

The Burden of Justification

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I would like to highlight Sheryle Bergmann-Drewe's opening statement that it is indeed "during this time of cost-cutting and the back-to-basics movement" that the burden of justification among arts educators increases exponentially. Although I appreciate the seriousness of the justification problem, having taught music in the public school system in Canada for ten years, I approach our efforts to justify the arts in schools with some misgiving. This misgiving stems from my observation that, in our strategies to redress the "status problem" of arts education, many of us compromise the arts by embracing epistemological ideologies that harbor dualistic thinking. This dualistic thinking in turn manifests the very curricular hierarchies that locate arts education as a curricular "frill." In responding to Bergmann Drewe's paper, I would like to illustrate this epistemological context of the burden of justification by reviewing (1) Catherine Schmidt's critical analysis of a similar project in the music education community and (2) the provisional endorsement of arts education by R.S. Peters. I will then situate Bergmann-Drewe's argument in this context.

Catherine Schmidt exposes the seductive quality of "the power of legitimacy" represented by the national standards in education as articulated in the Goals 2000 Project in the United States.¹ She explains that, by adopting the national standards in education, the Music Educators National Conference (MENC) is reinforcing epistemological ideologies that exacerbate music education's "status problem"; that is, these standards prescribe a set of learning objectives that restrict learning to the predictable and the measurable. She notes, for example, that the *Journal of Research in Music Education* is "still firmly rooted in the positivist tradition."² Similarly, she explains that "the attempt to resolve the conflicting values of the western high-art tradition with those of other cultures" is eclipsed by the concern to judge the value of non-western experience using standards of western art music.³ She adds that the problem of embracing the Goals 2000 Project is compounded by the propensity of music educators to support trends in education based "more on their value for advocacy of the arts than as a vehicle for reform," either within music education or across the curriculum.⁴

My second example to illustrate the epistemological context is a general observation about those who openly support arts education yet often betray a dubious loyalty to it or limited appreciation of its educational value. For example, although R.S. Peters reasons that the arts have a "wide-ranging cognitive content" and can "illuminate other areas of life," his appreciation of the arts as a worthwhile curricular activity is provisional. In other words, although he includes literature with science, history, and philosophy as equally worthwhile curricular activities, he censures "other arts, like music."⁵ On the one hand, "writing a poem" is given the same priority as "doing science." On the other hand, activities that are associated with physical activity are denounced as utilitarian activities, pastimes, or games.⁶

This manifestation of the mind/body split associated with a residual Cartesian anxiety for the body⁷ frames Peters's philosophical argument and similarly the education system's preference for subjects more readily associated with the intellect over those more readily associated with corporeality.

In this epistemological context, arts educators face a philosophical dilemma. On the one hand, their secondary curricular status compels them to justify arts education in terms of the dominant discourse. On the other hand, their acquiescence to this burden reproduces the dualistic thinking that has long marked the arts as "frills" or desirable nonessentials. Thus, I believe Bergmann Drewe's argument is immobilized by being framed within this discourse and by so reproducing the epistemological underpinning of curricular hierarchies. These hierarchies are symptomatic of an epistemological bias for the predictable and the measurable, and for the discovery of truth through "pure" intellection. In short, they underscore an "ideal of the educated person" as the Man of Reason.⁸ Perhaps the most significant aspect of dualistic thinking as it permeates justification projects is the mind/body dichotomy. That is, justifications based on the merit of corporeal, practical, procedural, physical or experiential knowledge are doomed to fail given the centrality of the Mind in the ideal of the educated person.

Perhaps Bergmann-Drewe believes that she has addressed this bias by underscoring the merit of practical knowledge and then explaining the practical knowledge component of arts education. But note the oppositions that this approach to justification requires. In her opening paragraph, she articulates the familiar opposition of practical and theoretical knowledge. In her closing comments about practical knowledge in general, she introduces David Carr's distinction between making and discovering truth. This distinction is the last in a list of several related epistemological hierarchies that Bergmann Drewe interjects throughout her paper: theoretical and practical knowledge, propositional and procedural knowledge, "knowing that" and "knowing how," knowing and doing, knowing and creating, and, finally, discovering truth and making truth. Her claim that "denying students an opportunity to make 'truth' through practical reasoning would leave a significant void in their education" *presupposes* the discovering/making truth dichotomy. But rather than acknowledge this and related fundamental dichotomies and their role in framing her argument, she simply interposes that "there does not seem to be any logical reason why discovering truth should have a priority over making truth."

Although one might happily assume that few would deny students access to practical, experiential, or procedural knowledge, it is difficult without an examination of the residual epistemological bias for propositional knowledge to appreciate why *she* believes that "students should have the opportunity to attain practical knowledge (to make truth)." More importantly, given this bias in the curriculum, it is difficult to appreciate why practical knowledge would make a strong justification for performance arts. Because the mind/body split not only permeates Peters's case for worthwhile activities but also underlies the education system's common (mis)appreciation of "frill" subjects such as dance, movement, and physical education, Bergmann-Drewe's case for practical knowledge will at best justify the

education system's proclivity to allow "frill" subjects to complement their theoretical or academic mandate without assigning them full status as worthwhile curricular subjects.

If in fact Bergmann Drewe is looking for a "logical reason why discovering truth should have a priority over making truth," I recommend that she examine the *kind* of logic she utilizes in her justifications. In arguing that epistemological components of practical knowledge are analogous to qualifying standards of propositional knowledge, she exploits hierarchal associations and a logic framed by dualistic concepts. Thus, her paper reflects the same philosophical dilemma that Schmidt exposes in MENC's project. Both projects attempt to justify arts education by embracing the dominant epistemological discourse.

Jane Roland Martin, in her 1981 address to the annual meeting of the Philosophy of Education Society, explained that "dualism is built not simply into Peters's ideal but into our discipline."⁹ It is more than timely, therefore, to be sensitive to the dualistic thinking underpinning the chronic project to justify "frill" subjects as worthwhile curricular disciplines.

1. Catherine M. Schmidt, "Who Benefits? Music Education and the National Standards," *Philosophy of Music Education Review* 4, no. 2 (1996): 79.

2. Ibid., 80.

3. Ibid., 78-79. See also Bruno Nettl, *Heartland Excursions: Ethnomusicological Reflections on Schools of Music* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 109-10.

4. Schmidt, 71.

5. R.S. Peters, *Ethics and Education* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1970), 163n: "It might reasonably be argued that literature and poetry, for instance, are developments of a dimension of awareness of the world, while other arts, like music, may be creating, as it were, another world to be aware of. The latter would, therefore, be more like games than like science or history." Although Britain has had a stronger dance and movement component in their schools than we have had in North America, this subject area is not included in Peters's case for worthwhile curricular activities.

6. Although literature has a relatively secure curricular status, its aesthetic or literary component does not. Deanne Bogdan explains that "proponents of aesthetic education tend to emphasize the development of music and visual arts programs, understandably, believing that literature as a language art is taken care of within its own discipline." Bogdan, *Re-Educating the Imagination: Toward a Poetics, Politics, and Pedagogy of Literary Engagement* (Portsmouth, N.H.: Boynton/Cook, 1992), 60.

7. Ibid., 157-63. Note Peters's cautionary remarks about attachments to pets and people who "will die or become worn out with use and age." He happily adds that "no such fate awaits the objects of theoretical activities" (p. 157).

8. See Jane Roland Martin, "The Ideal of the Educated Person," in *Changing the Educational Landscape: Philosophy, Women, and Curriculum*, ed. Jane Roland Martin (New York: Routledge, 1994), 70-87 and Genevieve Lloyd, *The Man of Reason: "Male" and "Female" of Western Philosophy* (London: Methuen, 1993).

9. Martin, 81.