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The Dualism in Music Education Philosophy

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THE DUALISM IN MUSIC EDUCATION PHILOSOPHY

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A music education based on "aesthetic" education has been used as a primary justification and motivation for music teachers for most of this century. In 1970, Bennett Reimer presented a comprehensive document which outlined the aesthetic philosophy of music education in his book, *Philosophy of Music Education*. Dr. Reimer's philosophy sets up the concepts of absolutism (meaning placed in the music itself) and referentialism (meaning placed outside of the music) as opposite ends of a continuum. Dr. Reimer advocates the absolute expressionism philosophy. He states, "While Referentialism insists that you must go outside the work, Absolute Expressionism insists that meaning and value are internal; they are functions of the artistic qualities themselves and how they are organized. But the artistic/cultural influences surrounding a work of art may indeed be strongly involved in the experience the work gives..." The quality and necessity of a music education, based on Dr. Reimer's philosophy, has been severely challenged due to his emphasis on the musical "product" rather than the musical "process." While the popular and most widely accepted philosophy has been the aesthetic view, a different approach to music education has challenged the aesthetic philosophy. In 1994, David Elliott, a professor of music education at the University of Toronto, stated the bold opposition to the aesthetic concept in his book, *Music Matters*. Dr. Elliott proposes that "a musical product is more than a piece of music...or a 'work' in the aesthetic sense. What we are presented with is the outcome of a particular kind of intentional human activity. Fundamentally, music is something that people do." Dr. Elliott traces the history of the Romantic Revolution and the major changes of Western philosophy from the Enlightenment to the "romantic" (aesthetic) age. In doing so, he shows that music has not always been viewed as an intangible, mystic subject. Rather, music was a flexible and "do-able" societal component before 1800. As Western philosophy adopted the aesthetic viewpoint, the listener searched for a more "holistic" meaning in music. Dr. Elliott's philosophy opposes the aesthetic view in order to bring music into a more engaging and tangible activity for our society. In doing so, he proposes that the justification of a music program will be much more concrete and realistic. My research investigates the major voices of the profession and the philosophical trends of the past decade. In this study, a questionnaire will sample the music education majors at Illinois Wesleyan University to determine the philosophic trends. As the questions will address the areas of music as expression and experience, as well as music teaching, the questionnaire will serve to reveal the subject's philosophical position in the field of music education.