

A Comprehensive Technical Analysis of Bennett Reimer's Philosophy of Music Education: Advancing the Vision

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The landscape of music education has been profoundly shaped by philosophical inquiries that seek to define the value, purpose, and execution of music pedagogy. At the center of this intellectual discourse is Bennett Reimer's seminal work, **A Philosophy of Music Education: Advancing the Vision**. Originally published in 1970, the text underwent significant transformations, most notably in its third edition (2003) and subsequent reprints, to address the evolving socio-cultural and educational needs of the 21st century. This article provides an in-depth technical breakdown of Reimer's **Music Education as Aesthetic Education (MEAE)** framework, exploring its theoretical underpinnings, practical applications, and the synergistic shifts introduced in the third edition.

The Foundational Framework: Music Education as Aesthetic Education (MEAE)

Reimer's philosophy is rooted in the concept of aesthetics, specifically the idea that music is a unique form of human cognition that allows for the expression and experience of feelings that language cannot capture. The **theoretical framework** of MEAE posits that the primary value of music is intrinsic; music education exists to help students gain access to the depth of feeling embedded within musical structures.

The Duality of Perception and Reaction

Central to Reimer's technical analysis of the musical experience is the relationship between **musical perception** and **musical reaction**. This can be modeled as a feedback loop where the quality of the aesthetic experience is directly proportional to the acuity of the listener's perception. The mechanism operates as follows:

- Perception: The cognitive ability to discern the internal workings of music—its melody, harmony, rhythm, timbre, texture, and form.
- Reaction: The affective or emotional response to what is perceived.

From a pedagogical standpoint, Reimer argues that teachers cannot directly teach 'feeling' or 'reaction.' Instead, the technical role of the educator is to heighten a student's **perception** of musical elements. As perception becomes more refined, the capacity for a deeper, more meaningful reaction increases naturally.

The Four Pillars of Musical Knowing

In *Advancing the Vision*, Reimer expands the cognitive dimensions of music education into four distinct but interrelated types of 'knowing.' These pillars provide a structured approach for curriculum development and assessment.

1. Knowing Within

This is the core of the aesthetic experience. It is **non-conceptual** and **non-discursive**. Knowing within occurs when a person is fully engaged in the act of making or listening to music, experiencing the 'ebb and flow' of musical tension and resolution. It is the immediate realization of musical meaning.

2. Knowing How

This refers to the

procedural knowledge or technical skills required to perform, compose, or improvise. While some philosophies (like Praxialism) place this at the absolute center, Reimer views 'knowing how' as a vital means to the end of 'knowing within.' It involves the mastery of instruments, vocal techniques, and notation.

3. Knowing About

This involves **factual and contextual information**. It includes music history, theoretical terminology, and cultural background. In a technical pedagogical workflow, 'knowing about' serves to provide the necessary context that can sharpen 'perception,' thereby enriching the 'knowing within' experience.

4. Knowing Why

This is the **philosophical and evaluative** dimension. It involves understanding the value of music in human life and being able to make informed judgments about musical quality and educational priorities. It is the 'meta-cognition' of the music student and educator.

Comparative Analysis: Aesthetic vs. Praxial Philosophies

To understand the technical nuances of Reimer's philosophy, it is essential to compare it with the **Praxial Philosophy**, most notably championed by David Elliott. This comparison highlights the shift from a 'product-oriented' aesthetic view to an 'action-oriented' praxial view, and how Reimer's third edition attempts to bridge this gap.

Feature	Aesthetic Education (MEAE)	Praxial Philosophy
Primary Value	Musical Work as an Object of Feeling	Musical Action (Musicing)
Core Goal	Deepening Aesthetic Perception	Developing Musicianship and 'Flow'
Role of Listening	Central to all musical engagement	Secondary to active music-making
Knowledge Type	Focused on 'Knowing Within'	Focused on 'Knowing How' (Procedural)
Scope of Music	Traditionally Universalist/Formalist	Contextual and Socially Situated
Reimer's 3rd Ed. Shift	Synergistic: Includes process and product	Remains focused on the act of doing

Technical Workflow: Designing an Aesthetic-Based Lesson Plan

Implementing Reimer's philosophy requires a specific instructional design that moves from technical perception to aesthetic realization. The following step-by-step procedure outlines a MEAE-aligned instructional unit.

Phase 1: Entry Point (Knowing About)

The educator introduces the **contextual framework** of the musical work. This includes historical significance, the composer's intent (if applicable), and the cultural environment. The goal is to prepare the student's mind for focused perception.

Phase 2: Technical Analysis (Knowing How & Perception)

Students engage with the technical elements of the piece. This might involve:

1. Isolating Variables: Identifying a specific rhythmic motif or harmonic progression.
2. Skill Acquisition: Practicing the performance of that motif to understand its physical requirements.
3. Structural Mapping: Creating a visual or mental map of the piece's architecture (form).

Phase 3: The Aesthetic Encounter (Knowing Within)

This is the 'Advancing the Vision' stage. Students interact with the music as a whole. Whether through performance or active listening, the focus shifts from the 'parts' to the 'wholeness' of the musical expression. The educator facilitates an environment of **quietude and focus** to allow the 'knowing within' to occur.

Phase 4: Synthesis and Reflection (Knowing Why)

Students reflect on the experience. Why did the music move them (or why did it not)? How did the technical elements contribute to the overall feeling? This phase solidifies the connection between the **technical craft** and the **aesthetic result**.

The Synergistic Vision of the Third Edition

In the 2003 revision, Reimer moved away from a strictly formalist view of aesthetics. He acknowledged that the 'vision' needed to advance by incorporating **experiential learning** and a broader range of musical genres, including popular, folk, and non-Western musics. This **Synergistic Philosophy** recognizes that music is both a 'thing' (a work of art) and a 'process' (an act of creation and performance).

The Integration of Multiple Intelligences

Reimer's technical breakdown in the third edition aligns closely with Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences. He posits that **Musical Intelligence** is a primary mode of human operation. To teach it effectively, the curriculum must address:

- The Composing Dimension: Exploring the creative organization of sound.
- The Performing Dimension: The physical and interpretive realization of music.
- The Listening Dimension: The sophisticated perception of musical meaning.
- The User Dimension: How music functions in daily life, from ritual to entertainment.

Case Study: Overcoming the 'Elitism' Challenge in MEAE

A common critique of aesthetic education is its perceived bias toward Western Classical music, which often prioritizes structural complexity. In a **technical implementation study**, a suburban high school music department transitioned their curriculum from a traditional performance-only model to a Reimer-inspired MEAE model.

The Problem

Students in the jazz band and choir felt a disconnect between their technical drills and the 'meaning' of the music. Engagement was high for 'fun' songs but low for 'complex' repertoire.

The Solution

The department implemented a **Perceptual Analysis Grid**. For every piece of music, regardless of genre (from Bach to Kendrick Lamar), students were required to map the **Aesthetic Components**: *Tension/Release patterns, Timbral Shifts, and Narrative Form*.

The Result

By applying the technical perception tools of MEAE to popular and jazz idioms, students reported a higher 'Knowing Within' experience. They stopped seeing pop music as 'simple' and started seeing the aesthetic nuances in production and vocal delivery. This successfully demonstrated that Reimer's philosophy is **genre-agnostic** when applied as a technical perceptual tool.

Mathematical Modeling of Musical Meaning

While music is an art, Reimer's philosophy suggests a quasi-mathematical relationship regarding aesthetic value.

We can express the **Aesthetic Potency (AP)** of an educational experience as a function of **Perceptual Complexity (PC)** and **Technical Competence (TC)**:

$$AP = (PC * TC) \cdot dt$$

Where:

- PC (Perceptual Complexity): The depth of musical elements the student is trained to hear.
- TC (Technical Competence): The student's ability to manipulate or interpret those elements.
- dt: The time spent in focused, aesthetic engagement.

If either PC or TC is zero, the Aesthetic Potency of the educational moment is significantly diminished. This formula underscores Reimer's argument that performance skill (TC) alone does not constitute a full music education; it must be multiplied by perceptual awareness (PC).

Common Pitfalls and Troubleshooting in MEAE Implementation

Educators transitioning to a Reimer-based philosophy often encounter specific operational challenges. Below is a guide to identifying and solving these issues.

Operational Challenge	Root Cause	Technical Solution
Over-Intellectualization	Too much focus on 'Knowing About' (facts).	Reduce lecture time; increase 'Knowing Within' through guided listening sessions.
Performance Burnout	Neglecting the aesthetic for technical 'Knowing How.'	Incorporate 'Aesthetic Breaks' where rehearsals focus on the emotional arc rather than notes.
Subjectivity Trap	Confusing 'Aesthetic Reaction' with 'Personal Opinion.'	Use objective terminology (e.g., "The crescendo increases tension") rather than subjective (e.g., "I like this part").
Assessment Difficulty	Inability to 'grade' a feeling.	Assess the *Perception* (the ability to identify elements) rather than the *Reaction*.

Bennett Reimer's *A Philosophy of Music Education: Advancing the Vision* remains a cornerstone of pedagogical theory because it refuses to separate the **mechanical** from the **spiritual**. By providing a technical framework for the 'ineffable' qualities of music, Reimer allows educators to move beyond mere skill instruction into the realm of true artistic mentorship. The third edition's move toward synergy ensures that this philosophy remains relevant in a world of diverse musical practices, cementing the idea that the value of music lies in its unique ability to educate human feeling. As music education continues to evolve alongside technology and global culture, the core tenets of MEAE—focusing on the depth of the musical experience itself—provide a stable and profound foundation for future generations of learners and teachers.

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