomistic, synthetic and analytic, subjective and objective. It focuses on the development of the person as well as the particular skills and understandings encompassed within given subject matter. It invokes intuition and reason, mind and body, emotion and cognition. It fires imagination and engenders dogged determination. It is creative and repetitive, rhapsodical and structured, play and work. It is caring and dispassionate, student-centered and teacher-directed.

Education is a dynamic enterprise. It is not a static entity. Like the society of which it is a part, it is in process of becoming, sometimes oriented more to the future, at other times toward the past. As a predominantly social and corporate activity, it both reflects and reconstructs society. Like music, education may become formalized, even fossilized as a civilization develops, especially if its instructional methods, curricula, and administration come to be set in stone, regarded as ends rather than means to other ends, and it ceases to be relevant to the life of the surrounding society.

As an art rather than a craft or even a science (in the classical sense of the natural sciences), education draws on theory and practice to forge solutions that face a plethora of situations in which some measure of control is possible. Its effects are evident and hidden, real and imagined, predicted and unexpected. Educators both know and do not know what they are doing. Like artists, they imagine given outcomes and foresee certain possibilities,

and, applying the skills and techniques they have honed in practice, direct their efforts toward achieving those ends.

Education encompasses various ways of knowing—artistic, scientific, philosophical, and religious, among others. It is not only about gaining utilitarian skills, however important—reading, writing, computing, dancing, and archery are among the subjects that have been judged essential in the past—but about acquiring wisdom, the compendium of beliefs, values, and practices that are believed either to be indispensable to one’s successful participation in a particular social and cultural context, or to contribute to one’s humanity and enjoyment of life. While education may be comprised of various facets that are conceptually distinct, to acquire wisdom is to grasp the unity of this knowledge, to know in one way rather than in many ways, in which the one comprises the many. It is to know one’s self as well as the subject matter.

Each of these ways of knowing is approached within a framework that is consistent with itself. Scientific ways of knowing are not those of the arts, philosophy, and religion, any more than artistic, philosophical, and religious understandings are essential to gaining scientific knowledge. Yet despite these disparate and distinctive approaches and the sorts of knowledge they engender, the end of education is the attainment of wisdom—a grasp of the principles that reconcile and bring together in a whole the different ways of knowing self, world, and God. It is not enough to gain romantic and intuitive perspectives on the subject matter or to master its various instrumental skills and techniques. One must also eventually generalize these understandings within incorporative principles and relate them to the phenomenal world.

To omit some of these ways of knowing is to ignore vital aspects of cultural heritage. To view all of them monolithically, as if they constituted only one way of knowing is to overlook the diversity of ways of *knowing how* as well as *knowing that*. It is also to fail to recognize the richness of knowledge inherent in ritual and enactment besides didac-

tic instruction, and the many layers of figurative meaning in metaphor and analogy besides literal understandings.

On Philosophical Method

Music education properly exemplifies synthetic or constructive as well as analytic approaches to doing philosophy and employs deductive, analogical, and inductive strategies; it takes phenomenological as well as positivistic stances. Each approach contributes a unique philosophical perspective that contrasts and balances others. While philosophers may disagree with each other about which perspectives are the best and express preferences for some over others, the larger historical and philosophical picture reveals that a diversity of ideas results from this variety of philosophical approaches and perspectives.

Also, a broader view of philosophy as content as well as method replaces a preoccupation with methodological issues; philosophy is not described only in terms of how it is done but also with respect to what it is about. To know philosophy is not just to understand a method—be it analytic, phenomenological, or otherwise—but also to grasp some of the principal questions and ideas that have preoccupied philosophers through the ages and that constitute the stuff of philosophy. In other words, professional philosophers not only do philosophy, they also know its literature.

Accordingly, philosophers and theorists of music education are trained as professional philosophers and theorists as well as musician-teachers. Throughout their careers, they continue to discuss ideas not only with music educators but with other professional philosophers and theorists outside music education. One finds them talking, in particular, with philosophers of music, the arts, and education, as well as with social science theorists. And the same principle applies to those engaged in other research specialties.

Implications

Every point of view constitutes in some sense a response or reaction to perceived weaknesses or flaws in foregoing or other points of view. While it may have derived from the working out of logical principles, it stands as a theoretical entity in contrast to or

opposition with extant or potential others. When we compare it to these other perspectives, its weaknesses and flaws may be discovered. Our perspective affects the kinds of questions that can and will be addressed; these may both expand and limit our vision. Hence the need to examine critically and carefully its assumptions and propositions before declaring our allegiance to it, no matter how current and popular the idea may be. Like other views, this interdisciplinary view of music education seems to offer a great deal to our current situation. But is it also problematic? I answer “Yes” because of difficulties inherent in the propositions themselves and their possible interpretation by music educators.

The praxial aesthetic viewpoint that emphasizes musical context as opposed to content and is grounded in musical practice rather than its spiritual, philosophical, or theoretical underpinnings, reflects the current scientific bent toward that which is seen rather than unseen. As such, it may perpetuate the historical division between *musica practica* and *musica theoretica* and fail to do justice to the unseen elements of musical experience. Just as the formalist aesthetic perspective may be faulted for overlooking contextual aspects of music, so the praxial may overlook music’s formal elements in a quest for contextual perspective. While the formalist might be faulted for an idealistic perspective on the *undergoing* of music, the praxialist can be criticized for an excessively realistic focus on the *doing* of music. While the formalist might focus on questions having to do with musical aesthetic, the praxialist may become preoccupied with problems of musical artistry. While the formalist might be taken to task for an excessively rationalistic, parochial, and culturally chauvinistic view of world musics, the praxialist may be criticized for an extremely relativistic and universalistic musical view that is not discriminating of one’s own musical heritage.

Because the interdisciplinary view of music education melds contrasting, even conflicting assumptions about the nature of music—exemplified in the differing formalist and praxialist positions—it raises significant problems for music education policy makers. De-

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spite this melding, they may still be tempted to uncritically adopt a praxialist posture because it is newer and somewhat in vogue, and to reject formalist and cognitivist insights. Thus, the contributions of aestheticians in the past may unfortunately be forgotten as policy makers embrace current, popular philosophical ideas.

There is no one “high road” in music education despite the fact that music educators often seek it. Rather, there are many possible ways. Finding ways that reconcile the host of competing, even conflicting assumptions about music, that work in particular contexts, and that match the value systems of policy makers and the society in question, constitutes a challenge that is not easily met. We shall need people who are equipped to make such philosophical and practical choices. The interdisciplinary view multiplies our options without also providing a fleshed-out theory of musical values that can be used universally to determine the right choices among them.

While it offers the possibility of rethinking the corpus of music to be taught and including those who have been disenfranchised, the interdisciplinary view of music education may be interpreted to warrant an excessive politicization of the musical canon and preoccupation with music’s dynamic *becoming* in the future rather than on its more static qualities of *being* in the past and present. Overemphasizing musical reconstruction to the detriment of transmission may also present the danger of losing one’s past heritage.

Pitfalls of irrelevance, even fossilization of musical ideas and practices abound, but those of pandering to current, popular, and sometimes fickle public opinion are also of obvious concern to music policy makers—especially given the influence of mass media in shaping the public’s musical tastes. Again, the interdisciplinary view of music education

necessitates developing criteria whereby these potential pitfalls can be avoided.

Emphasizing the intellectual nature of musical meaning-making redresses the somewhat narrower stress on its emotional dimensions in earlier expressivist formulations. However, even when musical intellection is taken to encompass the cognitive and emotive elements of musical experience, the possibility exists that an holistic view of mind and body may be overlooked. Researchers’ interests in articulating Western classical music may lead them to focus on its formal rather than functional properties and thus account for its intellectual rather than physical appeal. In particular, music’s rational and literal meanings, rather than its intuitive and figurative meanings, may be emphasized because these are more amenable to the sorts of techniques that science and analytic philosophy typically employ.

It is possible that the differences among musical traditions and experiences will not be sufficiently explicated and that such explaining as is done will constitute too narrow a view. Tradition dies hard. Dualistic notions of mind and body, positivistic approaches to research, ethnocentric musical attitudes, and formalistic and idealistic theories of music are firmly entrenched in the musical establishment. Historically, few researchers have demonstrated the independence of mind to follow unpopular paths. The interdisciplinary view of music education challenges the research community to create an environment in which interdisciplinary research is fostered; genuine openness, diversity, and scholarly criticism are valued; monolithic views of musical experience are challenged; and nonscientific as well as scientific studies of music are encouraged.

The complexity of education suggests a revision of the practice and preparation of teachers and educational policy-makers that

will enable them to cope successfully with the tensions and paradoxes with which they are confronted. Historically, the emphasis in teacher preparation programs has been on training in selected methods for given curricula. To challenge the status quo involves a revision that goes far beyond the structures of educational institutions and formal curricula to face the preparation of educators themselves. This much more radical position requires developing beliefs, values, and skills that enable educators to make judgments about those aspects of the educational process with which they are concerned.

How does one implement these ideals? Will merely altering the curriculum be enough, or is a change in the aspirations and approaches of those who teach the curriculum also required? How shall educational policy makers, reluctant to change their attitudes and bureaucratic structures, be persuaded to change their minds? These and other questions constitute an enormous challenge to implementing radical changes in the preparation and practice of educational policy makers.

In this regard, the interdisciplinary view of music education leaves us with a multiplicity of problems but no easy solutions. It suggests a plethora of ideals but offers little about how to accomplish them. Historically, the “demonstration effect”—seeing models that are not only innovative but effective—has been a powerful force for change in educational ideas and practice. Some might suggest that implementing change may necessitate developing model programs. But negotiating the economic, political, and organizational realities of developing such models is no longer as simple a matter as it once might have been. Certainly, modern education is not the uncomplicated enterprise a Rousseau, Pestalozzi, or Montessori could once consider it to be.⁵

In emphasizing the dynamic, processual nature of the educational enterprise and avoiding excessive formalization and fossilization of instructional objectives and approaches, educators may forget their history and the traditional ways in which they carried on their work. Focusing on technology,

innovative strategies, and the like, they may overlook such traditional approaches as the apprenticeship method with its roots in antiquity; imitation by the pupil of the teacher; constant practice of tasks (including repetitive drill); and learning by doing in contextualized situations.

Without vigilance on the part of educational policy makers, the educational “industry” (including curriculum designers, textbook publishers, television program producers, producers of computer hardware and software for educational use, and the like) may emphasize the entertainment value of education. Educators may forget that the primary motive of business enterprise—regardless of its pleadings otherwise—is profit, and that business enterprise thrives on innovation. Under advertising and social pressure, educators may forget that for millennia, much of what happened in education was demanding of students. Educators were concerned with the serious educational task of transmitting wisdom—beliefs, values, and skills—from one generation to the next rather than with entertaining their students. For most of this time, commercial influence was at a minimum if present at all. I do not mean to suggest that educators should ignore the interests of their students or that commerce cannot be an effective educational agent. Rather, pandering to student and public opinion and turning education into a form of entertainment are mis-educative in the Deweyan sense. If not monitored closely, the educational industry can contribute to mis-educative experiences and possibly become the tail that wags the dog.

The difficulties inherent in the interdisciplinary nature of music education ought not be underestimated. As in other interdisciplinary areas, music educators are faced with keeping up with developments in one or more foundational fields while also constructing and critically reflecting on ideas and paradigms that are more-or-less uniquely music educational. This renders researchers particularly vulnerable to ignoring or misunderstanding ongoing work in other relevant fields and unwittingly perpetuating philosophical and scientific myths and fictions that have been discredited elsewhere.

One approach to coping with these difficulties would be that rather than attempting to become experts in a variety of research methods, music education researchers might focus on gaining a working knowledge of at least one foundational field such as philosophy, history, psychology, sociology, or anthropology, and a solid background in its literature and methods. They would then be in a position to engage in collaborative endeavors with others, each of whom has an understanding not only of a grounding discipline but also an interest and awareness of the particular problems relating to music education. This would also suggest the use of a wide range of scientific and nonscientific research methods in the study of music educational problems and a community of music education researchers inclusive and supportive of a variety of perspectives reflecting music education's essentially interdisciplinary character. Such an approach, of course, implies potential and significant changes in the preparation of music education researchers. It presents challenges similar to those alluded to above in respect to the preparation of educational policy makers.

That the analytic philosophy movement largely bypassed music education suggests that in an effort to redress a past bias toward synthetic approaches, philosophers may now concentrate their efforts on analytic approaches. This would be an unfortunate development if it were not also complemented by constructive, or a meld of analytic and synthetic, approaches.

Music education is presently in a relatively embryonic conceptual state. This is not in any way to disparage the work of previous philosophers of music education. James Mursell, Leonard Meyer, Bennett Reimer, and Keith Swanwick, among others, have contributed in important ways to music education thought and advocacy.⁶ In embracing the need for close analytic philosophical study, however, it is important to remember that there is still much to be done in conceptualizing music education, and synthetic contributions have yet to be fully explored.

As we have seen, the interdisciplinary view of music education presents us with numerous theoretical and practical possibilities and

challenges. It is up to future researchers to further amplify, modify, and critique them, and to decide what the interdisciplinary view's particular role in guiding music education practice should be.

Notes

1. *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 25 (4) (1991). In press. Paper presented to *The Philosopher/Teacher in Music: The Indiana Symposium on Research and Teaching in the Philosophy of Music Education*, Bloomington, IN, July 1990.
2. See for example Edward Hanslick, *On the Musically Beautiful* (1891) trans., Geoffrey Payzant (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1986); Susanne K. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art*. 3rd. ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1957), *Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art Developed from Philosophy in a New Key* (London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953); Francis Sparshott, "Aesthetics of Music: Limits and Grounds," In *What is Music? An Introduction to the Philosophy of Music*, Ed., Phillip Alperson (New York: Haven, 1986), 33-98.
3. See Edward D. Myers, *Education in the Perspective of History* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1960); John Dewey, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education* (New York: Macmillan, 1915), *Experience and Education* (New York: Macmillan, 1938); Israel Scheffler, *Reason and Teaching* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), *Of Human Potential: An Essay in the Philosophy of Education* (Boston, London, Melbourne and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985), *Inquiries: Philosophical Studies of Language, Science and Learning* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1986).
4. See Estelle R. Jorgensen, "In Search of Music Education," unpublished essay available from the author, School of Music, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN 47405.
5. Paulo Freire, *The Politics of Education: Culture, Power, and Liberation*, intro., Henry A. Giroux, trans., Donaldo Macedo (South Hadley, MA: Bergin and Garvey Publishers, 1985), pp. 170, 171, addresses the limitations of educational reform and the necessity for societal transformation if education is to be radically reconstructed.
6. See James Mursell, *Human Values in Music Education* (New York: Silver Burdett, 1934); Leonard Meyer, *Emotion and Meaning in Music* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1956); Bennett Reimer, *A Philosophy of Music Education*, 2nd. ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1989); Keith Swanwick, *Music, Mind, and Education* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988). 