

BEYOND TECHNIQUE: AN ETHICAL RECONCEPTUALIZATION OF MUSIC EDUCATION IN A CHANGING WORLD

Maria Argyriou

Department of Pre-School Education & Educational Design School of Humanities
University of The Aegean

ABSTRACT

This article offers a critical exploration of contemporary music education, emphasizing the shift from positivist, teacher-centred paradigms to post-positivist, student-centred approaches. Drawing on philosophical, sociological, and historical perspectives, it interrogates the ethical implications of this transformation across Greece, France, and Finland. Central themes include the erosion of teacher autonomy, the instrumentalisation of education, and tensions between standardisation and cultural preservation. Through a literature-based philosophical methodology, the study critiques reductive educational models and proposes an alternative framework that foregrounds ethical reflection, pedagogical autonomy, and cultural responsiveness. Dewey's pragmatist ethics supports the redefinition of "method" as a reflective, value-laden practice attuned to uncertainty. The music educator emerges not merely as a technician but as an ethical agent shaping transformative learning experiences. This work advocates for reformed teacher education that integrates ethical training and promotes critical inquiry. Ultimately, it situates music education as a vital force for cultivating ethical awareness, democratic values, and social transformation.

KEYWORDS

Ethics, Music Education, Pedagogy, Autonomy, Professionalism, Cultural Identity

1. PRESUMPTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The modern educational environment, marked by a focus on learning outcomes, students' subjective experiences, and the transient trends of young culture, indicates a significant epistemological transformation [1] [2]. The post-positivist shift, although a required adjustment to the reductionist, behaviorist frameworks that formerly acknowledged the teacher's esteemed authority, exacerbates the issue of professional legitimacy. This phenomenon arises as the fundamental principles of teaching expertise face challenges and examination from both academic and political spheres. In this context, the field of music education reflects broader shifts, moving from behaviourist, positivist paradigms to post-positivist frameworks that value subjectivity, student agency, and cultural relevance. These transformations bring to the fore urgent questions about professional identity, ethical responsibility, and educational purpose. A more comprehensive literature review at this point reveals growing international discourse surrounding the ethical dimensions of music education, with particular focus on the interplay between pedagogical autonomy and institutional accountability.

Studies [3] [4] [5] emphasise that music education increasingly grapples with the challenges of standardisation and outcome-driven assessments. This tension, often described as the instrumentalisation of education, reduces complex human and cultural experiences into

quantifiable outputs. In both the Greek and French systems, such trends contribute to the erosion of teacher autonomy, limiting educators' influence on curriculum and pedagogical direction. In Finland, while the emphasis on student-centred pedagogy is celebrated, it has introduced new complexities, particularly concerning the preservation of cultural heritage. This paper aims to explore the ethical reconceptualisation of music education by examining how different educational systems navigate the tension between individuality and standardisation, heritage and modernity, autonomy and accountability. Our central objective is to critically interrogate the epistemic and evaluative underpinnings of current music education paradigms, while identifying alternative frameworks that preserve the ethical and aesthetic values traditionally associated with the discipline.

To achieve this, we conduct a philosophical and comparative analysis of educational practices in Greece, France, and Finland, drawing upon sociological and historical perspectives. We argue that a reimagined music education must embrace ethical consciousness and cultural reflection, resisting reductionist pressures and affirming the intrinsic value of artistic and pedagogical practice. Furthermore, we propose that educators should be empowered as autonomous professionals—capable of critical decision-making grounded in both theoretical understanding and practical knowledge of their students' needs.

The erosion of professional autonomy, illustrated by de-professionalisation trends in the Greek state, highlights a profound apprehension about the perceived unpredictability of individualized instruction [6]. The instrumentalization of education, as shown in Greek music education that emphasizes quantitative outcomes over the development of aesthetic and ethical principles, illustrates a wider cultural tendency to simplify intricate human experiences into quantifiable measurements. The diminishment of professional autonomy in the Greek educational system reflects a profound apprehension regarding the uncertainties linked to personalized instruction. This trend of de-professionalisation is evident in the restricted capacity of teachers to impact school operations, as headmasters and teachers frequently find themselves following directives without substantial involvement in decision-making processes. Simultaneously, the instrumentalization of education [7], especially in Greek music education, prioritizes quantifiable results over the development of aesthetic and ethical principles. This transition corresponds with a wider social inclination to simplify intricate human experiences into measurable measurements. This contrasts sharply with the assertions of ancient Greek philosophers, including Plato and Aristotle, who acknowledged the significant influence of music on character formation and moral education, emphasizing its inherent worth beyond mere functionality [8] [9].

Our perspectives contest professional autonomy, seemingly influenced by de-professionalization trends within the French educational system [10] and the instrumentalization of education, particularly in French music education, which emphasizes quantifiable results over the development of aesthetic and ethical values [11]. This illustrates a widespread social inclination to simplify intricate human experiences into measurable numbers, highlighting a profound apprehension about the apparent unpredictability of personalized instruction. We concur with [11] that disparities in the French educational system seem to influence the professional autonomy of educators [12] [10]. Thus, music education inside the French educational system is not immune [17], as it continues, as demonstrated by the research of Bourdieu and Passeron, to perpetuate social disparities [18].

In Finland, although the pedagogical mandate emphasizes student-centered learning [19] and seemingly empowers students, it has created a cultural divide in education, revealing tensions between democratization and cultural legacy [14]. The conversion of music lessons into venues for popular music performances has encountered opposition, highlighting the conflict between the democratizing efforts of modern education and the safeguarding of cultural legacy [15]. This

contradiction highlights a major philosophical dilemma: how to balance the desire of individualized expression and experience learning with the conveyance of lasting cultural norms. [15] conducts a historical and sociological analysis of Finnish education, exploring the cultural and social forces that impact educational practices. The simplification of educational practice to a tool for attaining specific results [16] threatens to obscure the inherent worth of learning, converting the educator from a nurturer of knowledge into a mere facilitator of standardized performance. This philosophical inquiry into education compels us to examine the essence of knowledge, the function of the educator, and the objectives of learning within a swiftly changing cultural landscape [20]. The Finnish system clearly illustrates the persistent issues in music education with the integration of young culture and democratic pedagogy. We acknowledge that Finnish society possesses a robust heritage of equality and social fairness, which impacts educational policy. Today, the incorporation of young culture into education remains an ongoing challenge for the Finnish educational system. Finland is recognized for its faith in educators; nevertheless, this is evolving as instructors face pressure to achieve particular results [21].

The aforementioned points underscore our apprehension, which is why this text conducts a critical examination of the current educational paradigm, emphasizing a notable transformation in epistemic and evaluative foundations. It illustrates a shift from a positivist, teacher-centered model to a post-positivist, student-centered approach, marked by a focus on subjective experience, quantifiable results, and the evolving dynamics of young culture. The transition from behaviorist paradigms to an emphasis on students' subjective experiences indicates a move away from objective, quantifiable knowledge towards a more constructivist and phenomenological comprehension of learning. This illustrates a wider philosophical movement that challenges the certainty of knowledge and acknowledges the influence of individual interpretation and environment. The examination of pedagogical expertise, scrutinized by scholars and political entities, prompts inquiries regarding the essence of professional authority in a post-positivist context. This crisis arises from the conflict between the demand for accountability (quantifiable results) and the acknowledgment of the intricate and unexpected characteristics of personalized learning [22] [23].

The trends of de-professionalisation in Greece and France, along with the instrumentalisation of education (emphasizing outcomes over ethical and artistic qualities), illustrate a reductionist perspective of education as only a means to a goal. This indicates a utilitarian philosophical perspective, wherein the value of education is assessed exclusively by its practical results, disregarding its inherent significance.

The conflict in Finland between student-centered teaching and the preservation of cultural heritage highlights the conceptual challenge of balancing individual autonomy with communal ideals. This dilemma addresses essential inquiries regarding identity, tradition, and the influence of education on cultural awareness. The simplification of education to fixed objectives can be perceived as a misapplication of a Platonic ideal. While Platonic ideals were designed to serve as a framework for attaining the good, the beautiful, and the genuine, preset outcomes have diminished the experience to a mere semblance of the ideal.

The method chosen for this study—a philosophical and literature-based approach—was selected deliberately to meet the complex and interdisciplinary demands of the research subject: the ethical reconceptualisation of music education. This method is particularly appropriate given the study's central aim: not to measure outcomes through empirical data, but to critically interrogate epistemic foundations, educational paradigms, and moral responsibilities within music education across cultural contexts. Firstly, the literature-based philosophical method allows the authors to explore deeply embedded assumptions in music education, especially regarding the instrumentalisation of education, the erosion of teacher autonomy, and the shift from positivist to

post-positivist paradigms. The philosophical lens is essential to examine these macro-level conceptual tensions across systems like those in Greece, France, and Finland, which would be difficult to capture adequately through traditional empirical methods alone. Secondly, this method enables an interdisciplinary and comparative analysis, drawing from educational philosophy, ethics, sociology, and musicology. By adopting a critical, reflective stance, the study bridges theory and practice, addressing not only how education is delivered but also why it is structured as it is and to what ethical end. Dewey's pragmatist ethics, for instance, is integrated to reconceptualize “method” as more than a technique—rather, as a reflective, value-laden action situated within dynamic social contexts.

Furthermore, the nature of the study necessitates a methodology that allows for normative inquiry, particularly the construction of ethical frameworks that can guide future practice. Such frameworks are not readily measurable but require argumentation, synthesis, and reflection, which are best supported by philosophical research approaches. Lastly, the authors acknowledge that their literature-based findings could be further validated through future empirical research (e.g., longitudinal studies or action research). This reinforces the role of the current methodology as foundational, offering a conceptual groundwork upon which more applied, evidence-based models can be later developed and tested. In sum, the chosen method aligns with the ethical, philosophical, and transformative nature of the study's objectives—moving beyond technique to interrogate the very meaning, values, and purposes of music education in a changing world.

The presented assumptions and concerns compel us to scrutinize the essence of knowledge within a swiftly changing cultural landscape. Is knowledge objective or subjective in nature? Is it steady or dynamic? This also prompts inquiries regarding the educator's responsibility. Are educators simply intermediaries or nurturers of intellectual wisdom? Ultimately, it encourages us to contemplate the objective of education. Is learning exclusively focused on attaining results, or does it also encompass the cultivation of personal growth, ethical development, and cultural comprehension? [24]. We assert that education should encompass more than the simple conveyance of skills and knowledge. It must foster ethical and aesthetic principles. We assert that educators need to be independent professionals, able to make informed decisions grounded in their competence and comprehension of their students. We acknowledge that learning is a dynamic and multifaceted process that cannot be adequately simplified to basic evaluative indicators. Our discourse reveals the necessity for a more sophisticated and comprehensive approach to education, recognizing the intricacies of learning and the significance of ethical and aesthetic ideals. It suggests that teacher education must prioritize the cultivation of critical thinking abilities, ethical consciousness, and the capacity to traverse intricate cultural situations. It indicates the necessity for an expansive social discourse about the objectives of education and the function of educators in a swiftly evolving planet.

2. ETHICAL ASPECTS OF EDUCATIONAL METHODS AND EDUCATOR PRACTICES: A PHILOSOPHICAL REINTERPRETATION

The modern educational paradox exposes a concerning conflict: although learning environments and student performance are emphasized, the educator's ontological status within this framework has become unstable, fluctuating between mechanistic execution and unrestricted autonomy. This instability is reinforced by a significant silence regarding the educator as a cognitive agent.

This part presents a critical examination of the current educational landscape, emphasizing the vulnerable status of the educator. Their ontological condition, fluctuating between robotic execution and unbridled autonomy, highlights the necessity to reinvent educational practice. We deem it essential to reconceptualize method as a foundational approach to dealing with the world,

utilizing Dewey's arguments to underscore its epistemological importance. The rejection of simplifying it to simply technical methods emphasizes the necessity for a critical and reflective methodology. Method, perceived not solely as a technical procedure but as an essential approach to comprehension and practice, becomes the educator's principal instrument [25]. Method, whether a defined system such as Kodály, an improvised approach, or a comprehensive philosophical framework, signifies the conceptual organization of knowledge and experience to enhance both. In music education, this has frequently been diminished to particular skill-based methodologies or standardized curriculum, eclipsing its profound philosophical importance.

According to Dewey's [26] [27] definition of method as the utilization of intelligence in contingent and unpredictable circumstances, we acknowledge its intrinsic ethical aspect. Educational techniques fundamentally address the ambiguities and complexities inherent in certain cultural and institutional situations [28]. Consequently, our investigation into the ethics of music education will concentrate on the decisions instructors undertake in the transitional realm between established objectives and the unforeseen circumstances of the classroom.

The educator, confronted with the paradoxes and ambiguities of a system that requires both responsibility and innovation, must traverse a landscape replete with ethical issues [29]. Emphasizing the ethical aspects of teaching methods, especially in the transitional area between fixed results and unforeseen circumstances, highlights the educator's moral obligation. In this context, method transcends being a mere tool; it embodies the educator's ethical position and attests to their dedication to cultivating genuine learning experiences. Reaffirming the educator as a reflective and ethical agent contests the reductionist inclinations of modern education. Reclaiming the transformative power of pedagogical practice underscores the necessity for a more humane and mindful educational approach. All aforementioned references pertain to the emphasis on the educator's ontological stance and authenticity, practical intelligence, the repudiation of abstract concepts, the accentuation of empathy and ethical discourse (Ethics of Care), and the recognition of pedagogy's social transformative potential [29] [30] [31] [32].

The complex nature of teaching, comprising several decisions and behaviors, necessitates a strong ethical framework. John Dewey's philosophy provides a persuasive framework for analyzing the ethical aspects of teaching. Dewey's ethical framework, intrinsically connected to values, morality, and art, serves as a significant counterbalance to the modern quest for predictability and certainty as ultimate objectives.

Prioritizing predetermined outcomes may inhibit the agency and creativity essential for effective instruction. [33] accurately noted that this strategy undermines educators, constraining their ability to think and make decisions. In today's cultural environment, as educators traverse a complex and ever-evolving landscape, Dewey's naturalistic meta-ethics of valuation and evaluative judgments provides a significant instrument for practical reconstruction [33].

Dewey's ethics beyond the strict division between facts and values, avoiding simplistic determinations of "right" or "wrong." Rather, it adopts a dynamic inquiry approach aimed at addressing practical issues via the perspective of "ethically transformed" desires and expectations [32]. This approach acknowledges that ethical issues are not limited to a single set of principles, but arise from the interaction of various values and objectives. In this framework, we regard the educator's expertise and organizational capacity as inherently connected to the ethical imperatives of education. Methods, as concrete expressions of educational decisions, serve as a vital focal point for ethical contemplation. An educator's approach, including the choice of activities and their execution, embodies their fundamental perspective, comprehension of their students, and involvement with the collective problems of the educational process. The teacher's ethical ability, linked to organizational culture, is not a fixed attribute but a dynamic process of ethical thinking

and action. By employing a reflective methodology, grounded in a profound comprehension of context and principles, educators may adeptly manage the intricacies of their job and foster significant learning experiences.

The modern transition from teacher-centered approaches to learning theories rooted in extracurricular, self-directed musical practices has unintentionally eclipsed the distinct ethical and pedagogical attributes intrinsic to the school setting. In a period characterized by the de-professionalization of education, a reinvigorated focus on the "what," "how," and "why" of pedagogy is essential. This reflection must surpass mere musical considerations, incorporating the ethical and educational imperatives stemming from the particular environment of the institution. Ethical discourse, in this context, interrogates the entrenched hierarchies of values that frequently implicitly govern the reflective practices of music educators. This process transcends technical, professional, or musical justification. It entails evaluations that fundamentally pertain to the growth and nurturing of a dynamic, developing identity. In the context of the school, the self encompasses not only the individual educator but also the collective identity of the learning community. The school, as a distinct socio-cultural environment, necessitates a pedagogical method that acknowledges its intrinsic ethical aspects. In this context, educators partake in an ongoing process of ethical decision-making, influencing both the musical advancement of their pupils and their ethical and social development. By prioritizing the ethical components of music education, we confront the reductionist tendencies that emphasize technical skills and quantifiable results. We reassert the position of the music educator as an ethical agent, actively involved in fostering a learning environment that encourages both musical excellence and ethical development [33] [34] [35].

The current crisis in the teaching profession, marked by disillusionment and feelings of inadequacy, can be partially ascribed to the discord between swift societal transformation and the inflexibility of conventional educational methods. Concerns with cultural responsiveness and student rights, frequently regarded as trivial technicalities, expose profound ethical dilemmas associated with teacher preparation and professional identity [36] [37]. Their worries, frequently expressed as astonishment and perplexity among university graduates, indicate a systemic disregard for ethical contemplation in teacher preparation.

The gradual growth of ethical discourse in music education indicates a historical neglect, a propensity to regard ethics and morality as peripheral to the "common" reality of musically justified training [38]. We contend that method, perceived as a fundamental approach to dealing with the world, is intrinsically linked to ethical activity. We must dissociate the notion of "method" from its typical affiliation with established systems such as Orff or Kodály. We adopt a more comprehensive epistemic perspective of method as a tool for managing uncertainty and directing experience. Similarly, to how we employ methodology to address the technical obstacles of cello instruction or daily routines, we must also apply it to the intricate ethical terrain of education. An ethical crisis occurs when conventional approaches are uncritically applied to evolving settings, thereby stifling creativity and innovation. Authentic ethical discourse necessitates the rejection of preset solutions and an openness to the specific circumstances of each distinct educational moment [36]. In this context, method is not a fixed instrument but a dynamic manifestation of the educator's ethical dedication to promoting genuine and transforming learning experiences [39] [40] [41].

3. ETHICAL ASPECTS OF MUSIC EDUCATION AND CHALLENGES IN MODERN TEACHING CONTEXTS

Our concept for an ethical music education is founded on eight essential principles, each contesting dominant assumptions and encouraging profound contemplation. We acknowledge that a core issue in our field is the enduring conviction that certainty eliminates the necessity for investigation. [30] astutely noted that the quest for "rapid, precisely quantifiable, accurate outcomes" promotes a strict and mechanistic methodology. This cultural myth, which associates effective teaching with infallible competence, deters educators from accepting doubt and participating in critical self-reflection. The misconception that certifications or advanced degrees represent the culmination of intellectual growth fosters a culture of performative intelligence, wherein the semblance of certainty eclipses authentic inquiry.

Music education surpasses the simple attainment of musical abilities, addressing essential inquiries regarding human character and societal ideals. The current focus on student-centered pedagogy, albeit praiseworthy, requires scrutiny from an ethical perspective. The ethical legitimacy of a method is contingent upon its alignment with its objectives. For instance, although informal methodologies such as Green's emphasize student autonomy, they must consider the ethical ramifications of unrestricted freedom. The possibility of pupils selecting music that endorses violence, prejudice, or detrimental behaviors necessitates a sophisticated approach that reconciles personal liberties with societal obligations. An ethically designed informal approach must confront the intrinsic conflicts between educational and sociological objectives [42].

Ethical instruction necessitates the recognition of context, both personal and cultural, alongside the understanding that the educator functions as an ethical agent, not simply a purveyor of skills. While values provide broad direction and means are chosen for specific aims, an excessive focus on abstract ideals can hinder practical action, just as an exclusively pragmatic approach without a comprehensive vision risk reducing education to disjointed activities. The conflation of curriculum modules or competencies with overarching educational goals reflects a confusion between existential growth and mere technical proficiency, demanding a transcendence of both abstract idealism and restrictive pragmatism. Furthermore, the concept of democracy in education requires critical examination, not uncritical acceptance, and the concept of change must be embraced, not feared. Finally, ethical discourse is understood as a continuous process, not a singular event.

Comprehending multicultural reality and addressing its ethical imperatives is crucial, as the increasingly diverse and interconnected society has rendered music educators' deliberations on means and objectives more intricate. Recognizing the multitude of incompatible forces at play, as Dewey observed, necessitates a sophisticated and contextually aware approach, moving beyond established techniques regulated by fixed parameters that constrain decision-making and stifle independent thought. Instead, an ethical pedagogy demands a shift from static techniques to a dynamic and adaptive approach, empowering educators to effectively navigate the complexities of multicultural environments, thereby fostering a classroom that truly reflects and responds to its diverse community.

4. EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AS TRANSFORMATIVE COMMUNITIES, FOSTERING A RESEARCH-ORIENTED PERSPECTIVE

A pedagogy grounded in continuous educational research, empowering educators to engage in critical and transformational practices, is essential, as argued by [43] who emphasize the

development of a critical and transformational research orientation as a vital objective of professional development. Educational institutions, distinct from mere reflections of the external environment, are unique communities with public aims that transcend prevailing cultural norms, necessitating an active engagement and reform of societal standards rather than passive assimilation. This intrinsic unpredictability and fluidity of our reality demands an educational paradigm that fosters reconstruction and transformation, differentiating education from simple instruction, cultural indoctrination, or training, especially in music education, which must transcend the mere conveyance of technical abilities. Concurring with [44] instruction in musical practice does not equate to music education; rather, the objective should be to rejuvenate musical culture, foster a new generation of music enthusiasts and practitioners, and reconstruct musical practices, both innovative and credible. A dynamic and progressive approach, embracing change and challenging conventional conventions, is crucial, requiring educator professionalism, rooted in an ethical commitment to music education, to shift beyond limited artistic objectives. Confining ourselves to solely musical considerations hinders our ability to engage in ethical discourse and resolve issues, thus necessitating, as [24] posits, the embodiment of both educators and musicians, surpassing the confines of topic specialization and technical expertise.

The discourse on ethics in music education may necessitate the examination of non-musical topics. Musical considerations, such as perfect pitch or "authentic" performance, may need to be deprioritized in our study, as emphasis is placed on broader individual or societal benefits that represent contemporary imperatives. Consequently, dualisms that perplex us with the paradoxes they present (such as musical excellence or the primacy, in a strict sense, of musical goal-setting) do not pertain to us as binary oppositions. We contend that optimal education is fundamentally an ethical endeavor influenced by a variety of unanticipated, intersecting, and frequently conflicting social acts and values. Development must extend beyond the musical area, as educational institutions have more comprehensive objectives. The school is not a binary entity; rather, it serves as a microcosm of society, embodying its complexities and paradoxes. It is an environment where students are enabled to interact with the world, question its conventions, and aid in its evolution.

The essence of a music educator's professionalism is the acknowledgment that no objective, particularly a musical one, is absolute or free from additional ethical scrutiny. It is a fundamental fallacy to presume that musical objectives, whether as artistic artifacts or performances, are static and detached from social or ethical contexts. This assumption frequently entails a hierarchical classification of musical objectives, wherein specific "terminal experiential completions" are prioritized over all other human values. [45] contends that this hierarchical perspective fosters the erroneous belief that ethical judgment is solely the "immediate perception of an end-in-itself," overlooking the dynamic and contextual aspects of ethical decision-making.

When regarded as a self-contained realm of "pleasurable activity," musical practice may serve as an escape from ethical responsibility. For instance, emphasizing excellence in public performance at the expense of democratic engagement or inclusion may result in the exclusion of pupils via discriminatory methods. Educators must acknowledge that their artistic practices and methodologies reflect the overarching principles of their institutions. The lack or misallocation of values is evident in their actions and decisions. A rigorous hierarchy of values is notably apparent in conservatory education, where repertory serves as the exclusive criterion for discourse, so marginalizing opposing viewpoints and constraining the breadth of exploration. This can rationalize practices (such as humiliation or bullying) that emphasize technological accomplishment over ethical principles. In light of the aforementioned, music educators must adopt a diverse array of principles, encompassing equitable access, collaboration, inquisitiveness, self-worth, and cultural analysis. These principles should inform musical objectives, guaranteeing their relevance to students' lives and promoting a vibrant school community. Values are

anticipated to be dynamic. They are influenced by swiftly evolving settings and cultures. General educational values can and should fundamentally transform musical objectives when required [46].

In conclusion, the professional competency of the music educator is rooted in their capacity to perpetually restructure value hierarchies informed by ethical judgment. This continuous process of ethical contemplation and adjustment elevates the music educator from a simple instructor to an agent of ethical and pedagogical influence.

5. TEACHER ETHICS AND PROFESSIONALISM: BEYOND NEUTRALITY

Our final thoughts concern the role of the music educator, revolving around the notion that professionalism cannot be confined to technical skills or neutral pedagogical practices. Instead, the ethical dimension is fundamental to the educational process, especially in music education. Teacher professionalism, at its core, entails a commitment to public discourse, a willingness to articulate the ethical and educational frameworks that guide pedagogical practice. It involves a continuous process of negotiating, reconstructing, and reshaping educational and musical practices [47] [48].

While we advocate teacher empowerment and professionalism, we strongly oppose timidity and ethical negligence. The notion that musical creation is a neutral, purely "neural" activity is deeply impoverished, reducing the rich tapestry of human experience.

Imagination, as [48] argues, is essential for ethical teaching. Teachers lacking imaginative capacity, unable to guide students in exploring the diverse interpretations of art, are likely to lack empathy. The ability to "feel one's way into the place of another" is a crucial ethical skill.

Teachers who cultivate an inquiry-based environment, empowering students to understand the multiplicity of perspectives within a classroom community, embody the true essence of professionalism and power. They recognize that empathy and critical thinking are not merely traits, but fundamental ethical stances. The music educator understands that their role extends beyond the transmission of technical skills. They engage in the cultivation of human understanding, fostering empathy and empowering students to engage critically with the world [49] [50]. The teacher's ethical responsibility is not a burden, but a privilege. Through the conscious and reflective application of imagination and empathy, teachers can create transformative learning experiences and contribute to the creation of a more just and humane society. Imagination, in this context, is not limited to artistic interpretation. It encompasses the ability to understand and address the ethical dimensions of cultural practices and social realities. To cultivate ethical imagination, teachers need opportunities for imaginative practice, ethical encounters, and empathy development. They also need strong training in disciplinary expertise. We envision the classroom as a laboratory for ethical exploration, where teachers and students engage in imaginative encounters between the present and the possible. Similarly, we envision teacher education programs as experimental, contingent, and ethically grounded spaces. These programs should be informed by the traditions, cultural practices, and histories that shape the field of music education. They should cultivate teachers not only as musical performers and experts, but also as ethical agents, capable of navigating the complex interplay of musical, educational, and social values.

In this context, carefully selected musical means become methods for achieving broader ends, encouraging both musical and personal development. Educators are equipped with the tools to experiment, adapt to changing situations, and critically evaluate their practices in light of competing ideals. Through the cultivation of ethical imagination and the development of robust

pedagogical methods, music education can become a powerful force for social change and personal transformation. The music educator, in this light, emerges as an ethical agent, actively engaged in creating a more just and humane world. We call upon music educators to redefine their role as ethical agents, capable of creating transformative learning experiences. Music education, with the appropriate approach, can contribute to the creation of a more just and humane society.

This study underscores the urgent need for an ethical reconceptualisation of music education that transcends purely technical approaches and quantifiable outcomes. Drawing from philosophical, sociological, and historical perspectives, it identifies critical tensions within contemporary educational paradigms—particularly the erosion of teacher autonomy, the instrumentalisation of learning, and the reduction of complex educational values to narrow performance indicators. The findings illustrate that music education systems in Greece and France are notably affected by de-professionalisation and an overemphasis on standardisation, while Finland, despite its strong tradition of pedagogical trust, grapples with the preservation of cultural heritage in a climate of student-centred reform. Across all three contexts, a common thread emerges: the need to reclaim education as an ethical and culturally reflective practice. This involves a shift from rigid methodologies to dynamic, context-sensitive pedagogical strategies that empower educators as moral agents and critical decision-makers. Furthermore, the study demonstrates that method must be redefined—not as a fixed set of procedures, but as a reflective and ethically charged orientation toward teaching practice. Dewey's pragmatic philosophy supports this view, positioning method as an adaptive, value-laden process responsive to the uncertainties of educational life. Educators are thus called to navigate between fixed institutional objectives and the unpredictable realities of their classrooms, exercising ethical judgment in real time.

The ethical framework proposed here encourages educators to foster critical inquiry, empathy, and democratic values through music. Ethical music education should prioritise context, inclusivity, and social responsiveness, acknowledging the multifaceted role of the teacher not just as a musical expert, but as a cultivator of ethical and aesthetic development. In practical terms, the study advocates for reformed teacher education programs that include ethical training and promote reflective practice. It also calls for future empirical research—such as action research or longitudinal studies—to further validate the theoretical propositions presented, offering a roadmap toward more humane, equitable, and culturally relevant educational models. Ultimately, this reconceptualisation situates music educators at the heart of a transformative process: not merely delivering content, but shaping society through ethical engagement and pedagogical imagination.

This study contributes to existing scholarship by offering a normative framework for ethical reflection in music education, underscoring the necessity for both epistemic rigour and pedagogical compassion. Future research may adopt alternative methodologies—such as longitudinal studies or action research—to validate the theoretical propositions outlined herein. Such approaches could further illuminate the lived realities of educators and provide empirical grounding for ethically responsive pedagogical models. In doing so, this paper sets the stage for an expanded discourse on the role of music education in fostering ethical, aesthetic, and cultural development in contemporary society.

It is important to emphasize that this study's focus on ethical reconceptualization in music education aligns with the broader concern for ethical considerations in educational research and practice. Just as teacher professionalism extends beyond technical skills to encompass ethical dimensions, so too must research methodology strive for rigor and transparency to ensure the validity and trustworthiness of findings. Further research employing alternative methodologies

(e.g., longitudinal studies, action research) could provide additional validation of the findings of our literature-based study.

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AUTHOR

Dr Maria Argyriou works as Laboratory Teaching Staff (Senior Lecturer) for Applied Music Pedagogy at the Department of Pre-school Education and Educational Design, School of Humanities, University of The Aegean (Rhodes, Greece). She holds a PhD in Cultural Policy and Music Education from the Department of Music Studies at Ionian University, as well as a Master of Education from The Open University of Greece and a second Master of Education in education leadership and school unit assessment. She co-edits the open-access "Hellenic Journal of Music, Education, and Culture" (<http://hejmec.eu/journal/index.php/HeJMEC>) and is the editor of "Music in the First Grade" (<http://mspv.aegean.gr/>).

