

Musical education or education through music? Transdisciplinary approach to the musical education of the adolescents

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Abstract: *Transdisciplinarity can be added as a way of reporting to the musical phenomenon in adolescent education. Starting from the transdisciplinary aim to form good citizens in the future, we will identify a certain way of thinking that integrates, responding to the need for meaning and restoring the balance between the physical, biological and spiritual nature for a future adult, a member responsible for societies that are in a continuous change.*

In the field of non-vocational Romanian public education, students access music through the classes of musical education, a subject under the auspices of the present cultural paradigm characterized by the lack of correlations and of a coherent vision upon the world and knowledge. The benchmarks offered by this approach helps to evaluate the role of the musical education in the present and in this context, offering new perspectives upon theory and practise.

Key-words: *transdisciplinarity, music, education, adolescence*

1. Introduction

Musical education or education through music? Here are two structures that would normally be equivalent. The current general perception of musical education is distorting its meaning and purpose. In most cases, the few classes allowed to this subject are an opportunity to theorize music, focusing on the provision of information, that is on the cognitive aspects. However, what would the purpose of acquiring so much specific information, if not being given the opportunity to make

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or feel the music, to internalize and re-define achievements acquired both to their own personal good and to those around them, in order to reach an authentic knowledge.

In the contemporary Romanian society we can notice a certain crisis of consciousness, of values. The situation is also maintained in the educational field, which focuses "way too much on the formation of competences meant to socially integrate the individual and too little on the formation of values, meant to cosmically integrate the individual" (Mureșan 2010, 10). "The path to virtue goes through music," considers Plato (Moutsopoulos 1989, 12). But, at present, music has lost its role of orderly principle of human life, being reduced, most often to a mere aesthetic act. With the phrase "art for art's sake", everything has become permissible. The collective mind was dominated by music whose functions were gradually reduced to the field of entertainment, the most affected age group being the adolescents for whom the musical activities occupy a significant part of their time.

2. Transdisciplinarity - conceptual boundaries

Transdisciplinarity is a word used more and more frequently in educational fields, but in many cases, its meaning is partially known or even mistaken for *multi-*, *plural-* and *interdisciplinarity*. There are two meanings on *transdisciplinarity* (Education Center 2000+): that of the psychologists and educators of the UNESCO research group who refer to these terms in relation to the organization of the contents of education, - *intra-* / *mono-*, *multi-*, *inter-* and *transdisciplinarity* being stages of curricular integration, - and the latter, that of the scientists from CIRET (*International Center for Transdisciplinary Research and Studies* established in Paris, in 1987), which refers to *transdisciplinarity* from the perspective of a philosophy of science, as a new vision on the World, on Nature and on Reality, - *multi-* and *interdisciplinarity* representing forms of potentialization for *transdisciplinarity*. Each of the two approaches represents a benefit to the other, being at times in a relationship of interdependence and having the same purpose, that of completeness, of the status of being complete.

Through *transdisciplinarity*, an *in vivo* knowledge is proposed (Nicolescu 1985, 323) focusing on concrete aspects of everyday life and their impact on the lives of the members of the society. The *transdisciplinary* approach aims to train students as good citizens in the future, able to understand the world in which they

live through a new type of intelligence that will ensure the balance between mental, emotional and physical dimensions, and this integral personal development will lead to social responsibility. Knowledge focuses on the correspondence between the outer and the inner universe, between the object and the subject, including values and being "oriented to astonishment and sharing" (Nicolescu 1985, 323).

The differentiation of *transdisciplinarity* from the other forms of integration is made when the existence of the levels of Reality is accepted and understood. Thus, while *mono- / intra-*, *multi-* and *interdisciplinarity* refer to a single level of Reality or to fragments thereof, *transdisciplinarity* captures the dynamics caused by the simultaneous action of several levels of Reality, but also stemming from *disciplinarity*. The absurdity of the discriminating character is avoided, because, in such a case, "*transdisciplinarity* would remain void of its entire content, and the effectiveness of its action would be reduced to zero" (Nicolescu 1996, 56). A more appropriate formulation regarding the relationships existing in the above context would be that of complementarity. Thus, the acquisitions *within* the disciplines (*mono- / intra-*, *multidisciplinarity*) and *between* them (*interdisciplinarity*) are taken over, integrated and signified *beyond* any boundary through *transdisciplinarity*, removing rigid limitations so as to reach awareness, cooperation, critical and creative thinking in order to adapt to a world to be created in the future. Thus, *mono- / intra-*, *multi-* and *interdisciplinarity* are different degrees of the same phenomenon, *transdisciplinarity*, all four representing "the four arrows of one and the same bow: the bow of knowledge" (Nicolescu 1985, 322).

3. Musical activities and adolescence

Adolescence is a fascinating stage, yet difficult to tackle in all its complexity, by the youngster himself and those around him. It occupies a privileged position within the preoccupations of psychologists, educators, sociologists, physiologists, physicians, psychiatrists, philosophers, as this is the "age of the great changes, the great effervescences, the age at which the man of tomorrow is born" (Dumitrescu 1980, 6). The musical phenomenon, particularly present in young people's lives, has deep intra- and interpersonal implications, thanks to its ability to shape their personality and behaviour.

Thus, music plays an essential role as the guiding principle of the human spirit, it helps to develop different types of intelligence, it is a way of transmitting

information and values, as well as an important means of emotional and behavioural self-regulation. However, as the food can be nutritious or harmful, depending on its quality, the music also supports this differentiation. Not all information transmitted through this *language* is beneficial to young people. Some music can have the opposite effect, can cause the de-structuring of thought, can negatively influence behaviour. Given that, most of the time, access to information is fast and uncensored, adolescents in the turmoil of their age may be vulnerable, without the ability to discern the value of accessed music. Introducing musical education into meaningful systems through wider *transdisciplinarity* helps to change the vision and attitude towards it, to formulate new solutions to the problems of the individual and of the society as a whole, to make decision-makers and the person responsible for their own training.

There are countless studies that track the impact of musical activities on children, young school-age students, recognizing the importance of music in their formation and education. But, these musical activities are equally important in the lives of the students in the secondary and high school cycle, even if they do not yet benefit from a significant interest of the specialists in the pursuit of studying and theorizing.

According to some specialists, in adolescence, the brain is a real learning machine, as it has a "high synaptic plasticity" (Dumulescu, Matei 2017, 17), which means that it has a large capacity of synapses responsible for learning, to be modified by the experiences of the student. If carefully chosen, songs meant to be sung in a group can facilitate access to music, poetry, and develop their memory. If certain physical movements are associated during the interpretation, we can add stimulation and motor development, as well as coordination.

During this time, hormones, environment, and the learning process make the brain regions that handle basic needs, emotional needs, motivations, and immediate desires very contextually sensitive. At the same time, the prefrontal cortex, responsible for the control of emotions, is not yet fully formed, favoring the emotional and impulsive thinking, to the detriment of the rational one. The practice of appropriate behaviours contributes to its optimal development. The benefit of the activity within an ensemble (choir, the class group) consists in the fact that the adolescent will have to "practice" behaviours according to values such as: cooperation, unity, tolerance, respect, friendship.

As their appearance is constantly changing, adolescents are more concerned about it. Slower or faster, physical development can trigger feelings of fear, confusion, tendency to withdraw, eating disorders and depression can be

experienced, these students feeling excluded, mocked, often teased by their peers. Interacting with members of a musical ensemble can help young people to accept themselves as they are, to gain confidence in them, to understand that they have something to offer, that they need it, as long as the pleasure of singing is emphasized, on love of music and of people, regardless of their musical aptitudes. It is necessary that the arrangements of the musical pieces contain elements with more degrees of difficulty, so that each student has access to at least one of them. People who cannot correctly tune will be moved to the rhythmic part. If you encounter difficulties there, they will execute certain movements that will contribute to the overall scenic game. It is important for everyone to have an appropriate role, and young people to be exposed to this activity so that as to bridge their own emotional gaps, to overcome certain limits of their own or imposed by others, over certain complexes or prejudices, to evolve together.

Hormones responsible for the physical changes that cause sex differences, estrogen for girls and testosterone for boys, also have brain implications. Increased estrogen levels in girls favor hippocampal development, which is responsible for memory, emotions and autonomic nervous system. Therefore, girls exhibit enhanced social skills, attention to detail and emotional content of stories, while boys express interest in sports, physical activity and sexual desire, as testosterone determines early development of the tonsil, responsible for the *fugue-fight* reaction and centers of pleasure, and the hypothalamus with an important role in physical and social needs. Within an ensemble, the girls are "carrying melody and emotion", while the boys deal more with the rhythmic part which involves more movement, accompaniment (guitar, piano). Of course, sometimes there are exceptions.

From a cognitive point of view, the adolescent knows several developmental characteristics: the progress of abstract thinking, the return to concrete thinking in stressful situations, a better understanding of cause-effect relationships, the manifestation of interest for moral reasoning. The meaning of life begins to become a theme of reflection, assigning greater importance to the goals and roles assumed, increases the capacity for planning, risk behaviours may occur. Songs that have as their theme the concept of life, songs in which certain states and feelings are captured, help students to create their own perception of life, to identify themselves with certain states. The same phenomenon occurs in the case of auditions. This is why it is very important to carefully select the songs to be played and the songs offered for the audition, so that they are for the benefit of the students. In his book, *Musical Education from the perspective of creativity*, Iosif

Csire stated that "Ideas transmitted to the human consciousness through the aesthetic emotion have on man a power of conviction superior to the purely rational ones" (Csire 1998, 42). Accordingly, we can consider that, by choosing the songs in the repertoire according to the message conveyed, it is possible to deflect the intention to place in certain risky situations, until the individual acquires a set of appropriate behavioural and emotional strategies.

In discussions with high school students, I noticed that, in most cases, music is among their passions, either in an active form, when young people sing vocals or play an instrument, or in a passive form, in the form of auditions music. Young people find in music not only a form of entertainment, but also a way of regulating their own states, as well as an opportunity to develop on a personal level. Singing along satisfies their needs of communion, communication, integration.

Musical activities occupy a significant quantum in young people's lives. At the same time, this is a sensitive period in which the risk behaviours appear: poor nutrition, sedentary lifestyle, smoking, alcohol consumption, drug use, violence, suicidal tendencies, etc. According to UNICEF representative in Romania, Sandie Blanchet, many of the "behaviours that later seriously affect society" (UNICEF 2015) are formed in the second decade of the individual's life, more precisely in the adolescent years (approximately 12-18 years). Following a UNICEF study targeting the risk behaviours of adolescents in Romania, among the recommendations of the specialists for prevention were those regarding "developing the emotional intelligence and non-cognitive abilities of children and adolescents in order to raise awareness and manage risk situations" (UNICEF 2015), increasing self-esteem among adolescents and creating leisure opportunities dedicated to them. To these we could add the development of spiritual intelligence, offering tools to regulate emotional states. For each of these measures, music can provide a solution, as long as those involved are aware of this.

4. Musical education in the context of current Romanian education from a transdisciplinary perspective

The psycho-pedagogical and scientific-philosophical acceptance of *transdisciplinarity* offers benchmarks both for the drawing up of general lines in the learning process (outlining the educational ideal, formulating general competences, choosing contents), as well as for addressing particular aspects of musical education (specific skills, activities learning), so that the result is the creation of a

complex, complete man. In this context, they can find answers to questions that mark the Romanian educational circles, offering solutions and arguments. One of these questions is related to the usefulness of musical education in adolescents' school curriculum. Does music education respond to the needs of high school and middle school students, as long as they are focused on achieving the performance required for admission to high school or college? Does it really help?

The pragmatism that characterizes today's society calls for the elimination of this discipline from the curriculum. Moreover, the process is in full swing, taking place in stages. This year the number of hours of musical education in vocational schools and high schools with a different profile from the musical (Sports, Arts, etc) one was halved, after, in previous years, those hours at theoretical or economic high schools had been halved or eliminated.

Although the current curriculum of the Musical education in high school and middle school cycle is pretty acceptable by being open to *multi-* and *interdisciplinarity* at the level of contents, specific competences and learning activities, in practice, this discipline suffers from the same isolation as all the other subjects studied in school, the accent being placed on content and not on the interest of the students. Moreover, the questions to which the initiator of a *transdisciplinary* approach should be asked could be:

- What and how will the student have to learn to become a responsible member of the future society?
- How can music help to develop new types of intelligence designed to bring balance to the individual and the world we live in?
- What musical activities contribute to student's social, universal integration, but also to the union with the self?
- How can I convey authentic values such as friendship, kindness, honesty, sincerity through musical activities?
- How can I make it easier for the student to balance and harmonize the mental, emotional, physical levels through the musical activities?
- How can I stimulate critical, questioning and dialogue?
- How music helps developing the connection between the outer and the inner universe of the student?
- How do I approach knowledge and learning activities so that I correlate them with concrete problems in the student's life?
- How do I connect to the musical universe of students so that I can offer alternatives to musical preferences?

Of course, no fixed recipes can be formulated, one of the *transdisciplinary* principles being precisely this opening to new solutions. However, possible models of approaches can be offered. For example, studying musical intervals is a good opportunity to discuss human relationships and friendship, completed with applications in which student choose the right musical interval to illustrate the personal mood of the moment or his relationship with his deskmate. He might, as well, choose the musical range that best characterizes him, motivating the response.

For high school students, music auditions could be associated with the four types of temperament (Mureșan 2010, 67-69), identifying the characteristics of each type according to the choice and use of musical elements (consonance / dissonance, dynamic contrasts, expression, melodic contrasts, others compositional procedures) and using a plastic, literary, choreographic or other *language* in expressing the states, feelings, events suggested musically. At the same time, it is very important to report the experience to itself by identifying each student with the audition that characterizes him or her best.

Very welcome in performing the auditions is the connection to the musical universe of the students through the comparative listening of works specific to cult music and their processing in rock, pop, hip-hop, jazz, discussing the semantics of each audition. An example of activity would be the comparative hearing of the following works: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart - *Lacrimosa* and Evanescence - *Lacrymosa*, followed by the identification of the semantic universe of each piece by associating each audition with a movie sequence. Surprisingly, when asked to express a preference for one of the works, most students preferred the original.

Also, a positive impact has the accompanying songs with elements of body percussion or the use of games or activities that combine music (vocal, instrumental singing, auditions), dance / movement or other art forms (painting, sculpture, architecture), other subjects of study (history, geography, religion, Romanian, mathematics), socialization, issuing value judgments.

Although musical education is a "backstage" discipline in mass Romanian education, it could make a full contribution not only to achieving aesthetic and musical goals, but also to enhancing other knowledge, training the skills needed for the future adult and balancing the mental, emotional and physical dimension, ensuring a healthy development of the person who, in turn, will have a positive influence in the society through the quality of his own life.

5. Conclusions

The need for the completeness of knowledge becomes more and more present in the context of the present Romanian society, from whose evolution we can remark that the *transdisciplinary* vision is a possible way to be adopted in the future.

At the moment, in terms of musical education, there are intentions, but only theoretically. In practice, such a *transdisciplinary* approach is neither supported nor understood by the actors involved in the learning process. The lack of a clear vision on possible ways of applying the *transdisciplinary* methodology in and starting from the musical education is obvious considering that by placing musical education in a *transdisciplinary* context the focus is on the students' interest and on satisfying certain needs and solving problems that go beyond school curricula, the involvement of adolescents in musical activities has an internal, intrinsic motivation, meant to trigger changes at the level of consciousness, leading to the rediscovery of "the intangible core of our being, the source of our dignity and freedom" (Nicolescu 1996, 148) - the sacred as an included secret third, generator of authentic meaning and values.

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