

## MENC: The National Association for Music Education

---

The Evolution of Music Education Philosophy from Utilitarian to Aesthetic

Author(s): Michael L. Mark

Source: *Journal of Research in Music Education*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (Spring, 1982), pp. 15-21

Published by: [MENC: The National Association for Music Education](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3344863>

Accessed: 24/08/2010 08:55

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=menc>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).



MENC: The National Association for Music Education is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Journal of Research in Music Education*.

*Throughout Western history, various philosophies of music education have been articulated by intellectual, political, and religious leaders. A common factor in the various philosophies is the relationship between music education and society. Since the middle of the 20th century, writers on music education philosophy have been mostly music educators, rather than societal leaders. They have, for the most part, abandoned the many historical justifications of the profession in favor of aesthetic philosophy. The utilitarian values of music education that have formed its historical philosophical basis have been rejected during the last 30 years because they have little to do with music. Music is now taught for the sake of music, and the link that has historically connected aesthetics with societal needs has been broken.*

**Michael L. Mark** *Towson State University, Towson, Maryland*

## The Evolution of Music Education Philosophy from Utilitarian to Aesthetic

Philosophies of music education have been articulated by many societal leaders throughout history. A review of those with whom music educators are generally familiar reveals that the writers understood the aesthetic value of music, but did not think of it, in itself, as justification for music education. Justification was based on the fact that the aesthetic development of the individual influenced behavior in such a way that a better citizen (in terms of cultural, civic, religious, or other values) was expected to be developed.

The literature of ancient Greece contains many statements describing the role of music education in the development of the individual. Plato strongly emphasized the necessity for music (meaning all of the arts) in education to maintain traditional cultural values and to develop the ideal citizen. Discussion of the topic is found in his *Protagoras* (Hamilton & Cairns, Eds., 1961, p. 322), *Laws* (1961, pp. 1,251-1,257, 1,264-1,267, 1,294, 1,343, 1,370-1,374, 1,300-1,303, 1,386-1,387, 1,394-1,396, 1,400), and *Republic* (1961, pp. 623, 643-647, 654-656, 753-754). Aristotle cited historical precedents for music education, saying that music is

---

Requests for reprints should be sent to Michael L. Mark, Dean of the Graduate School, Towson State University, Towson, Maryland 21204.

valued for “intellectual enjoyment in leisure” and that it “...is a sort of education in which parents should train their sons, not as being useful or necessary, but because it is liberal or noble.” (Ross, Ed., 1921, 1,383:30). The Greek scholar Athenaeus, discussing Damon, said, “...Damon of Athens and his school say that songs and dances are the result of the soul’s being in a kind of motion; those songs which are noble and beautiful produce noble and beautiful souls, whereas the contrary kind produce the contrary” (Gulick, trans., 1937, p. 389). Roman authors also discussed music education in reference to the development of the citizen. The orator Quintilian stated that music was a necessary part of the ideal training program for orators, who were among the most respected members of the Roman intelligentsia (Smail, 1936, pp. 47–55). The Roman statesman and scholar Boethius, in summarizing the musical practices of the ancient world, reviewed many of the viewpoints held by Greek and Roman schools of thought about the influence of music on the development of the individual and the relationship of the influence to society (Bower, 1967, pp. 31–44).

The Middle Ages also produced many leaders concerned about music education. During a period of retreat from the greater world by the Holy Roman Empire and of church dominance over civic and governmental affairs, the basis of music education was the need for individuals to be religiously influenced by music. Again, music education was seen as a tool for the formation of the adult who would best fulfill those functions expected of him or her by the society of which he was a part. Charlemagne established a basic curriculum that included music throughout the Carolingian Empire in his decree “that there should be schools for boys who can read. The Psalms, the notation, the chant, and arithmetic and grammar [ought to be taught] in all monasteries and episcopacies...” In the same decree, he specified that all clerics were to learn the Roman chant thoroughly (Ellard, 1956, pp. 54–55). Seven centuries later the Protestant Reformation continued to confirm the value of music in the development of the citizen, beginning with the writings of Martin Luther.

Many well known European educators who influenced American education advocated music education. Comenius (who was also a minister) was specific about how and why music and art were to be taught. (Monroe, 1908, pp. 48–49; Comenius, 1923, pp. 194–202, 259, 261, 268, 274). Pestalozzi recognized the need for music education for the development of, among other things, a peaceful and serene family life, and of nationalistic feelings in children (Green, 1916, pp. 228–229). Froebel advocated music education (and other arts) as a means of developing an understanding of the universe and man’s place in it (1908, pp. 225–229). This goal was not unlike that of the classical quadrivium, in which music, as a mathematical subject, was expected to reveal the nature of the universe and the relationship of man to it. Spencer presented an argument for the power of music to further emotional development. He stated, “...music must take rank as the highest of the fine arts—as the one which, more than any other, ministers to human welfare.” (1951, p. 76; 1980, pp. 28–33, 70–81).

## MUSIC EDUCATION IN AMERICA

Music was not a part of the normal educational program in colonial America, but was considered an important aspect of life in the theocratic New England colonies. The New England ministers spoke and wrote of it frequently, often in impassioned tones. One of the most influential ministers, Cotton Mather, wrote that music was a natural part of worship and religion (Swan, Ed., 1977, pp. 10–11). Over a century later, Lowell Mason justified music education on the same basis and wrote about the benefits of music instruction for moral character development. He added other justifications—improved health and development of intellectual discipline (1834). It was on the basis of those same factors that the special committee of the Boston School Committee considered music as a school subject. The committee’s report stated:

Judged then by this triple standard, intellectually, morally, and physically, vocal music seems to have a natural place in every system of instruction which aspires, as should every system, to develop man’s whole nature.... Now the defect of our present system, admirable as that system is, is this, that it aims to develop the intellectual part of man’s nature solely, when for all the true purposes of life, it is of more importance, a hundred fold, to feel rightly, than to think profoundly (*Boston Music Gazette*, 1838).

The Boston School Committee adopted music as a curricular subject on the basis of the recommendations contained in the report. This was a turning point in music education history because the way was now prepared for music to become a regular component of the public school curriculum, which it did in most American school systems during the course of the next century. Music was usually adopted by local boards of education on essentially the same justifications as those accepted in Boston in 1838. Horace Mann, the first secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education, reported in 1844 that music instruction was successful in Massachusetts; his judgment was based on the threefold standard of morality, intellect, and health (1891, pp. 445–463). Although his judgment may have been subjective, he spoke for the state’s board of education and the citizens of Massachusetts, and he influenced educational policy-making bodies in many other states.

Early in his career, John Dewey wrote about aesthetic feeling, saying that “the end of art is to produce a perfect harmonized self” (1887, p. 274), thus restating Plato’s justification for education in the arts. Dewey said in 1897, “We need to return more to the Greek conception, which defined education as the attaching of pleasure and pain to the right objects and ideals in the right way” (pp. 329–330). Dewey was concerned about the development of the individual as a social being. The introduction of the *Progressive Music Series*, derived from Dewey’s philosophy, stated:

The general aim of education is to train the child to become a capable, useful, and contented member of society. The development of a fine character and of the desire to be of service to humanity are results that lie

uppermost in the minds of the leaders of educational thought. Every school subject is valued in proportion to its contribution to these desirable ends. Music, because of its powerful influence upon the very innermost recesses of our subjective life, because of its wonderfully stimulating effect upon our physical, mental, and spiritual nature, and because of its well-nigh universality of appeal, contributes directly to both of the fundamental purposes of education. By many of the advanced educators of the present day, therefore, music, next to the "three R's," is considered the most important subject in the public school curriculum (1916, p. 9).

In 1954, Benjamin Willis, superintendent of schools in Chicago, stated:

At the risk of underemphasizing many of the other important functions of music in the curriculum at all levels of education today, I believe I would put *education for citizenship* as its most important function. This concept is a very logical and necessary base from which many of the other values to be derived from music as a part of education, can follow. This is music's most important stake in education" (Morgan, 1955, p. 3).

The societal and educational changes brought about by the decline of progressive education, World War II, the Cold War, the repercussions of Sputnik, the dawn of the age of technology, and other events resulted in the need for music educators to redefine their profession in order to identify their place in the emerging technological society. Music Educators National Conference addressed itself to the need by appointing the Commission on Basic Concepts in 1954. The purpose of the commission was to articulate the philosophical and theoretical foundations of music education. The commission's work was published in *Basic Concepts in Music Education* (Henry, Ed., 1958). Although meant to serve as a basis for future development, it is ironic that, with the exception of one author, *Basic Concepts* was the philosophical culmination, in the United States at least, of thousands of years of utilitarian philosophy. Several authors discussed music education philosophy in utilitarian terms. They include Madison (p. 21), Mueller (pp. 120–122), McKay (pp. 138–139), Burmeister (pp. 218–219, 234), House (p. 238), and Gaston (pp. 272–274). *Basic Concepts* also contained an article by Allen Britton, who articulated a different philosophy, which later came to be called "aesthetic education." It was characterized by total emphasis on the aesthetic development of the child and rejection of extramusical values as part of the philosophical justification of music education. Few authors have addressed themselves to music education philosophy since the publication of *Basic Concepts*. The very small body of literature suggests that educational philosophy, the historical basis of music education philosophy, was replaced by aesthetic philosophy. Aesthetics had been, until that time, the philosophical basis of the art of music, rather than of music education. Where earlier writers had sought to link the two philosophies in order to indicate how aesthetic development led to societal fulfillment, the philosophy of aesthetic education concentrated

only on aesthetics, breaking the link with societal needs. Bennett Reimer stated in *A Philosophy of Music Education*:

If music education in the present era could be characterized by a single, overriding purpose, one would have to say this field is trying to become "aesthetic education." What is needed in order to fulfill this purpose is a philosophy which shows how and why music education is aesthetic in its nature and value (1970, p. 2).

Britton wrote in *Basic Concepts in Music Education*:

Music, as one of the seven liberal arts, has formed an integral part of the educational system of western civilization from Hellenic times to the present. Thus, the position of music in education historically speaking, is one of great strength. Unfortunately, this fact seems to be one of which most educators, including music educators, remain unaware. As a result, the defense of music in the curriculum is often approached as if something new were being dealt with. Lacking the assurance which a knowledge of history could provide, many who seek to justify the present place of music in American schools tend to place too heavy a reliance upon ancillary values which music may certainly serve but which cannot, in the end, constitute its justification. Plato, of course, is the original offender in this regard, and his general view that the essential value of music lies in its social usefulness seems to be as alive today as ever (1958, p. 195).

Charles Leonhard agreed with Britton. He wrote:

While reliance on statements of the instrumental value of music may well have convinced some reluctant administrator more fully to support the music program, those values cannot stand close scrutiny, because they are not directly related to music and are not unique to music. In fact, many other areas of the curriculum are in a position to make a more powerful contribution to these values than is music (1965, p. 43).

The Tanglewood Symposium in 1967 appeared to be an attempt to counter the new philosophy. Its purpose was to explore the present and future relationship between music education and society. The resulting document, the *Documentary Report of the Tanglewood Symposium*, presented many viewpoints of the relationship. However, the summarizing statement, "The Tanglewood Declaration," dealt for the most part with the place of music in the curriculum, rather than with societal needs that can be met by music education. Only one of the eight articles of the declaration referred to individual student needs. The inference might be drawn that the concern for the development of a citizen who is in some way different because of music education was not of the highest priority to the symposium participants.

Little has been written on music education philosophy since the publication of Reimer's work in 1970. One concludes from the lack of current literature, from the impact of Reimer's work, and from the emphasis on the subject at local, state, and national conferences, that aesthetic education is recognized to be the prevailing philosophy.

## SUMMARY

Music education philosophy developed over 2,000 years. The developmental process was not evolutionary because the philosophy remained essentially the same from Plato's time to mid 20th century. Developmental factors, indicated in the large body of literature of music education philosophy, resulted from differences between societies in various cultures over an extended period of time. In every case, the philosophical justification for music education was its effect on the development of the citizen and its ability to influence people to be more effective citizens. Around the middle of the 20th century, music education philosophers no longer expressed the need to relate aesthetic development to societal needs and goals. From that time on, the prevailing philosophy of aesthetic education has supported the teaching of music for aesthetic development without expressing the value to society of the aesthetically developed individual.

## REFERENCES

- Aristotle. *Politica*, Book 7. In W. D. Ross (Ed.), *The Works of Aristotle*, vol. 10. London: Oxford University Press, 1921.
- Athenaeus. *The Deipnosophists*. (C. B. Gulick, trans.). Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1937.
- Boston Musical Gazette*, 18, Nov. 28, Dec. 12, 26, 1938.
- Bower, C. M. Boethius' "The principles of music," an introduction, translation and commentary. (Doctoral dissertation, George Peabody College for Teachers, 1967). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 1967, 28, 2279A. (University Microfilms, no. 67-15,005).
- Charlemagne. *Monumenta Germania historica*, Leges II, Capitulari regum Francorum I. In G. Ellard. Master Alcuin, liturgist. Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1956.
- Comenius, J. A. *The great didactic*. (M. W. Keatinge, trans. and Ed.). London: A. & G. Black, Ltd., 1923).
- Dewey, J. The aesthetic element in education. In *Addresses and proceedings of the National Education Association*. Washington, D. C.: National Education Association, 1897.
- Dewey, J. *Psychology*, 1887. In *The early works of John Dewey: Psychology*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967.
- Froebel, F. *The education of man*. New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1908.
- Green, J. A., Ed. *Pestalozzi's educational writings*. New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1916.
- Henry, N. B., Ed. *Basic concepts in music education*. Chicago: National Society for the Study of Education, 1958.
- Leonhard, C. The philosophy of music education—present and future. In *Comprehensive musicianship: The foundation for college education in music*. Washington, D. C.: Music Educators National Conference, 1965.
- Mann, H. *Life and works of Horace Mann: Annual reports of the secretary of the board of education of Massachusetts for the years 1839-1844*. Boston: Lee and Shepherd Publishers, 1891.
- Mason, L. *Manual of the Boston Academy of Music for instruction in the elements of vocal music on the system of Pestalozzi*. Boston: Boston Academy of Music, 1834.
- Mather, C. *The accomplished singer*. Boston, 1721. In Swan, J. C. (Ed.), *Music in*

- Boston*. Boston: Trustees of the Public Library of the City of Boston, 1977.
- Monroe, W. S. *Comenius' school of infancy*. Boston: D. C. Heath & Co., Publishers, 1908.
- Parker, H.; McConathy, O.; Birge, E. B.; and Miessner, O. *The progressive music series, teacher's manual, vol. 2*. Boston: Silver, Burdett and Company, 1916.
- Plato. *Protagoras, Laws, Republic*. (E. Hamilton and H. Cairns, Eds.). Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1961.
- Reimer, B. *A philosophy of music education*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1970.
- Smail, W. M., trans. *Quintilian on education, book 1*. Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1938.
- Spencer, H. *Education: Intellectual, moral, and physical*. New York: D. Appelton and Company, 1890.
- Spencer, H. *Literary style and music*. New York: Philosophical Library, 1951.

June 1, 1981