

Student Choral Conductors as Reflective Musicians: Examining the Pedagogy

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Prelude

Introduction

While observing and realizing the composer's intentions for the music, we need to involve students in reflective practice to nurture their musical thinking before, during, and after conducting experiences. In our attempt to nurture students' reflective thinking we have devised various curricula and approaches based on differing philosophical positions. Two of these positions that have had an impact on our field are aesthetic education (Reimer, 1989) and praxialism (Elliott, 1995). Based on their philosophical positions, Reimer and Elliot have each provided a curricular model for performance-based programs. Reimer promotes empowering students to be musical thinkers and advocates using musical concepts as organizers of learning while Elliott states that all music education programs should be organized and taught as reflective musical practicums with the musical works at the center. Advocates of the praxial approach have argued that music education based on the principles of aesthetic education inhibit students growth as reflective musicians. In debates between supporters of aesthetic education and praxialism, one wonders whether or not the realization of pedagogical strategies (that is the "how" of pedagogy) can be compatible with both philosophies, and if there are more similarities than differences when examining each philosophy, particularly about matters regarding curriculum and the involvement of students.

How we teach and learn is inextricably linked to why we value music. Should music be taught, and if so, why? What is the value of music education? What is unique and essential about music education? Once we have made decisions about why we would teach, questions that need to be addressed include who, what, when, where, and how will we teach? (Madsen & Kuhn, 1978; Reimer, 1989; Elliott, 1995). The relationships between these questions and subsequent answers are crucial, and need to be cohesive in order for a comprehensive curriculum to result. This cohesiveness is built as decisions are made from a general perspective (why) to more specific situations that involve the approach and strategies utilized to involve students in music making. Re-visits to one's philosophy should reinforce what one does on a day to day basis, thus, involving the music educator in a reflective experience as problems are posed and resolved.

As I thought about the relationships between "why" (philosophy) and "how" (pedagogy) within a choral music education context, the following questions emerged: (1) Are there enough core similarities between the philosophies of aesthetic education and praxialism that we can implement strategies that nurture musical thinking while adhering to the philosophical position of each? (2) What are teaching strategies that can engage students in this kind of thinking as beginning conductors in the university setting, during field experiences, and during their careers as choral music educators? From these questions, I formed the following purpose and specific research questions.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this paper is two-fold: (1) to explore possible common ground between aesthetic education and praxialism, (2) to suggest how strategies that nurture reflective practice can be implemented within Reimer or Elliott's performance-based curriculum model, and (3) to suggest how we can involve student choral conductors in reflective practice.

The following questions guided my inquiry:

1. How can similar strategies be employed across choral methods curricula that are based on different philosophical positions?
2. What teaching strategies do we need to model, as mentors, that exemplify reflective practice?
3. What strategies do the students need to generate, implement, and develop during their growth as reflective musicians?
4. What is the evidence that students are thinking reflectively?

To answer these questions, I examine philosophical positions as espoused by Reimer (1989) and Elliott (1995) in relation to the purpose, content, and pedagogy of music education. To explore any possible common ground across the two philosophies, I offer ideas of those who influenced both men's thinking with respect to the purpose, content, and pedagogy of music education. I then present a comparative analysis by describing the thinking of those whose shaped Reimer and Elliott's thinking, and draw conclusions about a common ground across the two philosophies. John Dewey (1933/1991, 1934, 1938, among others, had an impact on Reimer's thinking, specifically about the meaning of art, expression of feeling, artistic creation and the artistic experience. Dewey also shaped Elliott's thinking in terms of learning as a doing activity and the structure of a curriculum. Another major influence on Elliott's thinking in terms of reflective practice and practicums is Donald Schon (1987) who investigated Dewey's theory of inquiry when developing ideas of and models for reflective practice. Hence, Dewey's writings about reflective practice had an impact on Elliott's thinking. Based on the common ground that emerges from these explorations, I present descriptions of how problems can be framed and solved; a reflective rehearsal; and strategies in the form of feedback, questions, and assessment that could be utilized in such a reflective rehearsal.

Philosophical Considerations

Reimer: Performance-based Programs Based on Aesthetic Education

The main purpose of music education is "to develop, to the fullest extent possible, every students' capacity to experience and create intrinsically expressive qualities of sound . . . to develop every students aesthetic sensitivity to the art of music" (Reimer, 1989, p. 185). To do this, we engage students in meaningful musical experiences to heighten their aesthetic perception which in turn can heighten their aesthetic response. The result is an aesthetic (a musical) experience. We do this by directing their attention to the expressive qualities of music, a process that is active and doing. As we experience the expressive qualities of music, we articulate our feelings and thus, explore our subjectivity in a way that can be experienced only through the arts. Cultural and social influences will have an impact on our experience and the

meaning, however they are submerged into the inherent, expressive qualities. We can achieve these experiences through listening, composing, improvising, or performing. Our ability to perceive and respond to the expressive qualities that are inherent in music is a potential possessed by all, thus, every student should be given opportunities to nurture this aspect of their humanness (see Figure 1).

The core of study for all music programs is music of diverse cultures and traditions, and styles that is authentic and of quality. Reimer provides conditions for a performance program that involve what (the content) should be taught, and how and when that content should be taught. According to Reimer, all musicians, regardless of experience, should have opportunities to be involved in musical decision-making activities from the initial lesson. There should be a balance of skills, understandings, and creative decision-making activities with music making as the primary focus and technique as a means to musical ends. Included in the content should be practice material that is related to the rich array of literature that is to be performed, and general learnings about music including creativity in the arts, the role of the performing arts in culture, and art as it relates to the quality of human life. Above all, music educators and students need to recognize that performance is a creative act and that the performance curriculum exists to involve students in that act (pp. 191-193).

Elliott: Performance-based Programs Based on Praxis

According to Elliott (1995), the purpose of music education is to develop students' musicianship. Musicianship is the essential content of the music curriculum, and the knowledge that is most worth learning by all music students. As the musicians develop, they pass through stages from novice to expert levels of musicianship.

In opposition to music education as aesthetic education, Elliott advocates for a curriculum-as-praxis at which the center are the musical works that organize the curriculum. These musical works are offered in various complexities and are chosen according to students' level of growth and change accordingly. The areas of study include interpretive, structural, cultural, representative, and expressional aspects of the musical selection. Integral to Elliott's philosophy is that all music education programs should be organized and taught as reflective musical practicums.

Elliott offers his curriculum-as-praxis in opposition to traditional curricula. To provide one argument against the traditional approach to curricula developments, Elliott traces the standard conceptual approach that emerged in the 1960s and was rooted in Tyler's (1949) behavioural objectives approach. The behavioural objectives movement was classified by Tyler, who in turn, had a major influence on music teaching, learning, and research, and whose presence is still felt today in curriculum guides, documents, and textbooks. Elliott suggests that the conceptual approach as adopted and advocated by Reimer, hence the aesthetic education approach, is a "softer variation" (p. 244) of Tyler's approach.

When discussing pedagogy, Elliott suggests that teaching expertise is fundamentally procedural and situational (p. 251). Educators find and frame teaching-learning problems during their interactions with students. These problems become increasingly more difficult and complex as students' growth as musicians develops.

Influences on Reimer and Elliott's Philosophies

When discerning common ground across Reimer and Elliott's thinking, the most logical place to start is with the writings of John Dewey, which influenced Reimer and Elliott while formulating each of their philosophies. In addition, Dewey's writings played a major influence on Donald Schon's work, whose writings formed a base for Elliott's approach to developing students' musicianship. In order to articulate the common ground that is found across both philosophies, I will examine areas of influence, particularly those related to the artistic process, reflective thinking, and reflective practice and practicum.

Dewey's influence on Reimer

Reimer draws on Dewey (1934) for several salient points when articulating the meaning of music and the artistic process. The first point revolves around the differences between language and music in terms of understanding. Meanings and values in language are expressed by words while meanings and values in music are experienced subjectively, that is, feelingfully. Hence, meaningful music making is experienced; it is a doing activity. Conceptualizing about music through discussion, analysis, and evaluation can provide insight about the technical and expressive components of the composition, but conceptualizing is only a means to enhance the depth and scope of the musical experience.

The second point is the distinction between expressing emotions and expression of feeling. The former involves venting or discharging what one is feeling at the moment (e.g., a baby crying when scared or hungry). The latter involves organizing the artistic qualities which are expressive in themselves (Dewey, 1934; Reimer, 1989), and requires immediate, thoughtful, and active participation.

The third point involves what occurs during the act of artistic creation. Reimer's explanation of this process (pp. 61-63) resembles Dewey's (1934) explanation of what occurs when an artist creates. In the first steps of the creative act, the musician responds immediately to what has been posed, whether it is the first playing of the opening musical line or the first shaping of a melody. The musician then undergoes, in a feelingful and critical fashion, the result of the initial impulse. An interplay evolves in which the musical materials and the musician work on each other. During this interplay, the musician's sensitivity, imagination, and craftsmanship are crucial partners as the musician explores the expressive potentials, makes decisions, responds, and continues to explore, decide, and respond. The integral role of interaction is revealed when Dewey writes: "The real work of art is the building up of an integral experience out of the interaction of organic and environmental conditions and energies" (p. 64).

Dewey (1934) described the artistic process, as does Reimer (1989), as actions that order ideas and feelings, a process that transforms ideas into perceptible forms. This process involves and develops imagination, and expresses values and meanings through music that are inexpressible in words. This occurs over time during which the musician and the music acquire an order and a form not previously possessed. For the artistic process to proceed, the musician acts on an impulse, one that emerges from prior experiences and is activated (as reflective thinking is fuelled when we locate and define any felt difficulty. When the impulse is fuelled by the expressive materials, beginnings of the musical form are experienced. The emphasis of artistic creation then, is on an interaction that requires time, and critical and reflective thought, and is ignited by an impulse.

Dewey's explanation of the creative process, in turn, resonates with his explanation of reflective thinking. For Dewey, (1933/1991), reflective thinking involves active and persistent consideration of any belief or knowledge by examining the grounds upon which they are based. As the grounds are examined, we locate and define any felt difficulty. A person's experiences influence whether or not she will experience elements of doubt when encountering a situation. In an attempt to resolve the felt difficulty, solutions are explored and critically examined as a means to determine the effectiveness of each. Through observation and experimentation, we accept or reject those possibilities, and thus accept or reject the initial belief. Learning then, is a reflective process that is active and involved.

The thread that emerges throughout Dewey's and Reimer's explanations about how we are involved artistically, and hence how students should be involved artistically, is an experience that is active and immediate, and involves critical and reflective thought. With this basis of understanding about how we are involved, Reimer advocates for a performance program in which students are reflective music makers (as described above).

Dewey and Schon's influence on Elliott

Elliott (1995) refers to Dewey when he critiques the objectives-based model of curriculum planning as pre-specifications of learning and suggests, as did Dewey, that they are outcomes of teaching-learning interactions. Elliott describes the objectives-based model as one that is inflexible and consists of a step-by-step procedure that is to be followed by teachers regardless of the context or situation. As an alternative, Elliott discusses the idea of practical curriculum inquiry (see Dewey, 1933/1991; Schon, 1987). Practical curriculum inquiry is one that requires teachers to reflect and deliberate in a dynamic, recursive fashion on themselves and their situations. Here solutions will be found "in the professional reflections and judgments of individual teachers engaged in specific teaching-learning situations" (Elliott, 1995, p. 254). Specific concepts and scripts are replaced with situated preparations and plans.

Influences of Dewey's thoughts on reflective thinking are found in Schon's (1987) writings. Schon discusses how we get through the day completing many activities without thinking about our actions, that is, we get through the day knowing-in-action. When we encounter an unexpected result, an error, or a new perception of a routine task, we are surprised. We can either ignore the surprise or we can reflect on it. Hence, we reflect on our action to assess our knowing-in-action. Or we may not stop to reflect but reflect in the midst of the action, what Schon calls and defines "an action-present—a period of time, variable with the context, during which we can still make a difference to the situation at hand—our thinking serves to reshape what we are doing while we are doing it" (p. 26). Thus, we reflect-in-action.

When we encounter a surprise or problem for which there is no obvious solution, or when we encounter a problem that is not clear, we engage in an exploration and assessment of possibilities. When technical rules, procedures, and information are not sufficient enough to generate plausible solutions, we then engage in the artistry of our professional practice. We make sense of unique and uncertain problems, and in generating possible solutions, create new rules, procedures, and information.

When a student enters a practicum, she is immersed in the traditions, cultures, and practices of that community. Quite often, the student has a mentor or coach. In the case of

graduate studies in choral conducting, the student often chooses a university at which an expert in the field conducts choirs and conducting seminars. In this setting, the student learns the "practice of the practicum" (Schon, 1987, p. 38), that is, the tools, methods, projects, and possibilities. Learning occurs by doing while interacting with colleagues, peers, and mentors. During the practicum, the student will not only think like a conductor, but also address uncertain or unique situations by "devising new methods of reasoning, . . . and constructing and testing new categories of understanding, strategies of action, and ways of framing problems" (p. 39). In addition, the student conductor may learn the rules, operations, and techniques, and then reason from general rules to unique cases for which new possibilities will be generated and assessed resulting in new forms of understanding and action. These ideas formed a base for Elliott's (1995) thinking about music education programs. He suggests that all music education programs should be organized and taught as reflective musical practicums in which the novice to expert musicians are immersed in the traditions, cultures, and practices of that musical community or style.

Elliott discusses how teachers must empower students to convert unique or uncertain problems to determinate ones, an idea purported by Dewey (1933/1991). For this to occur, students must have time to experiment and explore, frame new problems as well as generate possible solutions for known and new problems, and assess accordingly. In later writings, Dewey (1938) re-emphasized the importance of including the student in the formation of the purposes that direct her activities in the learning process (p. 67), a point that represents the cornerstone of progressive education. Including the student in these processes can result in her active co-operation while formulating the purposes that are involved in her studies. It is crucial that the student understands what a purpose is, how it is formulated, and how it functions in an experience. Through all of this, the student brings to the situations knowledges and knowings of past experiences, or what Dewey (1933/1991), called funded experiences, experiences that are comprised of our intellectual, emotional, and imaginative.

Elliott's call for developing students' musicianship through reflective practicums with the musical works serving as the content finds its roots in Schon's model of reflective practice, and hence, Dewey's theories of reflective thinking and curriculum. Both Schon and Dewey wrote about the importance of context, that is the traditions and cultures of the community in which the student enters. Elliott as well advocates for musicianship to be developed within a community with experts serving as models, mentors, and coaches. The influence of Dewey and Schon on Elliott's thinking is clear, hence providing consistency across pedagogical positions concerning the how and what of a curriculum, and philosophical positions concerning the why.

Conclusions: A Common Ground

As a result of examining certain aspects of each philosophy and ideas about pedagogy, and the influences on those aspects, a common ground emerges with respect to the process of making or experiencing music and pedagogy. Reimer and Elliott's descriptions of making/doing/experiencing include a process that is immediate and active, and involves reflective thinking. The musician and music interact while decisions are made utilizing a variety of knowledges. Reflecting-in-action and reflecting about what occurred are essential means towards developing aesthetic sensitivity/musical intelligence/ musicianship. While the

terminology varies, the integral tacit characteristic of experience/praxis reflected in both philosophies, and influenced by Dewey and Schon, serve as a basic block across philosophies, thus, creating a common ground.

The second common characteristic across both philosophies is found in ideas about curriculum, particularly about how we should involve young musicians with music. Regardless of experience or age, musicians need to be involved in music-making decisions with music of diverse cultures, traditions, and styles. Problems need to be critically framed and reflectively solved by these young musicians if aesthetic sensitivity/musicianship is to develop, which, according to Reimer and Elliott, is an underlying goal of music education. If we involve students in this way, they will experience reflective practice.

From this common ground, we can examine aspects of pedagogy focused on developing musicianship that resonant with a philosophical position based on aesthetic education or praxialism. In the next sections, I provide brief descriptions of how problems are framed and solved, a reflective rehearsal, and strategies that can be implemented in a reflective rehearsal and involve framing and solving problems.

Pedagogical Considerations

Framing and Solving Problems

Within the pedagogical component of curriculum, certain issues of how to develop reflective practitioners emerge. Reflective music practitioners are those who think reflectively while framing and solving musical problems within specific cultures, traditions, and styles (Elliott, 1995; Schon, 1987). Problem solving consists of presenting students with a situation or a set of parameters as a stimulus and having them solve the situation or find the answer in a way of their choice (Atterbury & Richardson, 1995). They first sense that there is a problem within the given situation, and then draw on previous knowledge while discovering ways to find and sort out possible answers. While sorting out the answers, the students try out each answer to see if any are desirable. During this process, they experience what it means to identify a problem, and analyze, evaluate and judge possible solutions while coming to conclusions about the various possibilities. This differs from completing teacher-formulated tasks that require right and wrong answers, solving teacher-formulated problems that have one solution, and solving teacher-formulated problems that have many solutions. This process, as described by Atterbury & Richardson (1995), is based on Dewey's components of reflective thinking and resonates with Schon's (1987) description of reflective-in-action.

Schon (1987) discusses problems for which, because of the uniqueness of the situation, that is, the situatedness, there are no solutions arising from a theoretical or technical base (see above). He refers to these areas as indeterminate zones of practice, ones that bode uncertainty, uniqueness, and value conflict that aren't solvable within the canons of technical rationality. It is now that the student creates new rules, procedures, and information in an attempt to solve the problem. It is at this stage that the students progress to the next level of expertise, one in which original material is being created as a result of critical examination of the problem that has been encountered.

A Reflective Rehearsal

Snow (1998) suggests an approach for rehearsals that is based on the thinking of, among others, Elliott (1995, 1992), Dolloff (1994), Rao (1993, 1988, 1987). She emphasizes process as well as product, and as a result, purports pre-rehearsal brainstorming sessions in which possibilities are generated as a result of purposeful score study. As a result of these sessions, the conductor has an abundance of ideas and directions from which to choose based on what has occurred during the rehearsal in the present time. Instead of generating a "laundry list" (Snow) which is organized as a step by step lesson plan that is to be strictly followed, the conductor makes decisions based on what has occurred in a dynamic and flexible manner. The attention is on the "how to flow" from a musical focus while attending to the piece from a technical and expressive perspective. This ability to trouble shoot, to identify the problem, explore possible solutions, test, evaluate, and explore alternative solutions if necessary is consonance with Dewey's definition of reflecting thinking (1933/1991), Reimer's description of musical-decision making, and Elliott's and Schon's definition of reflective practice. As well, it offers a more flexible approach than does the objectives-based approach put forth by Tyler (1949), one that has dominated much of curriculum and rehearsals in the last half of the twentieth century. Snow offers the creation of bubble charts instead of rehearsal plans. It is with her model and the model of a practicum (Schon, 1987) that I offer the following strategies that could involve choristers and student conductors in reflective practice while engaging in a choral rehearsal.

Strategies for Rehearsals that Involve Reflective Practice

Imagine a classroom in which teacher and students were engaged in reflective discussions and demonstrations while exploring the expressive possibilities of a piece of music. In informal verbal and non-verbal exchanges and formal reflective reports, each student would assess what was heard, provide feedback, compare descriptions, and make decisions about what was suggested. Throughout these processes each would be actively involved with the musical materials while developing her understanding of the piece. This interplay, in the form of feedback, can inform the student conductor and choral participants, and inform our assessment of student conductors' musical understanding as they find their voices as conductors. In the following sections, I offer various descriptions and examples of these strategies.

Feedback

Feedback can be delivered either verbally or non-verbally in the form of answers, descriptions, suggestions, and questions. When providing feedback, we need to think about whether the focus is on what needs to be done, has been done, or can be done.

I offer the following through the eyes of the student conductor who has learned and "practiced the practice" from and under the guidance of a mentor.

Within a rehearsal, conductors may want to: (1) provide information about a theoretical concept, a musical style, or a composer's style; (2) suggest recordings of the style of the piece or interpretations of the piece itself; (3) model vocal techniques that can solutions for technically difficult passages; or (4) model how one identifies a problem area and generates possible solutions. The first three processes will broaden students' knowledge and techniques,

and further equip them with materials with which to work while generating possibilities during the evaluative process. The fourth process allow students to view how one identifies a problem, and generates and assesses possible solutions. Observing and being part of the modeling process provides a foundation for students' attempts at generating feedback and framing problems. It also provides opportunities for students to experience differences between the processes of learning a new piece of music and solving musical problems. The choral participants, student conductors, and conductors can identify what needs to be done to increase the musical appeal of the selection and refine the technique to enhance the expressive qualities of the music. When students are expected to initiate feedback and demonstrate or converse about what they want the audience to hear, they have opportunities to take full ownership over identifying problems and providing possible solutions for each of those problems.

Questions¹

Different questions can involve students in different kinds of thinking. Some require students to identify, recall, and distinguish while others require students to analyze, synthesize, evaluate, create, transfer, and so forth (Bloom, 1956). When deciding on kinds of thinking in which students should be involved, it is important to identify the purpose of the activity, and then to make thoughtful decisions about the content of the questions and how they will be formulated. If the goal is to have students identify or recall musical information, then the questions will be direct and close-ended, that is, there will be a correct answer for each question.

There may be times when it is desirable for students to uncover the answers themselves. This activity would involve the Socratic method of questioning in which the conductor asks students questions whose answers and further questions can guide them to uncover the correct response. In the context of making music, the conductor asks questions that would guide the students to the right, or most appropriate, musical solution. What defines most appropriate might be based on a theoretical concept, a style issue, or the conductor's perspective.

A third type of questioning allows students to make musical decisions within conductor-formulated problems that are open to many possible solutions. Here students can independently make musical decisions while exploring possibilities and converging on desired outcomes. While making decisions, they should be encouraged to justify the musical reasons for those decisions, thereby requiring them to analyze, evaluate, and justify. This gets students beyond responses that are based on initial likes and dislikes, and snap decisions. Situations that call for this type of questioning are those in which the conductor targets or frames the problem and students generate, test, and evaluate multiple solutions. Questions of this type are open-ended and have no right answers but rather permit the student to have full ownership over the musical choices. Musical examples within a choral context would include: How could the melody be shaped that would indicate closure? Decide what dynamics are needed for this section. How can you make the rhythm be more angular? Think through the appropriateness of what part should be in the foreground and what part should be supportive?

A fourth type of questioning enables students to actually formulate problems. Richardson (1998) discusses the importance of students formulating or framing problems as opposed to always working within conductor-formulated problems. To clarify this differentiation, she offers

examples of questions that would involve students reflecting on skills and interpretations, and making decisions about the conductor-formulated problem; and formulating musical problems, articulating those problems, and discussing possible solutions for the problems. When the problem is addressed as opposed to the task being completed, students are exhibiting an expert-like process (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1993). In this kind of process, students resemble experts in terms of what they are trying to do and how they approach challenging problems, as opposed to what they are trying to accomplish. When students address, target, or frame the problem while making musical decisions, they are displaying musical understanding which contributes to the growth of their musicianship.

Questions that require the students to frame the problems are open-ended, have no right answers, and provide focus for the larger and more immediate goals of the composition. Questions like "What do you want the audience to hear?" keeps the overall goal in sight and provides structure for the more immediate decisions. Questions such as "What do you think needs to be done next?" place the student in the position to frame the problem and generate possibilities. "What do you hear?" demands that the student analyze what has been heard and prepares her for the next step. "What was most/least effective?" followed by "Why?" allows the student to reason musically about what was heard, and prepares her for further decisions. Questions could target one element, but still require the student to be the problem-framer. Examples of these kinds of questions would include: (1) Describe the complexity or simplicity of the rhythm. What is effective about it? (2) What is the relationship between the rhythm and the melody? On what do you want the listener to focus? (3) How does the tempo affect the melodic line? Questions that provide opportunities students to think musically about decisions can enable conductors to determine the students' musical involvement and growth, and empower them to think as a composer.

Regardless of the type of questioning, it is important to remember that all questions are not immediately answerable and that some may require further critical reflection and inquiry. As well, when employing the various types of questioning techniques, the conductor should be clear about the following questions: When is this type of questioning necessary and why? At what level of thinking does it involve the students? How do we assess students level of knowledge, and more importantly, their understanding of the knowledge? How can students exhibit knowledge of content while being involved with the content, or as Richardson (1998) states "thinking in the musical content" (p. 119)? Finally, these types of questions should not be integrated a rehearsal in a linear fashion, but in a dynamic and interactive process. Each type of question can be effective at all levels of learning and growth, and by answering the above questions, plus others, the conductor can determine when various types should be entertained.

Other interactions that can occur during feedback as students are those between students. In a rehearsal this would involve asking students to make musical decisions and judgments while conducting, as opposed to asking them to only identify musical selections, define musical terms, or memorize historical facts. The conductor needs to be sensitive when students are interacting and providing feedback, and realize when her input is not needed nor desired. It is here that a community of learning can develop in which musical ideas are exchanged and assessed. Each student can learn from the other as their understanding is constructed in a

social context and, and in turn, can take that new understanding to individual projects (Wiggins, 2001).

Assessing Students' Understanding

To assess students' understanding, we ask them to do something with the knowledge, that is, to put the understanding to work (Perkins, 1998). In a rehearsal this would involve asking students to respond, verbally and non-verbally, to the content of the feedback given by the conductor and their choral peers, specifically the suggestions and questions. Asking students to respond verbally and non-verbally to descriptions of what was heard, suggestions for refinement; and questions about what was heard requires them to reflect, test, and refine. Students may or may not agree with the descriptions given or find the questions relevant. When they do or do not, they need to justify why or why not.

Critically listening to students' performances and asking them to tell you what they want the audience to hear, coupled with knowing their abilities and understandings enables us to provide content that is relevant, and provide increasingly difficult challenges for the students (Rao, 1993). Our feedback, then, needs to progressively challenge the students' musical understanding and their growth as a performer.

The "what" and "how" of assessment is directly linked to the goals and objectives of the overall curriculum, and more immediately, the rehearsal. What is the purpose of the rehearsal? Is it to learn a new piece by rote or through the use of reading skills? Is it to demonstrate the expressive aspects of the piece? It is imperative that the conductor is clear about the purpose of the activity so as to guide how the activity will be realized and assessed.

Conclusions

Providing opportunities for students to put the knowledge to use, and transform and enhance it, allows for them to grow as reflective music practitioners. They are doing what performers do, that is, making musical decisions about the music that is being sung. This does not mean using the knowledge to solve problems quickly and easily, but using it efficiently to target viable solutions and acquire new knowledge. At this point, the students are experiencing the "growing edge" ((Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1993, p. ix) of expertise, of working at the edge of their competence and as a result increasing their knowledge. When students work harder and on their edge of capacity, extend their limit, and rely less on routines, they extend their knowledge as opposed to exploit their knowledge (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1993). As well, they bring past experiences and all that entails to frame and solve new problems, thereby extending their musical experiences.

Understanding, then, is displayed through performance, that is, doing something with the materials of the subject matter, in this case, musical materials. One aspect of teaching for understanding is assessment that can be offered by the educator, student composer, and classmates. We can assess students' understanding by listening critically to their performances, and examining their responses to the feedback that has been provided by the music educator and their peers.

The above ideas and strategies can be implemented into a reflective rehearsal while basing ones' philosophical position on aesthetic education or praxialism. Both ascribe to active,

musical experiences in which students make musical decisions in a critical and reflective fashion. The content with which the student engages is music of all cultures, traditions, and styles. Finally, the goal of music education is to develop students musical thinking which embodies musicianship and aesthetic sensitivity.

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Endnotes

¹ The ideas in this section can also be found in Younker, B.A. (in press).
