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Nationalism and Internationalism in the Philosophy of Music Education The German Example

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Introduction

The philosophy of music education has grown remarkably during the last decades, and now has all the characteristics of an academic discipline, including a growing scientific community and several forums for public discussions – the MayDay-Group and its e-journal *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* are one proof of that, and the International Society for the Philosophy of Music Education and the *Philosophy of Music Education Review* another one. The *international* discussion in the field has tended to be dominated recently by two leading paradigms (Reimer 2003, Elliott 1995), both of which stem from a North American tradition. This does not mean, however, that the philosophy of music education as a whole is a (relatively) homogenous enterprise.

Obviously, there are schools of thought, for example, the philosophy of music education written in German, that can be characterized as *national*; these philosophers tend to bypass the international discussion altogether and concentrate on their own topics, problems and traditions, and stick to their own language. This may explain serious misunderstandings that can occur when *international* discourse is pursued (as between, for example, Vogt 2003 and Reimer 2003). If we do not wish to devalue national traditions as merely provincial, there must be a reason, or probably several, for the ‘nationalisation’ of philosophical thinking that makes communication difficult across national boundaries, traditions, and languages. The result is disadvantages for both the national and the international debate, as many valuable theories, ideas, and experiences fail to be considered.

This paper is a first attempt to search for those reasons and to look for ways of avoiding or minimizing such misunderstandings in the future. I do not believe, however, that these misunderstandings will disappear altogether, or that there is a chance of reconciling different positions in a universal way on the basis of an anthropology of music (see Reimer 1997; but compare Bowman 1991). And of course, the paper itself is example of the problem

it seeks to tackle, as it is written from a “German” point of view. But I nonetheless propose that there is a chance to ‘internationalize’ local traditions and to ‘re-nationalize’ the global discussion in a way which may be called “glocal” (see Vogt 2003a). I concentrate on the German example simply because I know it well and it is a very distinct local tradition, at that. However, no doubt there are many other national examples with similar characteristics to which the following analysis can apply.

i.

Who outside of Germany, for example, knows of Michael Alt? In Germany, I suppose, nearly everyone who has studied music education knows at least his name, whereas outside Germany Michael Alt is probably completely unknown. In Germany his name is closely connected to the development of music education as an academic discipline, and his *Didaktik der Musik (Didactics of Music)* of 1968 can be considered to be the first German philosophy of music education after World War II¹. But Alt’s writings have never been translated into other languages, and the same is true for other authors; for example, Heinz Antholz (Antholz 1970) or Ulrich Günther (Günther 2005), who are well known in German music education. Generally speaking, this is true for all German approaches to the philosophy of *music education* while, in contrast, German *philosophy* certainly still has a notable international impact, at least on the philosophy of education in general.

Members of the so-called “Frankfurt School” of philosophy and sociology, like Horkheimer, Adorno, and Habermas, are well-known outside Germany, for example, and their influence on the critical theory of education and of music education especially in the English-speaking world is undisputed (e.g. see Regelski 2005). However, the key concept of German critical theory of music education, the “mature listener” (“der mündige Hörer”; see Segler 1972), is probably completely unknown outside Germany. And, I suppose, a philosophical study like *Truth and Method* by Hans-Georg Gadamer is not only translated into English but closely read by philosophers of education as well, while, at least as far as I know, Karl Heinrich Ehrenforth’s (Ehrenforth 1971) and Christoph Richter’s (Richter 1976) German books on Gadamer’s importance for music education have never been translated into English or any other language (however, see Richter 1996).


I will start my diagnosis of this general problem with the very obvious: German can no longer be considered as the important international language of science that it was at one

time; and, without doubt, the English language has become the *lingua franca* of academic discourse throughout the world (see, e.g. Ammon 2000). Perhaps, as some suspect, this situation will change some decades from now, and then Spanish or Chinese will overtake the dominance of English. This prospect might indeed be unlikely but, in any case, it indicates the existence of non-scientific reasons for changes in scientific discourse, and these reasons have to do with political and economical developments. Thus, the important role of German sciences until World War I cannot be explained apart from Germany's effort to become a leading industrial and military force. After two World Wars, however, the German language has lost much of the international importance it used to have 100 years ago, mainly because science in Germany has itself lost its importance. This used to be different, especially for philosophers of education, who at least made their intellectual academic pilgrimage from the U.S. to Germany; for example, William Torrey Harris, who borrowed quite a few of his arguments from Hegel; or Josiah Royce, who studied with Hermann Lotze and who taught Wilhelm Dilthey's pedagogical writings at Harvard; or G. Stanley Hall, who studied with Wilhelm Wundt and Hermann v. Helmholtz².

But this is long ago, and there is no reason to believe in the return of this specific historical constellation. Hence, it should be easy to accept that to communicate most broadly, every researcher or philosopher in the field of music education should write and publish in English because English is the undisputed international language of research. I am afraid, however, that the situation is not as simple and clear as it might otherwise appear to be. Language, as we learned from Wilhelm v. Humboldt or Sapir and Whorf, is not simply a neutral tool; it is, rather, the expression of a certain way of seeing the world, or, according to Wittgenstein, of a certain life-form. In other words, a single language for the philosophy of music education would not necessarily produce shared understandings if thinking continues in categories that are otherwise deeply rooted in national or regional scholarly traditions and language. Frequently such traditions produce concepts and terms that should not (or cannot) be adequately translated in some way or another, but can be understood in the first place only in terms of their original context and language.

Regarding the German context, probably the most famous and notorious examples in the field of education are the terms *Didaktik* (see, e.g. Hopmann & Riquarts 1995, Kertz-Welzel 2004, Nielsen 2005) and *Bildung*, neither of which can be translated into English without losing both their history and their substance. *Bildung*, for example, must be

considered as the most basic concept for the philosophy of education and of music education in Germany. Of course, there have been several attempts to translate *Bildung* into English, but no translation seems to get the full heart of the concept. Suggestions are, for example, “education”, “formation,” or “cultivation”. However, each of these terms covers only one aspect of *Bildung*. I will certainly not even try to give an exhaustive definition of *Bildung* here, but it includes all aspects of education designed to help human beings become individuals. Thus, education, formation, and cultivation are all necessary elements. However, *Bildung* always also includes *adaptation* to the given circumstances and, at the same time, *resistance* to them in the name of the individual’s uniqueness. All in all, then, *Bildung* is a fundamentally dialectical term that some critics consider as much too fuzzy or much too complicated. But I do not know any other term, not even in German, which could easily replace it.

So why, if German terms like *Bildung* (or *Didaktik*) actually do offer such an enrichment of educational thought, did they not become key-concepts in the international philosophy of (music) education? I refuse to agree with the widespread chauvinist idea of the mysterious, deep and profound German, who simply cannot be understood by other nations. But, as German educational theorist J. Oelkers has demonstrated in several publications (e.g.  Oelkers 1989, 1999, 2000, 2002)³, local traditions certainly do have their roots, perhaps not in dubious national characters, but in the combination of national states and national theories that emerged in the late 18th century and that seem to endure despite the fact that nation states have tended to lose their importance in world politics and economics.

In sum, Oelkers’ central line of argument is that national states need national theories, or at least they need certain theories which make other theories national. Until the middle of the 18th century, there is no educational theory which could be marked as “national”. Most educational theories were confessional theories; but these make a difference between being Catholic or Protestant, not between being French, Greek, or Dutch. However, between 1750 and 1800 there is a striking expansion of national educational systems in Western Europe and of educational theories. This is more than just a mere coincidence because educational theories have to be complex and flexible enough in order to be able to react to the complex demands of educational systems that grew in serving the parallel growth of nationalist tendencies.

These educational theories, however, were holistic and universal theories. They usually did not deal with special fields of education like music education, and Kant's, Schleiermacher's or Herbart's lectures on education do not develop a nationalistic, "German" approach to the philosophy of education at all. Neither is this done by popular textbooks like Niemeyer's *Grundsätze der Erziehung und des Unterrichts* (Foundations of Education and Teaching) of 1796, or Schwarz' *Lehrbuch der Unterrichtslehre* (Textbook of Teaching Theory) of 1806. However, in contrast to philosophical and systematic approaches to educational theory of the time, they construct the theory of education as the history of education because they tend to see modern educational theory as the result of a historical development⁴. This approach alone does not make them nationalistic, of course, and thus these early textbooks cannot be considered as being specifically "German". It is striking to see, however, how dominant German authors are in these textbooks, with the exception of mention of Locke, Rousseau and Pestalozzi. However, John Locke was never really an important author in the German philosophy of education, and the Swiss Pestalozzi and Rousseau were simply included in the German line of educational theorists (or even as the starting-point in this line).

Thus, it is only one step from textbooks dominated by the history of names to educational theory understood as the history of education. From 1800 onwards, educational theorists in Germany were considered German theorists, not as supporters of certain theories that had an inter- or super-national background⁵. In other words, a German national theory first emerged when theory was "historicized" and, from the beginning, this historical construction alone establishes a key difference between "German" and other theories. From then on, however, national theories of education arise that have stable sets of names and persons, with certain schools of thought, and with certain vocabularies and semantics⁶. And the more hermetic the vocabulary and semantics became over time, the less adaptable national theories have become to international discourse.

Of course, Oelkers' argument does not tell the whole story: the "national transformation" (Tenorth 2000, 84) of pre-national educational theories in the 19th century is the result of more and other reasons⁷, but it is certainly good enough as a working explanation. Although the theory of music education in Germany does not develop at the same time as German educational theory in general, enough evidence exists for a belated but parallel development⁸. If we look, for example, at Georg Schünemann's classic *History of*

German School Music (Geschichte der deutschen Schulmusik) of 1928, we not only see the construction of a national history of music education that traces “Germany” as a nation back to the early Middle Ages. We also see that Schünemann constructs a national history of the theory of music education where non-German names simply disappear in the second half of the 18th century. And, of course, the German philosophy of music education begins with the Swiss Pestalozzi, together with Pfeiffer and Nägeli, who all are – *nolens volens* – included in the history of the modern German educational system after the Napoleonic wars.

After this beginning, non-German authors are seldom mentioned by newer German histories of music education. Only sometimes do other nations and other theories appear – when the music education system begins to become unstable and they are needed. For example, German textbooks inevitably name the British music educator John Hullah and his 1879 report on the devastating state of singing in German schools (Hullah 1973), and John Spencer Curwen (Curwen 1989), and his 1901 European report “School Music Abroad”. But these non-German reports were only used rhetorically to address certain deficiencies of particular methods (which may have been caused by the one-sided approach of Nägeli) without even touching the theoretical foundations of those methods. And it is not necessary to do so, as long as these foundations seemed to be true, and as long as they fit the national educational system and its requirements, especially the requirements of music teacher education. The same is the case for international names like Kodály, Jaques-Dalcroze, or Suzuki, which might seem to indicate something like an “international turn” in the first half of the 20th century. This indication, however, is misleading; these theories are highly personalized and highly specialized doctrines and, what is more important, they concentrate on certain techniques of teaching that can easily be integrated in existing philosophical approaches without regard to the specific presuppositions and implications of those philosophical theories⁹.

These reservations depend on two basic preconditions: First, such theories or doctrines of music education have to be immune to refutation, either on logical or on empirical bases; and, second, the educational system that a theory of music education refers to has to be stable or even static, according to the stability of society in general. If this stability is lacking, as was the case in Germany after World War I, educational theories must adopt to changing, always unstable conditions. Thus, the German “Reformpädagogik” (“progressive education”) movement begins to exert its influence on the educational system

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(see Vogt 2005). Neither criterion is met, then, whenever modern theories and modern societies are stake. It is not by accident that international theories of education after 1900 are dominated by empirical approaches, not only because empirical data seem to be independent of linguistic complexities, but because empirical research is basically defined by the temporary character of its results. Consequently, authors like G. Stanley Hall, Alfred Binet, Edward Thorndike or Jean Piaget have gained their international reputation independent of national theories of education in the early 20th century, but certain national conditions determined or influenced how readily their research was adopted. For the philosophy of music education the situation is even more difficult than for empirical research: Everything depends on how flexible, dynamic, and thus adequate these philosophies are in themselves for coping with changing societies, with changing individuals, and with changing musics.

Provided that this diagnosis is correct, we may have a clue to understanding why German philosophy of education and of music education are so little known outside of, yet so persistent within Germany. Apart from Herbart and international “Herbartianism” (see Dunkel 1970), German educational philosophy is basically rooted either in post-Kantian philosophies or in the various ‘philosophies of life’ from Romanticism to Dilthey and later to Nietzsche. But post-Kantian philosophies mainly deal with a priori categories of education, and nothing can be added to their substance by any historical change. And the philosophies of life are anti-rational or even irrational themselves, and it is hard to imagine how they could ever be integrated into any international discussion, because their truth depends on self-evidence that does not need either rational discourse or empirical findings from elsewhere¹⁰.

ii.

A similar analysis applies to philosophies of music education. Either, as was done before and after World War I, they are nourished by the Romantic idea of the “holy child” and of the irrational powers of life and music (see Ehrenspeck 1998), or, as, for example, Michael Alt did, they prefer static approaches to music, like the aesthetic ontology of Nicolai Hartmann¹¹. In both cases, such educational theories cannot profit and do not need to profit from theories outside of Germany – either because they are hermetically closed or because they cannot be considered as theories at all. And, to put it the other way round, it is hard to imagine why educational theorists from outside Germany should bother with those

philosophies, because nothing seems to be lost for the international discussion if they are overlooked.

But, fortunately, this is not the whole story. As I have mentioned before, modern philosophies of music education need to be flexible and dynamic as theories; they have to be characterized by their openness and their ability to reflect new and changing situations and challenges. Diversity, pluralism, and difference are not typical topics of German philosophy of education, and the diversity of musics, the differences between musical worlds, and the pluralism of world views certainly are not the focus of the older philosophy of music education in Germany..

But there always have been other options. As closed and static as the philosophy of Hegel had become, as designed by Hegel himself, for example, there always were enough Neo-Hegelians inside and outside Germany to establish dynamic versions of Hegelian philosophy, stressing the importance of open experience and open dialectics for any kind of modern philosophy. First of all, I think of Critical Theory, especially in the version of Adorno, which, in its best moments is a theory of aesthetic experience (and in its worst a theory of mere idiosyncrasies)¹². Critical philosophies of education inside and outside of Germany usually stress the importance of Jürgen Habermas, but Habermas' *Theory of Communicative Action* is not a theory of experience, especially not of aesthetic or musical experience (but, see Orgass 1996). Second, I think of Edmund Husserl's phenomenology, although it was originally designed to be anti-Hegelian. French philosophers like Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Jean Paul Sartre have especially contributed much to reconciling Hegel and Husserl and, in particular, Merleau-Ponty's major work, the *Phenomenology of Perception*, is fully a philosophy of open, bodily experience, the importance of which for the philosophy of music education has been underestimated until recently. And, finally, I think of John Dewey, whose pragmatism may be considered as "Hegel turned upside down", and who established the unique connection between democracy, experience, and education. Dewey's theory is probably unrivalled as a philosophy of education up to now, and his aesthetic (if not always musical) dimensions have been re-discovered by several philosophers of music education recently.

Those philosophies, however much they may have certain of their roots in German philosophy, cannot be considered as typically "German" any longer – not even Critical Theory, which is a theory of modernity and not of "German thinking". For Adorno, Merleau-

Ponty, and Dewey (however typically German, French, or American they may respectively seem) theories have to adapt to experience, and not the other way round. And national histories of music education simply do not tell us what our experiences are supposed to be. Philosophies of music education that underline the importance of experience and of learning, such as critical theory, phenomenology and pragmatism do, cannot be suspected of being nationalistically restricted and narrow-minded. And I do not see any reason why these philosophies – among others – should not be at the core of an international discourse in music education that does not simply disregard national differences, but that integrates differences and pluralist thinking into an open framework that has a variety of different entrances.

iii.

I will finish these remarks with some conclusions that might be not only relevant for the German Philosophy of Music Education but also for other national approaches and for international discourse as well (see, e.g., Jorgensen 2006, Nielsen 2006).

1. We need more translations! As English is and will be the lingua franca of scholarly discourse, there are two basic options. The first is for philosophers of music education to write and publish their papers exclusively in English. I doubt, however, if this option is realistic and desirable if we take into account the manifold functions those publications have, especially in relation to music teachers and music education in national systems of education. Here, I see a major difference between the philosophy of music education and, for example, the psychology of music. Thus, the second option is that we need more, but *selected* translations from other languages into English – and vice versa! However, we need an international public for these translations, together with interested publishers who see a likelihood of selling these books. National narrow-mindedness is probably the biggest obstacle for a project like this.

First of all, there must be a real interest in reading these translations, and this interest depends on the open versus hermetic character of national educational theorizing. . It is not by accident, for example, how John Dewey's writings were adopted (or selectively adopted or not adopted at all) in Germany until some years ago; until then, German educational theorists simply did not see the necessity of adopting more from Dewey than the project-method, if anything at all (see Bittner 2001). But there is more than just more translations;

good translations are needed and these depend on a greater theoretical exchange to begin with.

2. *We need more international exchange!* A shared language does not guarantee shared understanding. Dictionaries may be helpful, but they do not help us understand the peculiarities of other languages, of other histories and cultures, and of other philosophies and theories. We have seen that the German word “Bildung” is an outstanding example of this dilemma; but one might also think of other candidates like the English “liberal education”, which cannot be translated literally into German without losing its meaning. In order to learn better about those particular features of other languages, we need more international exchange, which should possibly begin as early as the undergraduate level. This leads to the next conclusion.

3. *We need more international courses of study!* Of course, this depends on national educational systems in general and, as we can see in Europe at the moment, it is by no means easy to coordinate even the most basic formal features of university systems within a united Europe. But at least there is some hope, because, for example, the European Union and other organizations support the development of international courses of study¹³.

4. *We also need more international research-projects!* Perhaps it is typical for philosophers in general to work as “lone wolves”, as opposed to the often collective approaches of colleagues whose research is empirical. But, again, international research-projects are supported. In Germany, for example, the Humboldt-Foundation supports common research of German, Canadian, and American scholars¹⁴. But, I am sure there are much more opportunities for common research (and for fund-raising) within and between other countries as well.

Furthermore as the German example should show, there are of course more intrinsic requirements for an international discourse within the philosophy of music education. First of all, we all have to avoid arrogance and ignorance concerning other philosophies. However, this ought to be self-evident for any academic discussion, where the best arguments and not national idiosyncrasies should prevail. But there are more requirements that have to do with the philosophies themselves: they should be able in some way or another to cope with contemporary needs and need to be able to be connected with other philosophies and with empirical research without losing their philosophical substance. Only a few such theories can be named today.

5. *We need theories and research, not just names and traditions!* Of course, this should not be taken too literally. Perhaps a better version would be: Do not construct continuities between names when there are in fact discontinuities between, for example, pre-modern and modern theories. It goes without saying that it is useful to study the history of music education, but its use for the philosophy of music education is doubtful if history is used to justify the status quo rather than to solve the ever-new problems of the present.

6. *We do not need simple dualisms!* The German tradition, and I suppose not only the German one, is full of dualisms of all kinds; for example, theory and practice, mind and body, development and learning, education and teaching, high and low art. But, as the philosophies of all those Hegelian renegades like Adorno, Merleau-Ponty or Dewey show, such dualisms prevent a further development of philosophy to the degree they tend to become dogmas and metaphysical positions.

Some time ago, I was sent a copy of the Chinese translation of Sigrid Abel-Struth's *Grundriss der Musikpädagogik* (Foundation of Music Education). In German, this impressive book ends with the words, "All in all, there still is a lot of work to do". I do not know how this is expressed in Chinese, but I am sure it is true for all countries where people are trying to develop philosophies of music education. At least, this is one irrefutable truth that applies to all of us and for all time.

Notes

¹ Actually, in Germany, the term "philosophy of music education" ("Philosophie der Musikerziehung") is rarely used (see Gruhn 2005). What, for example, D. J. Elliott (1995, 8) describes as "typical threads" of philosophical inquiry can be found in German *theories* or in *concepts* of music education. Although Alt develops a (didactic) concept of music education, there are reasons to call his approach "philosophical".

² For more details, see Goldschmidt 1983 or Hopmann & Riquarts 1995

³ For the historical background see Hammerstein (1996), Tenorth (2000) or Hammerstein & Hermann (2005). A theoretical and historical analysis of the educational system and the role of educational theory are given by Luhmann & Schorr (1989).

⁴ Niemeyer himself, for example, can be considered as a „Kantian“ theorist (see Luhmann & Schorr 1989, 189), who aimed – with unsatisfactory means and results – at a general theory of education which is autonomous of historical or national influences.

⁵ It was in the fourth edition of his handbook (1801) that Niemeyer added a survey of the history of education.

⁶ For the “German” semantics of „Bildung“ see Bollenbeck 1996. A classical study of Germany as a “belated nation” – especially compared to France or Great Britain – is given by H. Plessner (1974).

⁷ If, for example, the writings of Rousseau are adopted in a rather selective way by the protestant “philanthropists”, this selectivity has religious reasons, independent of nationalistic aspirations. But, in the end, the result is a “German Rousseau”.

⁸ S. Abel-Struth, for instance, seriously doubts if there is any substantial theory (or philosophy) of music education in the 19th century or before (Abel-Struth 1970, 46). Theorists of music education like H. G. Nägeli, K. Ch. F. Krause, O. Lange, G. Schilling or L. Ramann offered eclectic approaches, stressing either aesthetic or “didactic” ends and means for music education.

⁹ Here, another problem of terminology arises. According to Constanza & Russell (1992), Orff, Kodály, etc. should be described as “methodologies”, whereas German authors tend to call these approaches “method” (“Methode”). Methodologies that are applied without reference to a philosophical, spiritual (etc) background may be called “techniques” or “teaching strategies” (see Regelski 2002).

¹⁰ This characteristic, of course, cuts a very long story rather short. Neo-Kantian philosophers of education saw and still see the most important task for a philosophy of education as the search for an *idea* of education that is independent of the history of education. In this, they used to function as the critical counterpart to those philosophers, who, mainly following W. Dilthey’s hermeneutic approach, merely tried to understand the *history* of education as the outward appearance of its idea (see Benner 1978 or Blankertz 1982).

¹¹ Nicolai Hartmann, *Ästhetik*, Berlin: de Gruyter, 1953

¹² Adorno’s posthumous *Aesthetic Theory* especially stresses the importance of aesthetic experience. But for Adorno there is no aesthetic experience without an adequate work of art as its object. This makes his approach appear elitist, as long as only a few people are capable of such a kind of experience.

¹³ See for example <<http://www.kowi.de/en/entry/default.htm>>

¹⁴ See <http://www.humboldt-foundation.de/en/programme/stip_aus/transcoop.htm>

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