

## MUSIC EDUCATION, CREATIVITY AND CURRICULA. THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE TEACHER'S PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE IN THE CURRICULUM DESIGN

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**Abstract:** *In the last decades, research on music education has witnessed a significant increase focusing on different epistemological perspectives. Any artistic experiences represent an essential right aimed at enhancing creativity as well as fostering creative entrepreneurship, as recently confirmed by recent international policies, programmes, and best practices which underline the innovative, social, economic and occupational role of creativity. In Italy, music culture in the school system is backed by several legislative provisions; nevertheless, the role of music in school curricula still suffers from a certain subordination. We discuss the outcomes of a survey carried out within the project named "A vertical experimentation of music". The methodological protocol has been articulated according to the practice analysis' framework. The survey – conducted through in-depth interviews (target: 25 music instruments teachers) – allowed for an insight into the contribution of teachers' practical knowledge in music curriculum planning stages.*

**Keywords:** *music education; curriculum design; teacher's practical knowledge; creativity;*

### 1. Theoretical framework

In the last decades, research on music education has witnessed a significant increase in terms of studies focusing on different fields and epistemological perspectives (Colwell, Webster, 2011; Barrett, Webster, 2014; Darrow, 2015; Young, 2016), including: studies on music-oriented perceptions, propensities, and behaviours in children (Delalande, Cornara, 2010); sociocultural studies focusing on the environmental impact on the development of music skills (Barrett, 2010); studies on the impact of technologies on music development (Vestad, 2010) and on the modalities through which technologies can be embedded, adapted or planned in order to enhance music educational practice (Kim, 2013); studies on the effects of music on the ability to perceive and analyse sound stimuli (Kraus, Chandrasekaran, 2010) and on the ability to develop sensory and motor functions (Steele, Bailey, Zatorre, Penhune, 2013). These studies contributed to the problematisation of music-oriented educational practices as well as the related educational interventions. In the last decades, a development in the differentiation of contents and topics in the so-called *music curriculum* has been observed (Hanley, Montgomery, 2005; Barrett, 2007). There was a shift from an exclusive, central role based on music performance towards a broader perspective involving music-related fields (improvisation, composition, listening, analysis, historical contextualisation) aimed at providing students with a deeper understanding of music by studying the several and collateral variables of music performance (Reimer, 2004) and by means of "eclectic" music curricula. These planning forms were based on the hybridization of music styles and on the implementation of music repertoires and training which were different from "traditional" instrumental and choral approaches; these proved to be closer to students' extra-school experiences, such as jazz, folk, electronic or popular music repertoires; or chamber music *ensembles* as well as new improvisation-based music educational forms. Furthermore, music

teachers showed a growing attention to an embodied vision of mind on kinaesthetic and emotion-based grounds (Bresler, 2004): knowledge of the body is an essential feature in planning effective learning environments in music-related contexts (Powell, 2004). Darrow (2015) critically claims that arts disappeared from the standard compulsory education system, since they are considered as having poor influence on the innovation potential of the new "economy-based" curriculum. Music and arts, in this framework, are only available to talented students who can enhance their ability in specialised, elitist schools. A 19th century-like model seems to prevail based on claims such as "music for music" and "art for art" (Winner, Goldstein, Vincent-Lancrin, 2013), thus limiting the universal right to acquire artistic knowledge, skills and competence. Actually, music represents a social practice (Woodford, 2005) that should be thoroughly implemented in school curricula, since it is an unalienable right in one's education (Unesco *Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity of 2 November 2001*; *Declaration of the Cultural Rights*, Freiburg, 2007). Artistic experiences (Dewey, 1934; Eisner, 2003) represent a fundamental right in enhancing creativity and socially encourage creative entrepreneurship, as demonstrated by recent international policies, programmes and best practices on the innovating role of creativity even in economic and occupational terms (UNPD 2015; EU, 2016, 2018a, 2018b; EC, 2017; UNESCO, 2017). In Italy, several legislative provisions fostered music culture in pre-school contexts, a vertical curriculum planning of music studies, and teachers' professional qualification and training. These provisions reaffirm the need for music education to be part of the educational process for everyone. The Italian law decree no. 60/2017 (*Norme sulla promozione della cultura umanistica, sulla valorizzazione del patrimonio e delle produzioni culturali e sul sostegno della creatività* - Regulations on the fostering of humanities, on the promotion of heritage and cultural productions and on the support of creativity) entails the development of the so-called *Piano delle Arti* (Art Program) aimed at supporting school networks in the creation of educational practices, research programs and experimentations in the field of creative expressions and artistic and cultural orientation. Notwithstanding creativity is explicitly mentioned in Italy's educational priorities, the role of music in school curricula still suffers from a certain subordination.

## 2. The research project

The project *La musica sperimentata in verticale* (A vertical experimentation of music) (Vinci, 2018a, 2018b) has been developed from the cooperation between five schools (a Music school being the reference institution), the University of Bari, a conservatory, and two local music organisations. Its main aim is the formalisation of a curricular planning document aimed at teaching music in all school levels, from pre-schools to high schools. By means of a collaborative research&training project (Desgagné, 2007; Perla, 2014), a bottom-up vertical educational curriculum has been developed together with teachers, arising from the analysis of educational practices in schools and starting from exploratory research. The overall period of this research was one year. The project involved 1,460 students, 40 teachers, 5 school heads, and 1 Conservatory dean. Exploratory research has been carried out by means of interviews (teachers) and surveys (students). This paper aims at focusing on a specific stage of research dealing with an interview with 25 music teachers employed in secondary schools and high schools.

## 3. Methodology

The research protocol has been developed on a phenomenological-based framework represented by *semi-structured interviews*. Some questions have been asked following Vermersch's *explicitation interview* (2005), based on prompts (questions, reformulations) aimed at simplifying its verbal realisation and the action-related awareness. A particular

focus has been dedicated to the understanding of teachers' set of representations in the music field, or the so-called *teachers' beliefs* (Wong, 2005). The following research cores have been taken into account: the interviewee's education and their cultural references; the music-related image; music teaching; students' learning. All interviews have been recorded, transcribed and analysed by means of inductive processes of textual corpus-based encoding which are part of the Qualitative Data Analysis approach (Richards, Morse, 2009). Data encoding (open coding) stages include a selection of some significant strings, as well as data conceptualisation and categorisation. The resulting matrix includes the following core-categories:

Tab. 1: Music teaching: core-categories (excerpt from analysis)

<i>Music-related image</i>	<i>Curriculum creation-assessment</i>	<i>Curriculum</i>	<i>Educational mediation</i>	<i>Students' learning</i>
Intimacy	Cross-curricular ability	Continuity	Posture	Competition
Habitus	Individuality	Vertical degree	Listening	Family experiences
Spirituality	Prescriptive degree	Guidance	Experience	Usefulness
Change	Metacognition	Collegiality	Body	Vocation
Beauty	Observation	Research	Group	Professionalisation
Affectivity	Music ensemble	Extra-school environments	Technologies	School-Conservatory gap
Communication	Listening, performing	Teachers' training	Feedback	Talent/training
Necessity/Rand omness	Self-referentiality	Cross-cutting degree	Acoustics	Emotional management

#### 4. Results

The interviewed teachers interpreted the vertical curriculum as a three-stage course: 1) The valorisation of some fundamental frameworks of music education since pre-schools: listening, early forms of music production by means of a rhythmic-based use of daily tools and use of games; 2) early forms of music reading and participation in choir activities (primary school); 3) instrument specialisation and intense choir-related activities (secondary schools, high schools). Research shows the need for an earlier implementation of instrument study since primary schools: this necessity represents a new feature compared with the current Italian music teaching programmes and it represents an essential policy to be implemented in order to create a meaningful connection with secondary schools. Research also shows the opportunity to bring forward the use of music technologies in secondary schools; the valorisation of music ensembles in secondary schools; the use of three specific mediators in music teaching that can lead to related school activities in a 'vertical' perspective: *body*, *technologies*, and *voice*. The analysis of interviews also shows the lack of assessment tools which can provide a connection between School systems and Conservatories. The explicit complexity dealing with *the assessment of musical competence* (Pellegrino, Conway, Russel, 2015) depends on many factors such as the lack of shared assessment criteria among teachers; the lack of structural tools or common formats; a

complex nature of the evaluation object, that is the individual music performance which is associated with some features that cannot be easily assessed; a low level of collegiality among teachers; lack of adequate teachers' training.

## 5. Implications/discussion

The analysis of interviews led the research group to the development of the vertical curriculum; at the same time, teachers showed an active commitment that questions any 'static' curriculum-based vision (Aoki et al. 2005). As a matter of fact, teachers implement a countless set of modifications and alterations in the curriculum planning stage, thus being proper *curriculum makers* (Rosiek, Clandinin, 2016) or *agents of change* (Priestley, Biesta, Philippou, Robinson, 2016) who can influence the context(s) in which they work. Results encourage the possibility to foster adaptive expertise unlike prescriptive approaches and technical-based visions of teaching.

## 6. Conclusions

The cooperation with school has not seen its conclusion: further planning actions have been envisaged which are focused on experimentation/validation of the planned document in class contexts and in the educational transposition of the curriculum; this implies further study on mediation processes about music knowledge and on tools and modalities relating to the assessment of music competence. To conclude, research showed the need to think better of music teachers' initial educational models and professional development, since they prove to have a growing responsibility and acting as *maestros* in managing all variables underlying education-related processes; this, in turn, may enhance their reflective practices (Timperley, 2011) as well as their adaptive competence (Bransford et al., 2009; Soslau, 2012; Le Fevre, Timperley, Ell, 2016).

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