

Action for Change in Music Education

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The MayDay Group first met on May 1, 1993 with the intention of critically reexamining the status of practice in music education. This eclectic and varied group of thinkers, from a variety of disciplines and countries, continues to function as a think tank, concerned to identify, critique and change taken-for-granted patterns of professional activity, polemical approaches to method, and social, musical and educational philosophies, educational politics and public pressures that have threatened effective practice and stifled critical and open communication among music educators. This ongoing debate has resulted in a more formal two-fold purpose guiding future deliberations: (a) to apply critical theory and critical thinking to the purposes and practices of music education, and (b) to affirm the central importance of musical participation in human life and, thus, the value of music in the general education of all people.

The following regulative ideals have emerged. They are stated broadly as ideals for guiding dialogue and change, not as narrow or dogmatic conclusions. Each is followed by a brief rationale and a range of sample questions that point out directions for action. Because any consideration of ideals by diverse thinkers is a dynamic process, colloquy and reflection continue. Thus elaboration, refinement and qualification by members and other interested parties are expected and welcomed.

Despite the difficulty of formulating such ideals in precise yet brief form, members and other participants nonetheless agree that these ideals for guiding necessary change are sufficiently warranted that the signers put them forth as bases for action in music education.

1 Musical action that is fully mindful of musical results is the necessary condition of music-making and, therefore, of an effective music education.

The indifferent application of concepts, information and technical skills taught for their own sakes leads to music-making that lacks musical integrity. Skilled music-making, instead, requires the purposeful and appropriate practice of musicianship. Expert musicians develop critical and reflective abilities that mindfully employ knowledge and skill in the service of musical results. Therefore, any formal education of musical skill, knowledge and insight must similarly involve critically reflective, rather than unthinking or superficial, music-making.

- a. How can the profession focus less on teaching information and technical skills in isolation and for their own sakes, and more on the kind of critically reflective musicianship that results in individuals who can make thoughtful and appropriate musical choices independently of a teacher or conductor?
- b. In what ways has inattention to the development of independent musicianship encouraged unthinking and therefore unmusical performance on the part of individuals?
- c. How can all forms of music-making in educational contexts achieve musical integrity while advancing the critical and independent musical thinking of performers and audiences alike?

2 The social and cultural contexts of musical actions are integral to musical meaning and cannot be ignored or minimized in music education.

Aesthetic theories, with their claims that musical meaning and value transcend time, place, context and human purpose and usefulness, fail to account for the fullest range of meanings inherent in individual and collective musical actions. Such theories fall short of providing an adequate rationale for music-making or music teaching. Instead, all music must be seen as intimately tied to social and cultural contexts and conditions. The theory and practice of music education must account for this

situatedness of music and music-making. Music educators must have, therefore, a theoretical foundation that unites the actions of producing music with the various contexts of those actions, so that musical meaning appropriately includes all of music's humanizing and concrete functions.

- a. How can musical values be understood in terms of the human needs and contexts that bring them forth, while at the same time retaining appropriate standards of musicianship and musicality?
- b. What standards of musicianship and musicality in music education can be guided by traditions associated with aesthetic theories, while still emphasizing the situatedness of the musical practices in question?
- c. How can students be guided to advance their aspirations for identifying and serving the musicianship needs called forth by different musics and situations?
- d. What tangible qualities of musicianship can replace hypothesized and ephemeral aesthetic qualities as a basis for teaching, learning and evaluating music-making that is appropriately situated?

3 Since human musical actions create, sustain and reshape musical cultures, music educators can and should formally channel this cultural process, influencing the directions in which it develops and the individual and collective human values it serves.

A musical culture is a living process, not a set of works or of given practices. It develops out of the special synergy of change and tradition unique to its people and conditions and cannot simply be passed on as a timeless, unchanging set of traditions. Music educators, thus, must not be satisfied simply to perpetuate any musical culture as a matter of received "fact." Rather, they should guide and expand the musical initiatives, alternatives and levels of musical excellence of their students, going beyond what is otherwise already available outside of school, helping musical cultures to continue their respective developments while building bridges for students to other musical expressions of culture.

- a. How can music teachers be more accountable for increasing the likelihood that their students will value musical participation throughout their lives?
- b. What can music teachers do to improve the individual, family and society through the musical alternatives, initiatives and choices made available and advanced through the school music curriculum?
- c. What strategies can be developed to promote, improve and encourage the musical traditions of particular segments of society and, at the same time, help individuals become sensitive to and more successful within musical cultures other than the ones in which they grew up?
- d. How can the profession undertake a sustained campaign to reenergize musical life in society, and thus to expand the contributions of music to life?

4 The contributions made by schools, colleges and other musical institutions are important to musical culture, but these need to be systematically examined and evaluated in terms of the directions and extent of their influence.

Despite their good intentions and the high claims often made for institutions such as schools, colleges, professional ensembles, churches and mass media, institutionally-mediated expressions of musical culture are unpredictable and often self-destructing or self-limiting. Music and musical

actions, when institutionalized, are transformed by a variety of ideological, ethical, economic and pedagogical motivations and agendas. Any theory and practice of music education must successfully account for these phenomena, shed light on ways to critique them, and set in motion means of minimizing negative effects of institutions at the individual or social levels.

- a. In what ways do formal institutions of musical culture influence the actual musical life of a society and on what bases can these institutions be critiqued when the influences are ineffective, trifling or negative?
- b. How can a theory of music education account for the effects of institutions on music, provide ways to assess the cultural good or harm that various institutions can do, and devise means by which such institutions can be used for cultural good rather than harm?
- c. How can we influence institutions such as publishing companies and the mass media to improve their contribution to raising the musical quality of social and cultural life?
- d. What can the institution of music education do to reestablish avocational music-making as the cultural norm for the general public, as opposed to mainly nurturing professional performers and the audiences that listen to them?

5 In order to be effective, music educators must establish and maintain contact with ideas and people from other disciplines.

The dominant model of study and research in music and music education minimizes the relevance and applicability of influences from outside music. The intellectual and pragmatic narrowness and limitations of this model have led music teachers and musicians to an insularity that has isolated them from communication with others in the arts and sciences, from the other helping professions, and thus from the general public. Future teachers and musicians should apply valuable views from other fields to the problems that musicians and educators regularly face.

- a. How can the range of professional and general knowledge of music teachers (and teachers of teachers) be broadened?
- b. From what disciplines should such a broadened knowledge base for practice be drawn?
- c. To what extent and how can we free music teachers from uncritically mimicking their own teachers' techniques and instead develop rational, reflective and effective personal teaching approaches based on new evidence, rather than on tradition alone?
- d. What can accrediting, certifying and professional organizations change to improve the general education of musicians who will be school music teachers and professors?

6 The research and theoretical bases for music education must simultaneously be refined and radically broadened both in terms of their theoretical interest and practical relevance.

A renewed search for insight in unraveling the problems and issues of teaching and learning music must replace the professional goals and rewards that motivate much current research which is, as a result, often uninteresting in its contribution to theory and irrelevant to practice. We support an approach to music education inquiry that draws its problems from and applies its conclusions to the authentic musical actions of people and thus from music that incorporates a rich diversity of

musical meaning and experience. Furthermore, because such issues and questions in music education are inextricably wed to inquiry in other disciplines, music education research theories and practices must go well beyond the narrow paradigms and limitations traditionally accepted.

- a. How can more adequate research criticism be developed for music education as a profession? And what theories and findings from other disciplines will support this criticism?
- b. What items should be included on a profession-wide research agenda that will predictably lead to a more adequate research base for good practice? And how should items on this agenda be prioritized?
- c. How can the profession encourage independent, critical researchers and, at the same time, reward innovative methods, collaborative action and results that contradict tradition?
- d. What additional means can be devised to referee and disseminate research findings? How can both the methodological expertise and range of general knowledge of referees be improved?

7 An extensive and intensive consideration of curriculum for music education is needed as a foundation to greater professional unity and must be guided by a sound philosophical process.

Curriculum occupies a fundamental, central and defining place in any effort to improve music education and thus should precede considerations of teaching and research techniques, methods, materials and assessment. However, methods, materials, instruction, assessment and supervision are too often undertaken without specific curricular reference, or under the mistaken assumption that certain traditional means automatically guarantee worthwhile musical ends. In light of the six ideals stated above, it is clear that when desirable results remain unclear, then methods, materials and learning become haphazard at best and detrimental at worst. Thus a consensus on curricular standards -- the criteria of effective teaching and learning -- needs to be as strong a part of the preparation and practice of music educators as are the standards of musicianship.

- a. What philosophical, curricular, psychological and social principles and criteria should guide curriculum development, evaluation and criticism?
- b. Will curriculum be influenced best by standards developed and imposed by national or regional entities, such as music educators associations and central governments, or by specific attempts to make curriculum design a strong part of music teacher preparation? Can these interact effectively?
- c. How can a greater consensus on desirable outcomes take into account the institutional priorities, local conditions and resources that relate to implementing curriculum?
- d. To what extent and how can music education curriculums take broader educational and social concerns into account?

The initial signatories of this document affirm their general agreement with the broad ideals contained here as a basis for action. In addition, they and others were invited to expand and elaborate on specific points. Any such commentary will be made available in a separate document.

For further information

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