

Important aspects in developing the new musical curriculum for the Romanian educational system

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Abstract: *The development of a modern curriculum constitutes a preoccupation of the Romanian educational system, which is materialized with the apparition (in the past 4 years) of new framework plans and of new syllabi for primary and gymnasium education. The present study firstly clarifies aspects of institutional and chronological order regarding syllabi developments in the musical disciplines. It then clarifies strategic and conceptual aspects of developing new syllabi in the domain, the legal basis and priorities from the new syllabi structures. Some problems and challenges in the development of the syllabi are brought to attention, which can constitute threats for the system. It presents several novelties and opportunities which the discipline syllabi offer, the most important of which are correlation and gradation of informations over the course of the 2 teaching cycles, diversification, balancing and modernization of repertoire lists and last but not least encouraging the use of novel technologies.*

Keywords: *curriculum modernization, educational strategies, frameworks, syllabi of musical disciplines, syllabus development*

1. Institutional and chronological clarifications regarding the pre-university education in Romania

Further developing the curriculum in the musical domain represents a desire of the current educational system. Two distinct aspects are followed, one regarding the presence of music in general education (schools and high schools of general profiles or another vocational profile), and another regarding the musical – artistic profiles.

Through OMEN 3371/12.03.2013, the framework plan for primary education was approved. In the 2013-2015 period, the syllabi of disciplines targeted by this plan were developed. From the musical perspective, it is represented in the general curriculum by the “Music and movement” discipline, which is present in all the 5 grades. The teaching is performed by the primary education professor/institutor. The syllabi of this new discipline were adopted in the 2013-2014 period (for the grades between prep-grade and 2nd grade – OMEN 3418/19.03.2013, for 3rd grade to 4th

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grade OMEN 5003/02.12.2014). In the case of the disciplines in the framework plan for primary education with integrated and supplementary schedules of art-music, no new syllabi were developed at that time.

In 2014, the Ministry of Education started consultations regarding the new framework plans for gymnasium grades. The next year, on the 4th of November, it was decided to put in public debate three versions of framework plans for the general education, which included different versions of the Musical Education discipline statute. After consultations and negotiations, the framework plan was adopted, through OMEN 3590/05.04.2016, which keeps the previous statute of the discipline.

In regards to the integrated and supplementary art-music education, which has not benefited of a public debate, significant changes are occurring:

- The secondary instrument becomes compulsory for pupils which study the piano or organ (in mirror of the complementary piano study for pupils which study other instruments), permitting the completion of the skills for the concerned pupils;

- Changing the statute of the accompany discipline - the professor works with the pupil during the instrumental class, together with the instrument teacher;

- Changing the statute of the coral ensemble/instrumental ensemble disciplines, which have now disappeared from the common core and have been transformed into integrated options at the level of multiple curricular areas.

After this, the preparing of the syllabi for the targeted disciplines started. Work groups for the musical education discipline (which is taught by specialized teachers, in Romanian and in national minority languages) were constituted, along those of differentiated curriculum disciplines, which are afferent to musical education, all under the coordination of a scientific researcher from the Education Sciences Institute (ESI) and of a specialized Inspector from the Education Ministry. They developed syllabi, which were later debated in the curriculum committee of ESI, then in public debate, to be correspondingly modified on the observed aspects, receiving approvals from the National Center for Evaluation and Examinations and the National Committee for Arts, then finally to be adopted through Order of the Ministry.

To this moment, the steps above have been taken and new syllabi have been adopted for *Musical education*, including for the national minority languages educations (for grades 5-8), respectively *Music theory* (officially named *The Theory-Solfeggio-Dictation Discipline*, grades 5-8) from the vocational education, through OMEN 3393/28.02.2017. For specialized education, outside the cited disciplines, the rest of the syllabi are currently in different phases of writing and editing, before their presentation to public debate. The situation is similar to that of plastic arts (plastic education), where the latest term for adopting the new syllabi is February 2018. Until the adoption of these, teachers are using syllabi that are in some cases, over 30 years old, or syllabi that were not adopted by the Education Ministry (the cases of accompany, accordion and organ are the most well known). The delayed scheduling

is motivated by the decision to create syllabi for both gymnasium and primary grades, where syllabi vary in age of use between 10 to 30 years.

Regarding the high school education, this benefits of a framework plan adopted through OMEN 3410/16.03.2009 and the syllabi for some disciplines of the general curriculum (Musical education), as well as that of differentiated curriculum – the vocational branch. According to the schedule began after the adoption of Law 1/2011, the modernization of framework plans and afferent syllabi to the high school cycle will proceed in the following years.

2. Strategic, conceptual and structural clarifications

The conception of framework plans and new syllabi for disciplines is coordinated by ESI, which collaborates with other entities and selected human resources from the educational system. ESI creates the setting for developing new syllabi, starting from two aspects: the definition of key skills on European standards, respectively the profile of graduates of a cycle of education (primary, gymnasium, high school).

The 8 key skills, defined in European standards² are: 1. Communication in the native language, 2. Communication in foreign languages, 3. Mathematical skills and basic competencies in Science and Technology, 4. Digital skills, 5. Independent learning, 6. Social and civic competencies, 7. Initiative and entrepreneurial skills, 8. Sensibility and cultural expression. The artistic and musical disciplines contribute to these general skills, especially in the last category, with some other contributions to categories 5 and 6.

The profile of the graduate of the education cycle is clarified in the document of curricular policy³, which is still in the draft stage (although it produces consequences in the system). It starts by defining the graduate profile of each cycle (primary⁴, gymnasium, high school). It then⁵ explains principles that have stayed at the base of developing new syllabi, together with the implications at the level of national curriculum construction and the implications on the teaching – learning – evaluation processes.

Building scholarly syllabi assumes the respect for some principles⁶: centration on the pupil and the pupil activity, the principle of combining disciplinary approaches with those of multi-, pluri-, inter- and trans-disciplines, the principle of

² Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on key competences for lifelong learning (2006/962/EC)

³ http://www.ise.ro/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Document-politici-curriculum_draft_mai_2016.pdf

⁴ The Fundamentals in Early Learning and Development (RFIDT, approved by MO 3851/2010)

⁵ http://www.ise.ro/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Document-politici-curriculum_draft_mai_2016.pdf , pag 19

⁶ Coordinates of a new frame of reference for the national curriculum, CNEE, București, 2012, Potolea, D, Toma, S., Borza, A. (coord.), p. 183-189

congruence, the principle of decongestion, the principle of flexibilizing and personalizing curriculum, the principle of correlating to age-related characteristics of the pupil, the principle of respecting diversity (ethno-cultural, linguistic, religious etc.), the principle of equilibrium etc.

One of the most important effects of the conception of complex and unitary policies in the curricular development is clarifying and imposing a structural model of the disciplines' syllabi, a template with clear organization, mandatory for all syllabi from preparatory grades to the 12th grade. This model/template has the following organization:

- Presentation note – which includes mentions of the study discipline status and their afferent scheduling allocations according to the education framework plan; references to relevant documents which sustain/hold the study of the respective discipline; recommendations considered significant from a point of view focused on the finality of the study of respective disciplines; defining traits of the offer and the novelty of the approach; presenting the scholar syllabus structure and the significance of the used main keywords;
- General competencies – defined per study object and formed over 4 academic years;
- Specific competencies and learning activities – specific competencies are formed over the duration of an academic year, are derived from general competencies and represent stages in the acquiring of them; learning activities have an optional character, with the role of orientating the professor towards modalities of developing a specific competency through intermediary recommended contents;
- Educational contents – rigorously selected from the knowledge domains' structure, through referencing aimed at specific competencies;
- Methodology suggestions – they have the role of orienting the professor in using the academic syllabi, for the purpose of creating the class plans, and realizing teaching-learning-evaluation activities in the light of specificities in the discipline and those of pupil age and diversity; methodological suggestions include recommendations of didactic strategies which contribute predominantly to building competencies (for example, teaching based on problems or discovery, implicating individual or group projects), proposals of teaching activities or ways to approach the content from an interdisciplinary integrated approach and examples of adapting the syllabus to children with special needs integrated in the mass education system, and children with higher abilities; putting an accent on interdisciplinary correlations and the axiological dimensions of contents are considered essential premises for the teaching practices based on academic syllabi; additionally, methodological suggestions will include landmarks regarding the evaluation of learning, through *references to the specific competencies being followed*.⁷

⁷ ://www.ise.ro/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Document-politici-curriculum_draft_mai_2016.pdf

The new syllabi constitute the main effort of modernizing the educational system, with implications over new textbooks, new auxiliary materials, but most importantly over the approach of such disciplines taken by teachers. These innovative approaches necessitate future trainings for teachers as well, as efforts to popularize good practice examples.

3. Challenges and problems of approach in the new syllabi

In the collective effort of creating the new syllabi, a lot of problematic aspects have surfaced, requiring multiple changes:

- Prioritizing the clarification of general competencies, from the perspective of the likelihood of achieving them, of their measurable character and of their relevance to the formation profile of the educational cycle graduate;

- The year-specific differentiated formulation of specific competencies, with highlighting of more valuable elements, of the progress elements, in the context of a spiral model of musical education, in which some content is repeated a few times;

- The relevance of the specific competency formulation in the context of obtaining the general one;

- Linking specific competencies with examples of teaching activities, which can be used as a model by the teacher for obtaining competency; choosing two or three activities for each competency, which creates examples of good practice and a foundation for teachers willing to design new activities;

- Uncoupling of contents from their direct relationship to skills; these would become optional ways of obtaining a skill; compared to the older philosophy of creating syllabi, which considered the contents to be assimilated as basic elements, the current conception shifts the attention to the capacity of the student of doing and utilizing contents in the discipline;

- Balancing contents, especially in disciplines of theoretical nature - *Musical education, Music theory (Theory-solfeggio-dictation)* - between the wish of advancing as much as possible through the problems, and realism in terms of the capacity of the average student to operate independently with these;

- Following some trans- and interdisciplinary aspects, to interconnect with the rest of disciplines in the educational plan;

- Repertoire suggestions afferent to the Musical education discipline, which would cover the necessities of obtaining the targeted competencies, as well as a stylistic diversification of genres and interdisciplinary approaches.

Compared to the public consultation results (from the online survey) before the adoption of the syllabi, the formal and informal meetings with teachers from the system and the discussions inside of the National Art Committee, signaled the following:

- The difficulty of the new approaches, especially for debuting teachers without pedagogical experience, in planning the discipline over the course of a year, in the context of changing strategic priorities, with are focused on targets – competencies, which are then followed by methods; this aspect is observed as well in the first textbooks and auxiliary materials that were followed the new syllabi; in multiple cases, the order of browsing content elements was at least debatable; there are risks of lack of logic in contextualizing the teaching and the use of notions from contents, which constitute a question mark over the coherence in utilizing new syllabi.

- The teachers' need for creative effort in finding learning activities of relevant and diverse natures; note the need of modernizing didactic courses of the musical domain in University education, with clarifications of new ways of thinking priorities, together with putting an accent on the creative side, respectively the use of newer technologies; syllabi, materials, online courses and other methods for the education of the teachers in the system are needed in order to improve work efficiency in the context of the new syllabi.

- In the case of syllabi for instrumental studies, accompany and ensembles, while previous syllabi tended to have clear methodical landmarks with strict time-constraints (over semesters and years of study) and/or repertoire lists of essential importance to clarifying medium respectively highly performing levels, in newer syllabi the lists of repertoire suggestions are meant as a guide, without regulating character.

4. Achievements and opportunities created by the current reform

The first observation over the steps to renew syllabi for the primary and gymnasium (in perspective, high school as well) cycles, is that they permitted the correlation and gradation of information, across the educational cycles. The coherence of the conception, assured by the same group of teachers and professors for two cycles of education (to this date) constitutes a step forward.

In the adopted syllabi, which came into force since September 2017, multiple innovative contributions can be observed.

Musical education proposes the contextualization of music in the universe of thinking and human expression, with eteronomic and interdisciplinary elements. Repertoire suggestions are diversified significantly, with examples from cultural, popular (folk), cinematic and entertainment genres. The wish is to cultivate the pleasure to listen in critical spirit very different categories of music and to understand the pervasive nature of such manifestations in ordinary life (eg including video games and real-life backgrounds).

The use of musical instruments in education is proposed and encouraged, as a follow-up of some examples of good practice which have appeared in the past years

in multiple schools, in an attempt to align Romanian schooling with this European tradition, without losing the specific traditions in vocal music.

The contents through which pupils will gain singing, language elements operation and appreciation of music skills are carefully organized and graded.

The Music theory (The Theory-Solfeggio-Dictation Discipline) proposes as new elements:

- A general skill which addresses creative aspects for the first time in gymnasium musical education (with the exception of interpretative-type creativity), which continues the complexity approached in the newer syllabus at a higher level. This competency targets the generation of musical structures, giving pupils the opportunity to manifest their talent in melodic-rhythmic as well as polyphonic-harmonic contexts. This competency gradually integrates aspects of language which include modal structures, heterophonic, polyphonic and harmonic approaches etc. Thus, the degree of autonomous reporting in relationship to the introduced notions and the creations of great composers is increased, with the expected effect being a rise in the level of satisfaction of the student regarding the studied discipline.
- An extended approach of modal music, as a language of vital importance to music, utilizing scales with 2 to 7 component sounds, with applications in the operation with language elements as well as in the creative zone, allowing for the recovery and capitalization of some important samples of authentic folklore.
- An approach of tonality from the functional perspective, of understanding harmonic logic, starting in the fifth grade.
- The proposal of utilizing some software and digital platforms in the educational process (as support during lectures, as well as elements of developing musical hearing outside of courses, by pupils).
- A balancing of excesses of previous syllabi (for example, the approach of tonalities with many constitutive alterations).

In syllabi found in different stages of work, the congruence of conceptual approaches brings a closeness between the studying syllabi of different instruments. A diversification, balancing and modernization of repertoire lists can be observed, which are updated in some cases after 3 decades.

The presence of clarifications regarding the evaluation, diversification of methods and the increase of objectivity constitutes a positive aspect.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, these new syllabi will produce new textbooks and auxiliary materials as well as changes of attitude and conceptualization of teachers, which will diversify and modernize the educational process.

6. References

Potolea, D., S. Toma, and A. Borza. 2012. *Coordinates of a new frame of reference for the national curriculum*. București: CNEE.

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*** *The Fundamentals in Early Learning and Development (RFIDT, approved by M.O. 3851/2010)*

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