

Who needs theory anyway? The relationship between theory and practice of music education in a philosophical outlook

Heidi Westerlund and Lauri Väkevä

Sibelius Academy, PL 86, 00251 Helsinki, Finland

hwesterl@siba.fi, lvakeva@siba.fi

For a practicing arts educator, the relationship between theory and practice is often unproblematic: theory is considered to be irrelevant for the good practice. Considering the matter from an academic standpoint, one faces the distinction between poietic, or productive, and contemplative, or responsive, mindsets stemming from the classical philosophical tradition. Still more confusing is the question of the relationship between theory and philosophy; one's theory seems to follow one's chosen philosophical commitment, even to a degree that advocates of different philosophical stances do not necessarily understand each others' conceptions of theory.

In this article,¹ we examine the complex relationships between philosophy, theory and practice in music education. We shall begin with analysing different approaches to philosophy of music education. Proceeding towards more general conceptions of the relationship between theory and practice, we will examine the work of some of the well-known authors within the field of music education in order to pave way to a philosophical outlook that conceives the role of philosophy of music education as a form of cultural critique. The suggested alternative approach mediates between contemplative and poietic fields in pedagogical praxis. This guides us towards an understanding that considers theoretical concepts as philosophically loaded pragmatic tools that serve critical rationality embedded in practical action. From this standpoint there is indeed no need to cut theory apart from a good practice: both can be taken to serve the same master, philosophically informed way of living meaningfully.

Practice for the practitioners, theory for the theorists?

Today, educators widely share the notion that one has to be a practitioner to be able to teach skill-based subjects, such as music. Knowing how to sing or play an instrument in practice is considered not just essential but more important than any theoretical knowledge *about* music. The same reason of valuing practical knowledge over theoretical reflection makes it sometimes difficult to justify why music educators should research their own profession.

Corresponding author: Heidi Westerlund

For a practicing music educator, the relationship between educational theory and practice is unproblematic: when everything goes smoothly, there is no need for theorizing. An efficient educational practice might even be taken as an indication that theory is a distraction rather than an improvement: not just unnecessary, but even harmful. This kind of an attitude is connected to a common assumption that theory is always conducted at such distance that it loses touch and becomes irrelevant for the practitioner. Theory is speculative in nature and the theorist thus positions herself apart from the real world of practice.

The implicit rejection of educational theorizing may also have a deeper component that touches the very heart of the professional identity of every arts educator. This would be a notion that when one practices one's 'calling' well, one does not really need to tune oneself into a critical mood, except in the more restricted sense of making the 'right' decisions in the 'right' situation within the confines of the practice. Put differently, when everything goes effortlessly, one does not have to 'stop, look and listen' in a way necessary for theoretical reflection in any academic sense. While critique may be a requisite part of formulating any academically sound theory, someone who already knows how to succeed does not need this kind of critical outlook. Indeed, slowing down for consideration may invite thoughts that threaten to disturb one's balance and confuse the very value of the goals one aims at. Even worse, it might suggest a possibility that one's teaching methods may be inaccurate. Thus, it is best to keep theorizing distinct from a working practice: theory for the theorists, practice for the practitioners. At its best, theory can only be a vague abstraction of the experiential richness of practice; at its worst, it may force us off-track from our chosen artistic and educational path by luring our attention with its hypercritical suggestions.

Within this kind of pedagogical culture, it is easy to see why theorizing does not necessarily appeal to all music educators, and, in our more restricted case, why their attitudes towards research and theory in music education may be, if not directly hostile, at least slightly suspicious. While one may respect the reasons given by critical theorists when they suggest that truly empowering practices lean on theoretical reflection guided by a critical attitude, one may also counter-argue that the profession of music education does not need this kind of empowerment, for its values and meanings already are a common possession. Is it not true that our standards of musical expertise are the same standards that all music-lovers share, even if different cultures may attend them in different ways? If this is true, then we might conclude that while critical thinking may turn out to be beneficial in fields that have to negotiate their understandings of expertise from time to time, music educators are fortunate to be united in their global quest for the best.

There are alternative voices of course. Some may say that it is naive to think that what is accepted by professionals in a given practice, whether music, visual arts, theatre, or dance, is always the best way to think or act. Educational theory, according to these critics, cannot be reduced to the taken-for-granted ideas prevalent in a particular field of expertise, because observing the benefits of thinking or acting in a certain way within the confines of a given practice, we may blind ourselves of their shortcomings. What is needed is a more extensive criterion for evaluating the benefits, and this is exactly what theoretical perspectives provide us, if accompanied by a critical mindset.

Beginning from this premise, we can feed from the scientific tradition of making a methodological distinction between our everyday ideas and theory. Scientific attitude

demands that one always practices critique in the strongest possible sense, not accepting any reasons that systematically collected empirical evidence cannot support. Combined with the deep mistrust for ad hoc justifications (i.e. justifications that despite any contradictory facts try to support the prevailing belief), should be a respect for the exceptional. It is the exception rather than the norm, the surprise rather than the convention, that caters for new, more effective critical ways of thinking. Following this demand, we have to stay constantly observant for the new possibilities in our educational practice to gain further knowledge. Critique should be in-built into our professional ethics.

Along with this rationale, one does not have to consider theory as harmful for practical success in music education. Rather, guided by critical thinking, theoretical work may help us to detect new possibilities in our practice, thus helping us to make more of what we have already achieved. It is not that theory and practice are two life-fields apart: if good scientific work is taken as a model, theory can support practice and vice versa. This implies that educational theory, or theory of music education, cannot be a mere account of what is generally accepted or wished for in the profession. Rather, theory offers blueprints, or designs, specifically constructed for the purpose of understanding the profession and these understandings may always change along with the defining conditions of the latter.

Why is it then that theory is often considered harmful, or at least unnecessary, within music education in specific? As suggested above, one may trace this idea back to the origins of the scientific mindset, to an age when science was looked at as equal to philosophy. The classical Greek philosophers made a distinction between poietic (or productive) and contemplative (or responsive) fields of knowledge, the former reserved to practices that produce viable, tangible results (such as the art objects) and the latter for those that are liberated from these kinds of earthly concerns to appreciate the beauty of the order of the ideas (see Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics*, Book XI). The contemplative field was taken to belong to philosophers, those exceptional sages who in those days were thought to be able to pierce through the veil of empirical world and glimpse what lies behind: the universal, absolute Truth. However, this contemplative ability was not taken to be innate: it required a lot of hard practice in the logical ordering of concepts that represent the true world of ideas. Academic systems of education were developed largely to meet this challenge.

In the ancient Greek thinking, craft involving technique, *technê*, and contemplation dealing with theory, *theoria*, were sometimes combined to outline knowledge, or *epistêmê*. However, reason was taken almost without exception to be the judge of true knowledge, and of the virtuous deeds in the academic philosophical tradition that followed. This basic premise also implied a question of power. *Theoria*, in the hands of the philosopher class, was thought to provide *the* normative basis on which the practical concerns of the society were judged, and thus also the power base on which to rule the productive classes – in the same way that the mind rules the hands in a well-trained body. This hierarchy in values – and thus power – in issues concerning knowledge was retained in medieval thinking and prevailed long after that. For instance, in the medieval music culture, *musicus* as a representative of the theoretical discipline was valued higher in hierarchy than *cantor*, the music maker: it was the former who had an access to the deep truths lying behind music's sensuous surface (Wason, 2002, p. 47).

Noticing the long commitment to theory and theorizing in Western civilization, one begins to understand why philosophy and theory are still often equated in common

understanding: both are thought to serve the same master, the ultimate abstraction. However, while this was the rule rather than the exception for almost two-and-half millennia, within the last century this equation has been criticized by the philosophers of various schools, including pragmatism, postmodernism and feminism. All of these posit that in the final account there is no need for 'first philosophy', or even the kind of theory that holds strong commitments to how the world should be understood (Rorty, 1980, 1982). The most significant teachings of these critics seems to be these: (1) One's conception of theory cannot stem from claims of universal forms of knowledge; and, therefore (2) one's conception of theory follows one's chosen philosophical commitments – which further means that advocates of different philosophical stances do not necessarily share, or even understand, each others' conceptions of theory. Even if many arts education philosophers have shared this criticism (see e.g. Shusterman, 2000), music education as a professional field still has some work to do to bridge the gap between the theoretically abstract and the practically concrete.

Conceptions of philosophy in academic music education

'Philosophy as basis' approach

While theory is often neglected in the practical realm of music education, it is commonplace in the academic study of the field to think that philosophers can provide us the basic understanding of our practice. A philosophy of music education, for example, is thought to present a coherent and comprehensive conceptual way of looking at music education, and to help us to make judged decisions of the latter. One can argue that from this standpoint, there is no substantial difference between philosophy and theory. In his 1989 version of *A Philosophy of Music Education*, for instance, Bennett Reimer writes that his philosophy offers 'a base of theory on which effective practice can be grounded' (p. xiii) (see also Reimer, 2003, pp. 1–6). The fundamental premise of his argument is that 'the essential nature and value of music education are determined by the nature and value of the art of music' (Reimer, 1989, p. 1; 2003, p. ix). In other words, educators need to understand the value of music, and they can guarantee the value of their educational practices by making value choices in the music they teach. According to Reimer, one particular philosophical discipline, aesthetics, offers the most suitable theoretical concepts for justifying the worth and value of music (and, more extensively, the arts) in education, because

[a]esthetics is the study of that about art which is the essence of art and that about people which has throughout history caused them to need art as an essential part of their lives. So among all the disciplines of thought that are interested in the arts, aesthetics is the one devoted to an explanation of their intrinsic nature. It is essential for music educators to understand some basic concepts in aesthetics and to apply them effectively in their teaching. (Reimer, 1989, p. 2; see also Reimer. 2003, pp. 6–8)

For Reimer (1989, pp. 3–4), philosophy of music education, informed by aesthetics, exists to guide the effort of music educators, to offer 'bits and pieces of self-justification' and an understanding of the fundamental values of music, 'a 'collective conscience' for music education as a whole'. It is noteworthy that Reimer does not identify his philosophy as an

attempt to verbalize critical views on possible defects of the practice in music education; nor does he conceive it as an alternative viewpoint that expands our self-understanding. Rather, in his account, philosophy aims to improve the self-image of the profession as it has evolved at certain point of history (Reimer, 1989, p. 3; see also Reimer, 2009, pp. 11–12). The task of a philosophy of music education is to search for the collective voice that is intended to characterise the professionally agreed and commonly held, even if perhaps imperfectly applied, beliefs concerning music and music education.

Another kind of conception of theory and philosophy of music education is found in Keith Swanwick's work. Swanwick's *A Basis for Music Education* (1979) is a philosophical study that involves 'a careful and clear examination and analysis of the fundamental concepts involved in music' (p. 2) aiming to ground a '*schema* for practical music education' (Swanwick, 1979, p. 2, italics in original). Twenty years later, in *Teaching Music Musically* (1999), Swanwick explains that his thesis constitutes an essential philosophy of music education by stripping the discipline down to its fundamentals (p. xii). His theory of music education does not claim to grow out of the professional self-understanding, despite its search for self-justification, but rather searches for the conceptual ground that could explain the richness of the inductively experienced world of music education. In this way, Swanwick's scope is intended to be more focused than Reimer's: instead of a collective voice, he searches for the basis on which to rationalize the profession.

Hence, 'basis' in music education seems to have different meanings depending on the starting points of the author. At the most general level, what is considered 'basic' is thought to be fundamental either in the metaphysical or conceptual sense, 'metaphysical' referring here to the fundamental explanation of the nature of being. This rationale goes back to the Greek metaphysics, where theory was elevated to the highest level of human comprehension. In its more restricted – and, in modern mindset, more usual – indication, what is 'basic' is thought to be a general matter but still one of argumentation. Logically, the difference hangs on the Kantian distinction between a priori and a posteriori, i.e. between the explanation before or apart from any experience and the one dependent on experience (see Kant 1933/KdrV A 1–A16 = B1–30). If philosophy is conceived as critical reflection of the universal conditions of experience, as Kant suggested, one arrives at a conclusion that philosophy should always seek what is absolutely convincing from the *human* standpoint. Following this rationale, one reserves philosophical bases principally for the kind of understanding that is directed inwards, towards understanding the subject that allegedly possesses universal traits as its constitutive factors. This means that, at root, we all base our understandings on the same set of basic concepts.

Contemporary Kantian-style priorism often subscribes to cognitivist presuppositions: the universal traits are not thought to be universal conditions of subjectivity, but they are still taken as constitutive of our knowledge. At root, we all think with the same kind of apparatus, using the same kinds of processes to understand. One way to give this conception an earthy application is to make everyone a theorist, and thus a philosopher. In Swanwick's *Music, Mind, and Education* (1988), for example, the conceptual basis for music education is widened to cover a general cognitive approach in which thoughtful music education may be equated to theorizing: 'no human mind is free from the impulse towards theorizing, any more than human physiology can get by for without breathing' (p. 6). Theories are therefore not the opposite of practice but its necessary basis (p. 7). According to Swanwick,

with theorizing we can fight against 'the arbitrary, the subjective, the dogmatic, and the doctrinaire', and in this way transcend ourselves as practitioners. This means, again, that theories of music education are equated to 'philosophies' and that the thinking of a music educator forms a 'philosophy of music education' in itself (see also Elliott, 1995, 10–12).

From this standpoint, the line between professional philosophy and practitioner's philosophy can be blurred by referring to rational or reflective thinking as a necessity for professional transformation (Jorgensen, 2003; Woodford, 2005). The teachers' need for philosophizing is primarily motivated by an argument for the need of improved practice and change through deeper understanding of the 'basis'. This understanding is not as much contemplative as it is pragmatic: rather than offering a critical view of how the reality could be conceived or even changed, this kind of a philosophy of music education is mostly written from the didactic perspective that attempts to provide the teachers tools for realizing what the preconditions of teaching and learning music are, and what they should focus on in their teaching. Therefore, the normative and persuasive undertones of a given 'basis' are merged into a professional ethos that takes its own value for granted.

Analytical approach

As we explained above, the persuasive nature of philosophy of music education can find its model, firstly, from the philosophical discourse of the general condition of human being or, secondly, from a scientific understanding of theory as a basis, or as a schema. Against this modernist rationalization, an alternative has been suggested in the course of the 20th century philosophy. After the 'linguistic turn', defined by concentration on analysis of language as the core practice of philosophizing, it became commonplace to restrict one's philosophical generalizations on the conditions of language use (Rorty, 1980). The relationship between theory and facts changed from the idea of *langue* (language, tongue) as the mirror of the reality to the idea of *parole* (speech) as a structuring and constituting agent of reality. Some philosophers took this to mean that the world can be rationalized from many angles at the same time, because we perceive things differently depending on our conceptual mindset (Putnam, 1989, 1992). A more radical way to put this is that we have no way of stepping outside our language: the Kantian world *an sich* (a world in itself, without linguistic intervention) is, for a philosopher, a trivial matter (Rorty 1980, 1982). Moreover, philosophy should not question what cannot be put to question (Wittgenstein, 1999). In a similar vein, the most a philosophy of music education, for instance, can offer is a viewpoint, one out of many possible, and the validity and usefulness of this standpoint must be estimated by other criteria than by its capability to represent a basic structure that corresponds with the ultimate reality of music education. While most of the philosophers of music education shun this kind of pluralism (Reimer, 2003; Woodford, 2005), the idea of philosophy as a critique of language use has been widely discussed in contemporary philosophy of the arts (Shusterman, 2002).

The above analytical standpoint takes philosophy of music education to be a critical negotiation of the relevant concepts of the discipline, embedded in its discourses. By clarifying what is muddy in the use of the words, it is thought that one gets an understanding of what people mean when they address things musical. In a similar manner, an analytical approach to educational philosophy of music sets out to clear conceptual tangles from

the healthy use of words describing the pedagogical practices of music education. By this method, one gets a sense of what music, 'at root', means for most of the people most of the time. For instance, the analytical strategy behind David J. Elliott's (1995) praxialism suggests that one improves the music education field by formulating a concept of music that is as extensive in its use as one gets – and, furthermore, that this kind of an extensive concept of music can be found when music is taken as practice, 'something that people do, and know they do, and are known to do' (Elliott, 1995, pp. 42–43). There are several interpretations of what this kind of praxial philosophy amounts to. Elliott (1995, p. 18) sees it as an answer to the question 'What is music?' which he takes as 'the logical prerequisite to any philosophy of music education' (see also Alperson 1991). In turn, Wayne Bowman (2005) argues that 'praxial view is not so much an alternative music philosophy as a dramatic effort to redefine the traditional bounds of music philosophical discourse' (Bowman, 2005, p. 56). However, in either form, being a general description of what music is, or a critique of philosophical discourse of music, praxialism does not seem to extend its critique to what is commonly accepted and traditional within the confines of the musical practices. Rather, it takes the musical practices of 'getting things right' for granted. Praxis of music education is defined along the norms, standards and values of existing musical and musico-educational ways. This makes the view subject to a more extensive critique that asks for the general pedagogical significance of recognizing *difference*: in other words, recognizing the alternative perspectives that could help music educators to widen their professional understanding.

The problem with the analytical strategy of praxialism thus seems to be the same as with the kind of thinking that finds the basis for music education in the commonly accepted professional discourse(s). It subsumes the general critical view of music education to the professional ethos of the musical practices, and its quest for homogeneous theory to promote professional consensus prevents the critical viewpoints from stepping to the front. At the same time, it falls into the danger of promoting ideologically loaded discursive practices with which educators then justify their work hiding from the sight the structures of coercion that frame our commonly held assumptions. Thus, for a comprehensive analytical philosophy of music education, it is more important to fill in the cracks of the theory, the exceptions that disturb the consensus, than to search for new emerging ideas in the margins of the prevalent discourse, or elevating consciousness of diversity.

Philosophy of music education as cultural critique: mediating between theoretical and practical fields in pedagogical praxes

Philosophy as cultural critique: the case of pluralism

Several philosophers have tried to articulate how the complicated intertextual and interactive processes of philosophical thinking are embedded in culture. For instance, the Canadian philosopher, Charles Taylor (1989) suggests that the relationship between philosophy and culture is circular. Culture does not spread outward from the formulations of epoch-making philosophers, nor does philosophy consist of ideas that are simply a causative result of cultural dynamics. According to Taylor, philosophical ideas already exist as traits in the culture, traits that philosophers help to formulate. Also, for the

pragmatist philosopher John Dewey, philosophy, by sustaining the closest connection with the succession of changes in civilization, 'is fed by the streams of tradition, traced at critical moments to their sources in order that the current may receive a new direction' (Dewey 1996, LW, pp. 3, 7). From Dewey's standpoint, philosophy has a critical and reflective purpose within culture: its patterns are 'prophecies rather than records', that is, they suggest new policies and subsequent developments rather than already settled solutions (Dewey 1996, LW, pp. 3, 7). In a word, philosophy *is* culture, in its critical and reconstructive mood.

How can philosophy of music education (and arts education, in more general terms) reconstruct itself as cultural critique? Let us examine this through the concrete question of pluralism, a question that all of today's arts educators need to reflect on at some level. In music education, Reimer and Swanwick approach the question of pluralism by reducing the complexity of the phenomenon to general concepts, or by focusing on the salient features that transcend immediate musical-cultural contexts. Reimer (1989; 2003, pp. 266–267) offers basic criteria to examine the value of the best music in each musical genre based on the ideas of aesthetic education. In turn, Swanwick (1988) benefits Popper's theory of Three Worlds: the human mind (belonging to World Two) emerges from the physical world (of World One) and gets its content in relation to the objective products of culture (of World Three). World Three provides a limiting condition for musical learning in the sense that one needs to choose carefully the musical materials that carry cultural meaning to establish a link between the student's thoughts and the objective world of music (Swanwick, 1988, p. 113). Music education should keep the focus on the musically objective, not stir the balance with any unmusical cultural aspects, or by bringing too peripheral musical materials to the learning context (see also Elliott, 1996). In a similar vein, John Paynter argued for keeping the focus on objective musical event, structured as a tonal form: music education should build on the holistic experience of organizing music as events that present 'the 'truth' of the musical *idea*' (Mills & Paynter, 2008, p. 131, italics original). These approaches seem to provide a coherent and universally applicable way to solve the problem of pluralism by taking the value of music at least partly as generated by general established factors that transcend social-cultural particularities and discordance.

Philosophy as metaphor

Another North American music educator, Estelle Jorgensen (2003) offers a different possibility for cultural critique. Jorgensen does not search for a systematic theory like Reimer, Swanwick, or Elliott but for a more inclusive validation for music education, accepting pluralism both in theoretical and practical fields. She develops an open-ended approach where the philosopher identifies conceptual polarities and tensions as differences, without offering clearly cut syntheses or final solutions. According to Jorgensen, teachers generally focus on the imagined future and immediate situational practical consequences. Thus, the teachers' way of thinking tends to be eclectic to begin with. The task of a philosopher is not to make the either/or choices on behalf of music teachers; rather, the philosopher provides a stage where the implications of different options may be discussed in the way that the teachers are able to make their own justified decisions. Jorgensen's solution deals therefore with the theoretically abstract but also with the practical without suggesting universal or a prioristic rationalizations.

Interestingly, for Jorgensen (2005), the purpose of philosophy is different from that of theory: philosophy asks questions in a search for wisdom in distinction to theory that is formulated for explanatory purposes and that can be thus refuted through empirical observations. In her paper 'Seeing double: a comparative approach to music education' (2008), Jorgensen describes philosophy's quest for wisdom in metaphorical terms: philosophy can be likened to a journey, taken in order to learn something meaningful, not just of the world, but also of one's self. In this sense, philosophy is a form of self-rationalization. The self is not just reflected on, but in a deeper sense realized, made real, through philosophizing. Thus, philosophy, as a search for wisdom, can be a fundamental life-goal, a way to empower one's individual voice in critical ('dialectical') communion. Philosophizing is not an alternative for theory or professional practice in music education but something that offers ethical guidance to one's life in a wider sense as well.

Furthermore, Jorgensen (2005, p. 29) is not comfortable with the 'metaphor of fusion in which theory is melded into practice and practice into theory', for this denies the 'usefulness' of the distinction. To begin with, '[p]hilosophers have long debated conceptual matters irrespective of their practical applications and their inquiries have been useful to musicians and educators' (Jorgensen, 2005, p. 29). Moreover, 'many (maybe most) music teachers have gone about their work very effectively in largely intuitive ways without the benefit of explicit theoretical or philosophical understandings' (Jorgensen, 2005, p. 29). However, '[p]ractice construed descriptively may not always constitute a good, especially if one sees music education as a profoundly moral and ethical undertaking in the service of transmitting and transforming musical traditions from one generation to the next' (Jorgensen, 2005, p. 28). While emphasising the open-ended nature of music education philosophy as a meta-level discourse, Jorgensen clearly paves the way for a normative approach that seeks the justification of educational practice on a more profound level than distinct musical practices have to offer. For her, this is the level of spiritual commitment that frames one's decisions on both theoretical and practical level. Philosophy, as a general way to tune into life, precedes one's professional concerns, providing a hermeneutic understanding of the normative basis on which to build one's quest for wisdom. As to the issue of pluralism, it seems that Jorgensen's basic suggestion is to recognize the need for an attitude of humility, receptivity and hopefulness towards other cultures, as they may always provide opportunities for further self-realization and enrichment: 'in the process of sharing what we can, we will both be enriched' (Jorgensen, 2003, p. 121).

Jorgensen's point of departure is thus metaphorical rather than conceptual. In a very important way, it also challenges the notion of philosophy as a general model. She writes: 'recent philosophical thinking in music education has tended towards 'theories of the whole of the world of music education'' (Jorgensen, 2008, p. 62). 'Whether it be 'music education as aesthetic education', 'praxial music education', or 'musikdidaktik', she says, 'these philosophers have tended to organize the entire field of music education from one point of view as a systematic theory' (Jorgensen, 2008, p. 62). Thus, 'we are no longer left with a solitary metaphor but with a metaphor in conjunction with a model' (Jorgensen, 2008, pp. 62–63). This further means that 'we confront the possibility of multiple metaphors and related models' (Jorgensen, 2008, pp. 62–63). While the benefit of metaphorical strategy is that it provides one's philosophy with wings to fly, it is also important to outline a related systematic model (or a set of models) that is more-or-less consistent with the metaphor. The

point is that models are not equivalent to metaphors: rather, they paint systematic portraits that draw inspiration from the metaphor. Most importantly, the ambiguity of the metaphor suggests the possibility of several different models.

Philosophy as a map

Still another way to envision the role of philosophy in human life is to compare it to a map. For instance, for Elliott (1995, p. 9), philosophy provides a comprehensive overview of a given field. As a map, philosophy is supposed to be practical and in coherence with the empirical facts, but it is by no means a detailed picture of the described area, nor does it replace the actual experiences of travelling. Many philosophers have earlier used a similar metaphor, perhaps most famously John Dewey (1996, LW, pp. 1, 309). However, in Dewey, at its most extensive, philosophy is not an interest-free guide. Philosophical maps are simultaneously realistic and normative. They have to be useful in practice and to fit to our experience of reality at the same time as they must involve choices that are based on pragmatic deliberation of the criteria and priorities of their use. One could think that there are different maps for drivers and pedestrians, maps for those who use public transportation and maps that describe the density of population or climate. The same environment can be mapped differently depending on our perspective and depending on what we aim at. A philosophical map is therefore never *the* snapshot of the world: neither is there only one right map for every occasion. In a like manner, philosophy does not also offer a foundation for our practical efforts. Rather, it consists of a contextual network of views that can be applied in certain purposes at certain times and in certain contexts. This kind of a map cannot provide a general model of all of the relevant aspects of the music education profession; however, it can be used as a critical checklist of the possibilities involved in the transactions that make up the field, both at present and in the future.

Philosophy as tool

If one treats philosophies in this way as reflective guidelines for everyday action, one arrives yet to another view of a philosophy of music education. From this standpoint, rather than providing us with general models and metaphors on which to hang our epistemological needs and ethical hopes, or providing us with a map of the argumentative terrain, philosophies provide us tools. As tools, philosophies are used to fulfil certain purposes. Moreover, all purposes do not have to be settled beforehand: there are always new possibilities involved in the use of philosophies as tools, and part of the task of the philosopher is to find these new possibilities. Educational practice can be informed by related philosophy and the other way around, but their relation is based as much on opening of new previously unheard ideas than charting out prevailing concessions. Furthermore, new tools can be invented all the time: some may turn out to have lasting importance; others may be used just for the occasion, or perhaps be taken into new uses long after their invention. The main point is that philosophies provide us with *options* in our thinking. This means that even if philosophies do not subsume to so-called grand theories, they are not totally under-determined by practical demands, either. Their normative value is related to their open, or rather, *experimental* potential.

Taken in a similar way as tools for experimentation, theories of music education grant social experiments. Their prime heuristic import is not found in their descriptive value, but in their power to enhance cultural critique and thus to support a reconstructive way of life that Dewey identified as 'democracy'. A central dimension of this way of life is 'intelligence in action.' This term indicates the participative dimension of public life that requires ethical deliberation and communication (Dewey, 2006). If the logical conditions of intelligence in action are met, philosophies may truly function as maps; however, just as in the case of scientific theories, one must accept their transitory, relative and fallible nature, for if philosophies are taken as absolutes, they cater for dogmatism rather than democracy. What this pragmatist understanding of philosophy aims at is the acceptance that as philosophies perform their task in the public field (arts education field included), the most practitioners can hope from them is a set of alternatives. The philosophical power of any given alternative must be ultimately judged on its import into 'experience', the latter of which in this Deweyan outlook refers to the nexus of individual subjectively felt experience and the situated and contextually embedded social-cultural practice (see Westerlund, 2002). Thus, philosophy should acknowledge its active role in making visible, and suggesting solutions to, the 'Problems of Men [sic]', rather than continue the quest for certainty begun by the ancient philosophers (Dewey, 1996, MW, pp. 10, 46; cf. Dewey, 1999).

The pragmatist understanding of philosophy as a tool may be applied as a critique of the professional notion of a musical practice as the basis of music education philosophy akin to theory in its descriptive power. Much in this pragmatist vein, Wayne Bowman (2005) wonders, 'whether praxialism, as a non-normative orientation, is favoring description to prescription', and thus 'is better suited to music philosophy than music education philosophy' (p. 72). While praxialism may be conceived as an alternative to the aesthetic rationalization of musical value, because it models a conceptual representation of the musical world as *it is taken to be*, a more pragmatist understanding of practice would be future-oriented, more involved with what the musical life may *turn into*.

With this shift of emphasis philosophy faces its normative underpinnings: as a herald of new ways of life, it caters as much for educational as for explanatory needs. Indeed, in its future orientation, pragmatism suggests a close connection between philosophy and education. Dewey (1996, MW, pp. 9, 339) saw education as a 'laboratory in which philosophic distinctions become concrete and are tested': in turn, philosophy is to be conceived as a 'general theory for education' (Dewey, 1996, MW, p. 338). In other words, educational philosophy is, and must be, inescapably normative, for it involves a critical aspect that seeks for educational meaning through negotiations that we go through in order to understand what we are about. As educational philosophers we must attend the future: theoretical accounts of past practices may help us in orientation, but the final proof of the value of a given set of ideas is upcoming experience, which is of course to a large degree unobservable and uncontrollable. Philosophy, from this standpoint, can approach theory as a tool to deal with contingencies of actual dynamism of life in flux, not as fixed set of general descriptions of how things are. To paraphrase Dewey's words, philosophy must deal with the 'stubbornness' of the past in order to answer to the claims of 'an insistent future' (Dewey, 1996, LW, pp. 3, 6). The more an open field we have to envision for our future strategies, the more we can attend the possibilities of present. At its best, philosophy, and education as its laboratory, can help us to turn the necessities of our actual life into future possibilities.

While Bowman rightly juxtaposes educationally motivated pragmatism as a future-oriented approach with the kind of an analytical praxialism that settles for conceptual generalizations of 'what is music', one could ask a further question: Could not a philosophy of *music* be equally future-oriented and thus not only prescriptive of what already exists (e.g. what is taken as music)? This takes us too far off the scope of this article, but the reader can use the idea as a thought experiment to ponder on the possibilities of the kind of philosophy that accepts wholly the situational and contextual points of departure for our musical activities and understanding the meaning of the latter. Music can be seen as part of human experience, mediated through our educational endeavours to understand and live meaningfully. Perhaps it can also be taken as a way to embrace life in its uncertainty and richness of possibilities: music would mark 'the creative task itself', our basic way to deal with our temporal 'now-ness' (cf. Paynter, 2008, p. 130), conditioned by our past experience and potentialities of future experience. While this is a philosophical attitude towards the practice of music, theory is never cut apart from practice. The experiential sphere of our daily life involves both theoretical and practical aspects, feeding each other in a holistic field of interest that channels the philosophically driven praxis.

Concluding summary

In this article, we have explored philosophy of music education at its metaphilosophical level by examining the relation between theory and philosophy as well as practice through the work of some influential writers in the field. We argue that even if the role of philosophy can be seen as providing a 'basis' of the profession, either as a general understanding of the latter, its justification and values, or as a cognitive model that guides the thinking of music teachers, a prospective alternative in enhancing strongly reflective educational practice and in guiding today's music education practitioners in critical reflection instead of following models would be to treat philosophy and philosophical research as a wider interpretative field. This field provides new openings and fresh, even critical viewpoints that may counter-argue the generally accepted professional ethos. Moreover, understanding philosophy as a tool, rather than merely offering a general picture, or a comprehensive map, of the whole profession, we can create new possibilities for richer professional discourse that allows plurality of approaches and constructive critique, thus avoiding simplistic either/or positioning.

Note

- 1 This article is based on the keynote address delivered at 2007 Symposium of the Nordic Network for Music Pedagogical Research (NNMPF), held at the Sibelius Academy, Helsinki, Finland on 1 February 2007. We also thank all the doctoral students and teachers in the preconference of the 8th International Symposium on Philosophy of Music Education in Kallio-Kuninkala, Järvenpää (Finland), in June 2010 for their valuable comments.

References

- ALPERSON, PH. A. (1991) What should one expect from a philosophy of music education? *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, **25**, 215–242.

- ARISTOTLE, (1981) *EN = Nikomakhoksen etiikka. [Nicomachean Ethics.]* Helsinki: Gaudeamus.
- BOWMAN, W. D. (2005) The limits and grounds of musical praxialism. In D. Elliott (Ed.), *Praxial Music Education. Reflections and Dialogues* (pp. 52–78). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- DEWEY, J. (1996) MW = Middle Works. In Hickman L. (Ed.), *The Collected Works of John Dewey, 1882–1953*. The Electronic Edition.
- DEWEY, J. (1996) LW = Later Works. In Hickman L. (Ed.), *The Collected Works of John Dewey, 1882–1953*. The Electronic Edition.
- DEWEY J. (1999) *Pyrkimys varmuuteen. [A Quest for Certainty.]* Helsinki: Gaudeamus.
- DEWEY, J. (2006) *Julkinen toiminta ja sen ongelmat. [Public and Its Problems.]* Helsinki: Vastapaino.
- ELLIOTT, D. J. (1995) *Music Matters. A New Philosophy of Music Education*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- ELLIOTT, D. J. (1996) Music education in Finland: a new philosophical view. *Finnish Journal of Music Education*, **1**, 6–22.
- JORGENSEN, E. (2003) *Transforming Music Education*. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- JORGENSEN, E. (2005) Four philosophical models of the relation between theory and practice. *Philosophy of Music Education Review*, **13**, 21–36.
- JORGENSEN, E. (2008) Seeing double: a comparative approach to music education. *Finnish Journal of Music Education*, **11**, 60–79.
- KANT, I. (1933) *Immanuel Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*. Translated by N. K. Smith. London: MacMillan.
- MILLS, J. & PAYNTER, J. (2008). *Thinking and Making: Selections from the Writings of John Paynter on Music in Education*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- PUTNAM, H. (1989) *The Many Faces of Realism. The Paul Carus Lectures*. Second Printing. LaSalle: Open Court.
- PUTNAM, H. (1992) *Realism with a Human Face*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- REIMER, B. (1989) *A Philosophy of Music Education*. Second edition. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall.
- REIMER, B. (2003) *A Philosophy of Music Education: Advancing the Vision*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall.
- REIMER, B. (2009) *Seeking the Significance of Music Education – Essays and Reflections*. Lanham: MENC/Rowman & Littlefield.
- RORTY, R. (1980) *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- RORTY, R. (1982) *Consequences of Pragmatism. Essays, 1972–1980*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- SHUSTERMAN, R. (2000) *Pragmatist Aesthetics. Living Beauty, Rethinking Art*. Second edition. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.
- SHUSTERMAN, R. (2002) *Surface and Depth: Dialectics of Criticism and Culture*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- SWANWICK, K. (1979/1992) *A Basis for Music Education*. London: Routledge.
- SWANWICK, K. (1988) *Music, Mind, and Education*. London: Routledge.
- SWANWICK, K. (1999) *Teaching Music Musically*. New York: Routledge.
- TAYLOR, C. (1989). *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- WASON, R. W. (2002) Musica practica: music theory as pedagogy. In Christensen T. S. (Ed.), *The Cambridge History of Western Music Theory* (pp. 2–77). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- WESTERLUND, H. (2002) *Bridging Experience, Action, and Culture in Music Education*. Studia Musica 16. Helsinki: Sibelius Academy.
- WITTGENSTEIN, L. (1999) *Filosofisia tutkimuksia. [Philosophical Investigations.]* Juva: WSOY.
- WOODFORD, P. (2005) *Democracy and Music Education. Liberalism, Ethics, and the Politics of Practice*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.