

# **A Re-exploration of the Music Education Philosophies Proposed by Reimer and Elliott: The Perspectives of Critical Pedagogy**

Yu-Chen Ho<sup>1</sup>

## **Summary**

The purpose of philosophical inquiry in music education is to interpret and critique existing concepts, beliefs, and discourses to formulate new theories or establish a theoretical basis for music education research. The philosophy of music education in North America can be divided into aesthetic education and praxial philosophy paradigms. Reimer represents the aesthetic education paradigm, whereas Elliott represents the praxial philosophy paradigm. Previously, music educators seldom emphasized the topics of “power”, “ideology”, and “social justice” in curricula and instruction. By contrast, current music educators are devoting increasing attention to these topics. Recent arguments for postmodernism as an alternative to modernism have weakened previous philosophical, educational, and musical certainties. The major implications of this for music education must be understood by music teachers. Regelski (2010) stated that plural perspectivism is essential to postmodern thought. Elliott (2012a) argued that plural perspectivism is a variation of the synoptic approach. Thus, in this study, the synoptic approach to philosophical inquiry was adopted to explore the core concepts of aesthetic education proposed by Reimer and praxial philosophy proposed by Elliott. Because the synoptic approach is rarely employed for critical and conceptual analyses, a fusion of horizons was used to integrate discourses of critical pedagogy with music education philosophies regarding the topics of power, ideology, and social justice to facilitate the convergence of theory and practice. The objectives of this study were as follows: (1) to explore the concepts of aesthetic education proposed by Reimer and praxial philosophy proposed by Elliott,

---

<sup>1</sup> Assistant Professor /Center for General Education, Tzu Chi University

providing music teachers with an understanding of music education philosophy; and (2) to explore the implications for music education practice at schools in Taiwan by using a fusion of horizons to integrate aesthetic education, praxial philosophy, and discourses of critical pedagogy.

The aesthetic education philosophy proposed by Reimer features two core concepts: aesthetic experience and aesthetic knowing. Reimer (1989) stated that aesthetic experience comprises the three unique perspectives of formalism, referentialism, and absolute expressionism. Although he originally supported absolute expressionism as the basis of aesthetic education, Reimer (2003) later proposed a synergistic philosophical stance. He asserted that aesthetic experience should include a synergistic stance that can be determined by examining several aspects of musical value, namely, music as formed sounds, music as practice, music as an agent of social change, music as providing utilitarian values, and musical experience as an amalgam of “inherent” (the actual music that people create and share), and “delineated” (how individuals experience music in context) meanings. Thus, Reimer contended that musical experience is multidimensional at the present time. Aesthetic knowing comprises “knowing within”, “knowing how”, “knowing about”, and “knowing why”. The two essential dimensions of knowing that music provides are knowing within and knowing how, both of which are nonverbal. By contrast, knowing about and knowing why are verbal dimensions that facilitate aesthetic knowing. Knowing about and knowing why are necessary to enhance the essential dimensions of knowing within and knowing how. Knowing within and knowing how are the goals of music education, whereas knowing about and knowing why are the means for achieving the goals of music education.

The praxial philosophy proposed by Elliott comprises two core concepts: musical experience and musical knowing. Elliott (1995) contended that “musical experience was not rightly conceived of as an aesthetic experience”. Music is a diverse human practice; thus, musical experiences are neither impractical nor self-sufficient. From a practical perspective, musical experiences are valuable. Music makers and listeners achieve self-growth, self-knowledge, and enjoyment through the constructive actions of “musicing” and “listening”. A musical experience results from matching a specific type of musicianship with a specific type of musical challenge. The fundamental values of musical experiences are self-growth, self-knowledge, and enjoyment. The types of musical knowing required to listen competently, proficiently, or expertly to the works of a given musical practice are

the same types of knowing required to produce the music of that practice. These types of knowing are procedural, formal, informal, impressionistic, and supervisory musical knowledge, forming the components of musicianship. The essential dimension of knowing is procedural musical knowledge. The four remaining types of musical knowledge are secondary, but necessary to support the primary knowledge type.

The study explored the differences between aesthetic education proposed by Reimer and praxial philosophy proposed by Elliott based on the following considerations: (1) aesthetic experience and musical experience; (2) aesthetic knowing and musical knowing; (3) what is music?; (4) why do we teach music?; (5) what do we teach?; (6) what are the resources for teaching materials?; and (7) what is the critical aspect of music? Based on these considerations, we determined that Reimer's aesthetic education and Elliott's praxial philosophy yield implications for in-school music education: (1) regarding "why do we teach music?", according to Reimer, knowing within can enable students to achieve the goal of cultural empowerment; according to Elliott, dynamic curriculum can enable students to achieve self-fulfillment; (2) regarding "what do we teach?" according to Reimer, music teachers can teach students four types of aesthetic knowing in the comprehensive music curriculum; according to Elliott, music teachers can teach students musicianship in the reflective musical practicums.

Regarding the result of the fusion of horizons between music education philosophy and discourses of critical pedagogy, the implications for music education practice at schools are as follows: (1) professional music teachers and students must empower themselves; (2) music teachers must become transformative intellectuals; and (3) "identical" concept should be replaced by "constellation" concept. Based on these findings, we conclude that Reimer's aesthetic education philosophy and Elliott's praxial philosophy possess practical value for music education at schools in Taiwan.

**Keywords:** Reimer, Elliott, critical pedagogy, philosophy of music education, synoptic approach