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Institutional Support for Aesthetic Music Education

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Abstract: Aesthetic music education, most closely associated with Bennett Reimer's A Philosophy of Music Education, is grounded in the proposition that music education constitutes a distinctive form of aesthetic education through which learners develop capacities for feelingful and non-conceptual knowing. Although extensive scholarship has examined the philosophical foundations and limitations of aesthetic music education, comparatively less attention has been devoted to the institutional conditions through which its philosophical commitments are translated into educational practice. This paper develops a conceptual argument that the sustainability of aesthetic music education depends not only on the coherence of its philosophical foundations but also on the institutional arrangements through which those foundations are legitimized, represented, and enacted. Drawing on scholarship on music education philosophy, educational policy, arts advocacy, and higher music education, the paper develops a three-layer framework comprising the policy, organizational, and pedagogical levels of institutional support. The analysis identifies a common institutional problem across these levels: the difficulty of translating aesthetic educational purposes into the forms of evidence, authority, accountability, and professional capacity recognized by educational institutions. The paper further examines the implications of the aesthetic–praxial debate and the literature on curriculum reform for the institutional sustainability of aesthetic music education. Rather than conceptualizing institutional support as an external resource required to protect an independently established philosophy, the paper argues that institutional support is constitutive of the educational project itself. This reconceptualization provides a basis for integrating philosophical commitments with policy literacy, organizational representation, curriculum design, and pedagogical development.

Keywords: aesthetic music education; music education philosophy; institutional support; educational policy; arts advocacy

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1. Introduction

The philosophy of aesthetic music education emerged within a particular institutional and political context rather than in isolation from the structures of education. Its intellectual development was closely connected to the transformation of American education during the mid-twentieth century. Mark (1998) demonstrates that the development of aesthetic education philosophy began approximately two decades before the publication of the first edition of Reimer's A Philosophy of Music Education in 1970. This period was characterized by educational experimentation, funded research initiatives, intellectual debate, and significant changes in public policy, with federal statutory law serving as an important catalyst. Importantly, Mark (1998) also observes that although legislation and public policy played a significant role in the development of music education, the relationship between congressional action and the intellectual infrastructure of the music education profession has received comparatively limited attention.

This historical observation points to a broader conceptual problem. Aesthetic music education has predominantly been discussed as a philosophical position: scholars have examined its conception of musical experience, its account of aesthetic knowing, and its assumptions concerning the educational value of music. Such philosophical examination remains indispensable. Nevertheless, philosophical positions in education are never implemented in an institutional vacuum. They are enacted through schools, school districts, conservatoires, universities, ministries of education, professional associations, curricula,

funding arrangements, teacher preparation systems, and administrative structures. These institutions determine not only whether music is included in educational provision, but also how much time is allocated to it, who is authorized to teach it, what forms of learning are recognized, and what kinds of outcomes are considered legitimate.

The central problem addressed in this paper is therefore the institutional sustainability problem of aesthetic music education. If aesthetic music education seeks to cultivate a form of musical knowing that is affective, experiential, and resistant to complete conceptualization, how can this educational purpose be sustained within institutions that increasingly demand explicit objectives, measurable outcomes, policy alignment, accountability, and demonstrable educational value? More specifically, how do policy structures, organizational arrangements, and pedagogical capacities shape the ability of aesthetic music education to secure institutional legitimacy?

This paper addresses three related questions:

1. How can the institutional conditions supporting aesthetic music education be conceptually organized?

2. What forms of legitimation pressure does aesthetic music education encounter at the policy, organizational, and pedagogical levels?

3. How can institutional support be reconceptualized as constitutive of, rather than external to, the aesthetic educational project?

The paper advances a conceptual argument rather than an empirical hypothesis. Its purpose is not to determine whether aesthetic music education is intrinsically superior to alternative philosophies, but to reconsider the conditions under which any aesthetic educational project can remain institutionally viable. The argument proceeds from an important tension. On the one hand, the distinctive value claimed by aesthetic music education derives partly from forms of musical experience that cannot be fully reduced to conventional educational metrics. On the other hand, educational institutions must make decisions through mechanisms of accountability and resource allocation that generally require forms of justification and evidence. The resulting tension is not merely an administrative inconvenience. It affects the practical possibility of sustaining the philosophy itself.

The paper makes three contributions. First, it shifts attention from the philosophical justification of aesthetic music education toward the institutional conditions of its realization. Second, it develops a three-layer analytical framework that distinguishes policy, organizational, and pedagogical support while recognizing their interdependence. Third, it integrates debates surrounding aestheticism and praxialism with scholarship on advocacy and curriculum reform to argue that institutional adaptation should be understood as part of philosophical practice rather than as an external activity undertaken after the philosophical argument has been established.

The remainder of the paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 reconstructs the philosophical foundations and institutional origins of aesthetic music education. Section 3 develops the three-layer framework of institutional support. Section 4 examines legitimation as a central institutional challenge, including the evaluability problem and critiques associated with praxialism. Section 5 considers advocacy as a form of institutional work. Section 6 draws on curriculum reform in higher music education to examine how institutions absorb or resist pedagogical change. Section 7 integrates the philosophical and institutional dimensions of the argument, and Section 8 concludes with implications for the future sustainability of aesthetic music education.

2. The Philosophical Foundations of Aesthetic Music Education

2.1 Aesthetic knowing as the organizing principle

The aesthetic tradition in music education is fundamentally concerned with the distinctive form of knowing that musical experience makes possible. In Reimer's formulation, the central purpose of music education is to cultivate the capacity for aesthetic knowing through musical experience. This position subsequently became widely identified as music education as aesthetic education (Barrett, 2002).

The distinctive feature of this conception lies in its treatment of music as a form of experience that cannot be adequately reduced to propositional or conceptual knowledge. Reimer consistently emphasized that music should be understood and studied as non-conceptual and that musical forms of knowing engage subjective dimensions of human life. From this perspective, education through the arts is fundamentally an education in feeling (Allsup & Lewis, 2015). Musical education therefore acquires significance not simply because students acquire technical skills or factual knowledge about music, but because engagement with musical works can cultivate distinctive modes of perception, awareness, and affective experience.

Historically, aestheticism became one of the dominant philosophies shaping music educators' decisions concerning teaching methods and curricular content. Tuinstra (2019) identifies aestheticism and praxialism as the two major philosophical orientations that achieved particular prominence during the latter half of the twentieth century. Within this development, Reimer's 1970 formulation of aesthetic education became an influential guiding philosophy for a substantial segment of the music education profession.

The institutional implications of this philosophical position, however, are considerable. If the purpose of music education includes cultivating a non-conceptual and feelingful mode of knowing, then some of its most important outcomes may not be readily represented through conventional educational indicators. Institutions typically require educational programs to articulate objectives, demonstrate effectiveness, justify resource allocations, and provide evidence of student achievement. Aesthetic music education consequently encounters a structural tension between the character of its educational claims and the institutional mechanisms through which those claims must be justified.

This tension should not be interpreted as evidence that aesthetic experience lacks educational value. Rather, it indicates that the institutional language used to recognize educational value does not necessarily correspond to the philosophical language through which aesthetic education has traditionally been articulated. The question is therefore not simply whether aesthetic music education can justify itself philosophically, but whether its philosophical commitments can be translated into institutional practices without losing their distinctive character.

2.2 The institutional origins of the aesthetic position

The historical development of aesthetic music education further demonstrates why philosophical and institutional dimensions cannot be separated. Mark's (1998) account is particularly significant because it situates the emergence of aesthetic education philosophy within a wider policy and institutional environment. The philosophy that subsequently influenced a generation of music educators developed alongside federally supported research, educational reform, and statutory initiatives.

Aesthetic music education should therefore not be regarded simply as an autonomous philosophical doctrine that was subsequently introduced into educational institutions. Its development was itself partly shaped by institutional and political processes. Policy arrangements, research funding, professional organizations, and educational reforms contributed to the intellectual environment within which aesthetic education became influential.

This historical relationship has an important implication for the contemporary debate. If institutional structures contributed to the emergence and dissemination of aesthetic music

education, then its continued sustainability cannot be assumed to depend exclusively on the strength of its philosophical arguments. Its reproduction also depends on curricula, funding mechanisms, teacher education, professional structures, administrative representation, and institutional decision-making.

The relationship is consequently reciprocal. Institutions shape the conditions under which philosophical ideas emerge and circulate, while philosophical ideas influence how institutions understand the purposes of education. Institutional support is therefore not merely a secondary condition imposed upon an otherwise complete philosophical project. It forms part of the historical and practical process through which the project acquires educational reality.

3. A Three-Layer Framework of Institutional Support

This paper conceptualizes institutional support for aesthetic music education through three analytically distinct but practically interconnected layers: policy, organization, and pedagogy. These layers represent different sites at which aesthetic music education must obtain legitimacy and resources.

The policy layer establishes the formal conditions under which music education can be included and sustained. The organizational layer determines whether music education possesses sufficient authority and representation within institutional decision-making structures. The pedagogical layer concerns whether teachers and teacher educators possess the professional knowledge, autonomy, and institutional conditions required to translate philosophical commitments into classroom practice.

The three layers should not be understood as a simple hierarchy. Rather, they form a dynamic institutional system. Policy shapes organizational priorities and resource availability; organizational structures mediate policy and shape pedagogical conditions; pedagogical practice generates experiences and forms of legitimacy that can feed back into organizational and policy processes.

3.1 The policy layer

At the policy level, institutional support consists of mandates, funding arrangements, curricular requirements, accountability mechanisms, and other forms of public regulation that determine whether aesthetic aims can obtain formal recognition.

Cash (2025) shows that curriculum decisions are shaped by mandates originating at federal, state, and local levels as well as by government funding resources, while substantial decision-making authority remains at the school level, particularly with principals. Cash (2025) further notes that music programs can be among the first programs to be eliminated, even where school leaders recognize their value within the broader curriculum.

For aesthetic music education, this creates a problem of policy admissibility. Before aesthetic educational aims can be enacted, music itself must possess sufficient curricular standing to receive time, funding, personnel, and institutional attention. The philosophical quality of an educational rationale cannot compensate for the absence of institutional authorization.

Two characteristics of the policy layer are particularly important. First, authority is distributed across multiple levels. No single institution necessarily determines the position of music within the curriculum. Instead, outcomes emerge through interactions among governmental mandates, district priorities, school leadership, funding arrangements, and professional expectations. Second, these arrangements are inherently dynamic. Because music may occupy a relatively vulnerable position within curricular competition, its institutional status must be continually reproduced and renegotiated.

This means that aesthetic music education requires policy engagement even if its philosophical commitments are deliberately separated from instrumental or utilitarian justifications. If aesthetic education cannot participate effectively in the policy environment, it risks becoming institutionally marginal irrespective of the philosophical coherence of its underlying claims.

3.2 The organizational layer

The organizational layer concerns the structures through which music education acquires authority, representation, coordination, and leadership.

Bodilly et al. (2008) emphasize the importance of district-level arts education officials who can advocate for the arts and secure their position within the core curriculum. Their analysis also highlights the limitations faced by low-level arts coordinators who lack sufficient authority or access to key institutional conversations. The implication is that effective arts advocacy requires senior-level commitment and organizational positions capable of integrating arts education into broader institutional decision-making.

Forrest and Jeanneret (2005) extend this argument to education departments, noting that arts and music positions within administrative centers can provide the arts with a recognized point of reference and a voice in broader educational policymaking and implementation. Although responsibilities vary across institutional settings, the common function of such positions is to ensure that arts education is represented within decision-making processes from which it might otherwise be excluded.

This organizational dimension is particularly important for aesthetic music education because philosophical arguments require institutional representation. Aesthetic education cannot influence curricular decisions if its rationale exists only at the classroom level and has no organizational presence within senior decision-making structures.

The organizational layer therefore performs a mediating function. It translates policy into institutional priorities while simultaneously translating pedagogical needs into organizational and policy language. Without such mediation, aesthetic music education may become disconnected from the structures responsible for determining resources, curriculum, staffing, and strategic priorities.

3.3 The pedagogical layer

At the pedagogical level, institutional support concerns teacher preparation, professional development, pedagogical autonomy, curriculum design, and the capacity of educators to interpret and enact educational policy.

Helton and Delfing (2022) identify a significant weakness in this area: music teachers may possess limited awareness of and skills for navigating educational policy, partly because policy content is generally underrepresented in preservice music teacher education. They further note that although music teacher educators play a central role in curricular decision-making, administrators and program leaders who operate within policy environments may have only modest policy dispositions (Helton & Delfing, 2022).

This issue has direct implications for aesthetic music education. If aesthetic educational aims are difficult to translate into conventional institutional language, educators require not only philosophical knowledge but also the professional capacity to communicate those aims within policy and organizational environments.

The pedagogical layer therefore represents more than the final stage of implementation. It constitutes an important site of institutional mediation. Teachers interpret policy, construct curricular experiences, communicate educational value to students and administrators, and generate the practical evidence through which music education is understood by institutions.

A weakness at the pedagogical layer can consequently reproduce vulnerabilities at higher levels. Teachers who lack policy literacy may be unable to communicate effectively with decision-makers; teacher educators who lack organizational awareness may reproduce curricula disconnected from institutional realities; and programs that provide insufficient professional development may struggle to adapt philosophical commitments to changing educational environments.

4. Legitimation as the Central Institutional Problem

4.1 The evaluability gap

The most fundamental institutional challenge facing aesthetic music education is not necessarily explicit opposition to aesthetics but the difficulty of demonstrating its outcomes in institutionally recognizable terms.

Regelski (2022) identifies this problem directly. Because aesthetic experiences are, by definition, resistant to explicit evaluation, the absence of clearly observable improvements in aesthetic refinement can generate legitimation crises among school boards and education ministries. When institutional decision-makers cannot identify sufficiently clear outcomes, they may question the curricular value of music.

The problem is therefore structural. Educational institutions are accountable for allocating scarce resources among competing programs. Such allocation requires criteria through which programs can demonstrate educational significance. Aesthetic education, however, has traditionally emphasized forms of experience that cannot be completely captured through standardized measurement.

Allsup and Lewis (2015) situate this difficulty within a broader philosophical transformation in music education. The proposition that an education in the arts is fundamentally an education in feelings became increasingly difficult to sustain within an educational environment characterized by evidence, standardization, and demands for explicit knowledge. Critics also challenged the assumption that musical experience is fundamentally unknowable, emphasizing instead the conceptual, social, and sonic contexts within which music is produced and experienced.

The resulting tension should not be resolved simply by converting aesthetic education into a measurable program. Such a response could undermine the philosophical specificity of aesthetic education. At the same time, leaving the educational value of aesthetic experience entirely unarticulated makes long-term institutional sustainability difficult.

The central institutional task is therefore one of translation without reduction: aesthetic educational outcomes must become sufficiently communicable to participate in institutional decision-making without being reduced to purely instrumental or mechanical measures.

4.2 The critique from praxialism

The institutional legitimation problem is intensified by internal philosophical criticism. Barrett (2002) summarizes several important criticisms directed toward traditional aesthetic conceptions of music education. These include concerns about the treatment of the musical work as an autonomous object, the potential Eurocentrism associated with an exclusive emphasis on internal musical characteristics, the privileging of passive listening over active music-making, and the reliance on verbal response as a primary means of accessing students' musical understanding.

Elliott's praxial alternative responds to these concerns by emphasizing critically reflective action in context. Musical engagement is conceptualized through practices such as arranging, composing, conducting, improvising, and performing rather than primarily through receptive engagement with autonomous works (Barrett, 2002).

West (2015) demonstrates that this distinction did not emerge as a static opposition. Elliott's early writings on jazz education were influenced by aesthetic perspectives associated with Langer, Meyer, and Reimer, while his thinking subsequently developed through the 1983 dissertation and ultimately toward the formulation associated with Music Matters in 1995. The historical trajectory indicates that the relationship between aesthetic and praxial approaches is better understood as an evolving intellectual debate than as a permanent disciplinary binary.

Koopman (1998) similarly resists a simple either/or resolution. His comparison of Reimer's aesthetic conception and Elliott's praxial alternative highlights differences concerning the aesthetic and cognitive dimensions of music and the relationship between musical experience, performance, and interpretation. Rather than resolving the debate by eliminating one position, Koopman develops an intermediate approach involving a polarization of musical concept and musical activity. Tuinstra (2019) likewise identifies aestheticism and praxialism as major philosophical traditions shaping music education practice.

These debates are institutionally relevant because they influence the forms through which music education can be represented, evaluated, and legitimized. Active participation, contextual learning, diversity of musical practices, and observable forms of engagement may respond more readily to contemporary institutional expectations than an exclusively autonomous conception of aesthetic experience.

4.3 Why legitimation is an institutional rather than purely philosophical problem

The aesthetic–praxial debate is often framed primarily as a philosophical disagreement. However, its consequences extend beyond philosophy.

A philosophy whose educational outcomes are difficult to demonstrate may face difficulties during budgetary and accountability processes. A conception of music associated with an autonomous and culturally specific repertoire may encounter challenges within curricula increasingly concerned with diversity and inclusion. A philosophy that requires specialized conceptual language may be disadvantaged when educators and administrators lack the policy knowledge needed to communicate its significance (Helton & Delfing, 2022).

The institutional issue is therefore not whether aesthetic music education should abandon its philosophical identity. Rather, the issue concerns the institutional forms through which that identity can remain intelligible and defensible.

This distinction is important. Institutional adaptation should not be equated with philosophical surrender. Instead, adaptation can be understood as the process through which an educational philosophy acquires organizational forms capable of sustaining it under changing institutional conditions.

5. Advocacy as Institutional Work

If legitimation constitutes a central institutional challenge, advocacy becomes a necessary component of institutional sustainability. The relevant literature suggests, however, that effective advocacy is not merely promotional activity. It is a form of institutional work through which the educational purposes of music are translated into the language of organizational decision-making.

Earnhart (2014) makes this point explicitly. If music for its own sake is regarded as educationally important, advocates must develop appropriate vocabulary, explanations, and metaphors for communicating with administrators who control school district resources. Such communication is necessary if music education programs are to remain viable amid changing educational priorities and district goals.

Miksza (2012) provides further evidence concerning the organizational determinants of arts education resources. Examining community support, administrative support, arts educators in leadership positions, and school climate as potential predictors of principals' perceptions of resource adequacy, Miksza finds that parent and community support, the presence of arts specialists in leadership roles, and the existence of an arts curriculum specialist or program coordinator have particularly pronounced effects on reported adequacy of funding, instructional time, and specialist staffing. Student demand for arts education, the inclusion of arts grades in secondary students' grade-point averages, and principals' participation in arts events also demonstrate significant relationships with resource adequacy (Miksza, 2012).

These findings have a direct conceptual implication for aesthetic music education. The institutional resources required to sustain aesthetic educational experiences are mediated by social relationships and organizational positions. Who participates in decision-making, who represents the arts, how visible music education is within an institution, and whether advocates occupy positions of formal authority can affect the conditions under which music education is sustained.

Consequently, a philosophically sophisticated rationale that lacks institutional representation may remain practically vulnerable. Advocacy is therefore not external to aesthetic music education. It is part of the institutional process through which aesthetic educational purposes acquire organizational legitimacy.

The higher education literature reinforces this argument. Gaunt et al. (2021) document institutional initiatives involving creative and cultural entrepreneurship, curriculum decolonization through greater diversity in composers, performers, and teachers, intercultural collaboration through international exchange, the use of digital technologies to expand creative and educational access, and the development of artistic citizenship as part of graduate outcomes. These initiatives also seek to connect practical artistic training with wider social and environmental issues (Gaunt et al., 2021).

The significance of these developments lies not in their replacement of aesthetic education, but in the changing institutional vocabulary through which music education is justified. Contemporary institutions increasingly articulate the value of music education through concepts such as diversity, innovation, social engagement, entrepreneurship, citizenship, and digital access. These concepts demonstrate the evolving criteria through which institutional legitimacy is constructed.

For aesthetic music education, the implication is not that these alternative vocabularies should replace aesthetic justification. Rather, aesthetic educators need the capacity to articulate the relationship between aesthetic experience and broader institutional objectives without reducing the former to the latter.

6. Curriculum Reform and the Institutional Absorption of Pedagogical Change

Aesthetic music education cannot be sustained through philosophical argument alone because philosophical commitments ultimately have to be incorporated into curricula, teaching practices, professional development, and institutional routines. Research on curriculum reform in conservatoires provides an instructive illustration of the mechanisms through which educational institutions absorb or resist pedagogical change.

Duffy (2013), in examining curriculum reform at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, describes reforms that challenged established conservatoire practices and sought to broaden traditionally narrow curricula by increasing student choice and creating opportunities for collaboration across artistic disciplines. Such reform demonstrates that curriculum change is not simply a matter of adding new courses. It can require institutions to reconsider longstanding assumptions concerning specialization, disciplinary boundaries, and professional preparation.

McCormick (2025) provides a structural explanation for this difficulty. The contrasting historical origins of conservatories and schools of music produce differences in educational purposes, teaching methodologies, organizational structures, and curricular arrangements. Consequently, what institutions teach and how they teach it are partly determined by the structural characteristics inherited from their institutional histories.

Rumiantsev et al. (2019) identify an additional dispositional dimension. Interviews with conservatoire leaders in Flanders and the Netherlands indicate that teaching professionals often maintain considerable autonomy and continue to value traditional forms of teaching and learning. Leaders themselves may hesitate to introduce new pedagogies, principles, and guidelines because of strong commitments to craftsmanship and substantial respect for the expertise of teaching professionals.

These findings help explain why philosophical innovations are absorbed unevenly across institutions. Structural arrangements determine what kinds of change are administratively possible, while professional dispositions determine whether change is culturally acceptable. Philosophical reform therefore requires both organizational capacity and professional engagement.

More recent work by Rumiantsev, van der Rijst, and Admiraal (2026) identifies conditions under which curricular innovation may become more sustainable. Their four-year educational design research project at a Dutch conservatoire involved researchers and practitioners in the collaborative redesign of a Bachelor of Music curriculum. Five features characterized the co-creation process: practitioner ownership, iterative decision-making, shared conceptual language, the balancing of tradition and innovation, and collaborative reflection (Rumiantsev et al., 2026). The authors further argue that connecting curricular innovation with professional development and organizational learning can facilitate sustainable, long-term educational change.

These findings have broader implications for aesthetic music education. Practitioner ownership, shared conceptual language, collaborative reflection, and organizational learning are not characteristics of one particular philosophy. Rather, they constitute institutional mechanisms through which educational philosophies become embedded in practice.

The policy environment of professional music institutions presents a related challenge. Fletcher (2017) argues that outdated organizational and programmatic policies continue to shape the operation of many institutions responsible for preparing professional musicians. He suggests that stagnant policy structures may contribute to difficulties facing Western classical music because they provide insufficient capacity for change and innovation in an increasingly uncertain cultural environment.

If aesthetic music education remains closely associated with institutional structures that are themselves resistant to adaptation, the sustainability of aesthetic education becomes inseparable from institutional reform. Preserving the philosophy therefore requires attention to the organizational forms through which the philosophy is transmitted.

7. Reintegrating the Philosophical and Institutional Dimensions

7.1 Institutional support is constitutive rather than merely instrumental

The first implication is that institutional support should be understood as constitutive of aesthetic music education rather than simply instrumental to it.

If aesthetic education requires sustained instructional time, specialist teachers, curricular recognition, leadership representation, professional development, and organizational resources, then these conditions are not external additions to the educational philosophy. They constitute the practical environment in which the philosophy becomes educationally real.

Mark's (1998) historical analysis strengthens this interpretation by demonstrating that federal statutory law was an important catalyst in the development of aesthetic education philosophy. The historical relationship between policy and philosophy therefore appears reciprocal rather than unidirectional.

The implication is significant. Advocacy, policy engagement, leadership representation, and curriculum design should not be regarded as administrative activities that occur after philosophical justification has been completed. They are part of the practical realization of the philosophy itself.

7.2 The aesthetic–praxial debate also has an institutional dimension

The second implication concerns the relationship between aestheticism and praxialism.

Barrett's (2002) discussion of Eurocentrism, passive listening, and the privileging of verbal response highlights criticisms that have both philosophical and institutional consequences. Contemporary educational institutions increasingly value diversity, active participation, contextual learning, and demonstrable engagement. Consequently, some criticisms directed toward aesthetic education resonate with broader institutional transformations.

This does not necessarily require aesthetic music education to abandon its emphasis on aesthetic experience. Rather, it suggests that aesthetic aims may be pursued through a broader range of musical practices.

Koopman's (1998) intermediate position is relevant here. By recognizing both musical concepts and musical activity, it potentially offers a conceptual basis for integrating aesthetic experience with active and contextualized musical practices. Such an approach may allow aesthetic aims to remain central while enabling institutions to recognize more visible forms of learning and participation.

The institutional question is therefore not simply whether aestheticism or praxialism is philosophically correct. It is how different philosophical commitments can be organized within changing institutional environments.

7.3 Legitimation requires translation without reduction

The third implication concerns institutional legitimacy.

Regelski's (2022) critique identifies the central difficulty: aesthetic experience resists explicit evaluation, yet educational institutions require some basis for evaluating programs and allocating resources. The solution cannot be to make aesthetic education entirely measurable. Such an approach risks transforming aesthetic education into an instrumental program and thereby weakening the philosophical distinction on which its identity depends.

Conversely, refusing to articulate any observable educational implications risks leaving aesthetic music education institutionally vulnerable.

The more productive approach is therefore translation without reduction. Aesthetic educators need to develop ways of describing students' engagement, perceptual development, interpretive capacity, reflective awareness, musical participation, and affective experience that can enter institutional conversations without reducing aesthetic education to a narrow set of standardized indicators.

Earnhart's (2014) emphasis on developing appropriate vocabulary, explanations, and metaphors for communicating with administrators is directly relevant. So too is Helton and Delfing's (2022) finding that policy content is insufficiently represented in preservice music teacher education. Together, these studies suggest that institutional sustainability requires educators who are simultaneously capable of engaging with aesthetic philosophy and navigating the institutional environments in which educational decisions are made.

The broader conceptual proposition is that philosophical literacy and institutional literacy should not be treated as competing forms of professional knowledge. For aesthetic music education to remain viable, they need to become complementary dimensions of teacher and institutional preparation.

8. Conclusion

Aesthetic music education has traditionally been defended and criticized primarily as a philosophical position. This paper has argued that such a framing is incomplete because the viability of any educational philosophy depends on the institutional conditions through which it is interpreted, represented, resourced, and enacted.

The analysis developed a three-layer framework consisting of policy, organizational, and pedagogical support. At the policy level, aesthetic music education must obtain sufficient curricular and financial legitimacy within fragmented and changing systems of educational governance (Cash, 2025). At the organizational level, it requires leadership positions and institutional structures capable of representing the arts within senior decision-making processes (Bodilly et al., 2008; Forrest & Jeanneret, 2005). At the pedagogical level, teachers and teacher educators require not only philosophical understanding but also sufficient policy literacy and professional capacity to navigate institutional environments (Helton & Delfing, 2022).

Across all three layers, the central challenge is one of legitimation. The affective and non-conceptual dimensions emphasized by aesthetic music education do not always correspond readily to the evaluative mechanisms through which contemporary institutions allocate resources and assess educational effectiveness (Allsup & Lewis, 2015; Regelski, 2022). At the same time, internal philosophical criticism has challenged aspects of traditional aesthetic education, particularly its treatment of musical autonomy, passive listening, Eurocentric assumptions, and verbalized forms of musical understanding (Barrett, 2002).

The literature on advocacy and curriculum reform further demonstrates that institutional sustainability depends on more than philosophical commitment. Formal leadership positions, community support, professional networks, curriculum specialists, practitioner ownership, collaborative reflection, organizational learning, and shared conceptual language all contribute to the capacity of institutions to sustain and adapt educational practices (Miksza, 2012; Rumiantsev et al., 2026).

The principal conceptual contribution of this paper is therefore a shift from viewing institutional support as an external resource toward understanding it as a constitutive dimension of aesthetic music education. The philosophy does not exist independently of the institutions through which it is taught. Its educational meaning is continually reproduced through curriculum, policy, leadership, teacher preparation, professional development, and pedagogical practice.

This reconceptualization also suggests a different understanding of advocacy. Advocacy should not be viewed merely as a defensive strategy employed when music education is threatened. It is part of the philosophical work of sustaining an educational conception of music within changing institutional environments. Policy literacy, organizational representation, curriculum development, and professional learning are consequently not departures from aesthetic music education; they are among the mechanisms through which its purposes become institutionally intelligible and educationally actionable.

The future sustainability of aesthetic music education therefore depends not simply on reaffirming its philosophical foundations, but on constructing institutional arrangements capable of carrying those foundations forward. As Mark (1998) demonstrates, the aesthetic tradition itself emerged through particular relationships among policy, research,

professional organizations, and educational institutions. Its continued development will similarly depend on deliberate institutional construction.

The central proposition can thus be stated succinctly: the institutional conditions of aesthetic music education are not peripheral to its philosophy; they are part of the conditions through which the philosophy becomes education.

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