

Contexts for integrating classical music in vulnerable educational environments

Gelu NEAGU¹

Abstract *Intersectional intervention on educational policies in 21st century society is noted as a viable alternative in disadvantaged educational settings. In this direction, a well-reasoned educational policy facilitates access to education and knowledge for a significant number of students. The vision of each teacher, and in general of an educator, must be aimed at comprehensive educational policies, consistent with educational ideals and the agreed school curriculum, the skills of each educator being evident in the way they can adapt and apply classical or modern educational strategies or concepts, capable of producing much needed change in the evolution and school performance of the beneficiaries of this social service. The involvement of music education in the formation of the modern pupil's personality can be the foundation on which to build an equitable and inclusive education system, providing pupils with valuable opportunities to develop cognitive, social and emotional skills.*

Key-words: music education, music culture, educational environments, inclusive education, intersectionality.

1. Introduction

Throughout history, education has played a crucial role in the social and cultural development and progress of a community. In this regard, artistic training activities have played a vital role in educating and enriching people spiritually, and cannot be replaced by anything else. There are multiple ideas and concepts on the relationship between art and education throughout history, but one stands out as predominant and special in this spectrum of thinking.

This idea holds that the moral progress of society, of humanity as a whole, cannot be achieved without exploiting the educational potential of the arts.

Music has always had a powerful influence on sensitivity and conscience, playing an educational role in the development and improvement of human

¹ PhD Candidate West University Timisoara Music and Theatre Faculty, neagu.gelu69@e-uvt.ro

qualities. Throughout history, music has had a significant impact in balancing and ennobling the personality and has been considered an important factor in every important period.

The rapid growth of social and economic development in modern society is an unequivocally recognised fact in scientific and academic research.

Many of these distortions and ambiguities, here assimilated to the term mutations, can have various origins, such as those of a nature: administrative (Quigley 2016, 137), ethnic-national (Quigley 2016, 138–139), identity (Quigley 2016, 155) and economic (Kurkela 1993, 80).

If we look at a person's cultural background, habits or level of vulnerability, we can make many observations. This implies specific criteria for inclusion and adaptation, fully reflecting the diversity of a school programme which, by adjusting teaching strategies, can offer specific solutions to the educational context concerned.

In this way, we can treat educational environments distinctly according to age, types of vulnerabilities and psycho-physical particularities. Mixing all these characteristics we can refer to complex cultural educational environments that define one community or another.

Analyzing the traditional culture of a Roma community, for example, it can be treated in a specific approach only by superimposing some defining elements, perceived as vulnerabilities, or essential ethnic characteristics, which can lead to areas with a significant degree of sensitivity, to complex emotional experiences generated by specific traditions and a particular culture. Certainly, the consistent support of remedial approaches and coherent strategies, through specific social policies adapted from an inter- and trans-disciplinary perspective, will also be able to promote educational services that stimulate a significant reduction in the school dropout rate, while boosting the interest in learning of pupils who must aim for quality learning.

When we talk about musical knowledge, in this context, we can approach different themes and topics, starting from certain musical themes or from certain genres or styles that excite and that can develop a more objective knowledge of reality.

From this perspective, the Roma community, by its very nature being perceived as diverse, by the multitude of languages of the Romany language, by the diversity of traditional trades, or by specific Roma musical traditions, transposes the realities of heterogeneous social environments, past but also present, and through the educational act it will be necessary and necessary to anticipate a favourable evolution of them.

An educational environment that is supposedly disadvantaged implies the selection of an attractive musical repertoire, adapted to the knowledge and needs of the groups to which it is addressed, obviously marking possible links between classical music and popular musical tradition. The history of music, sometimes even music theory, revealing clear intertwining of musical genres, i.e., cult - popular, which only stimulates our interest in searching for and discovering appropriate creations, i.e., key elements of the implementation of an innovative relevant school curriculum for accessing an appropriate educational approach.

It becomes evident that in structuring comprehensive material and providing a coherent framework to cover a broad spectrum of issues related to globalization and cultural diversity, from the perspective of sustained inclusion of music education in educational contexts for students from vulnerable social backgrounds, it is necessary to mark the strategic objectives and targets assumed and anchored in today's social reality.

Due to the multiple possibilities of work and opportunities offered by new teaching strategies, including those in the sphere of digital technologies, specifically adapted to multicultural educational environments, we considered it necessary to have an overview of them, precisely in order to narrow down the area of interest in a topical spectrum, in terms of good practices in the field of diversity and inclusiveness, drawing on: brief literature reviews, research of relevant case studies, published results of questionnaires and structured interviews, and not least direct observation in music practice and instruction classes conducted over several years.

2. Conceptual delimitations

Today's school, as an organisation, ensures through the sum of individual cultures the emergence of complex and dynamic social structures made up of norms, values and resources that give stability and meaning to social life within a community.

The culture of the school organisation, as a subsystem of the national culture, reflects the beliefs, values and norms that shape the behaviour and decisions of its members, including both direct and indirect beneficiaries of the education service. In-depth knowledge of school culture thus becomes essential in order to anticipate and manage change, as it influences to a large extent the internal and external interactions of the educational environment, contributing to school success or failure.

It is clear that in our century we are dealing with new problems, which means we need new resources to manage them. At the same time, it has been

found that traditional solutions are no longer effective and do not deliver the expected results.

„If we want to see a better society it has to start with us and in our own lives. The Second Curve is our chance to make up for any shortcomings on the first curve, to redeem ourselves and to show that we have learnt from the past in order to create a better future.” (Handy 2015, 25).

Transposing this idea to the educational system, the author's observation can support two fundamental aspects in the evolution of the modern school as a social organization. One can be described as the first stage or phase, which is considered outdated and influenced by outdated ideologies and attitudes, while the other represents a new stage, currently experienced and labelled as the second phase. However, the new phase will quickly lead us to new uncertainties, which can infinitely restart the cycle of evolution. Thus, it is important to give greater consideration to how we adapt to new changes and the needs of the community in order to respond effectively to the requirements of all its members.

Discussing music and its meaning in various social contexts, we find obvious guiding milestones that can be included in an opportunity to transform and understand a certain meaning conveyed by the harmonies generated by the music performed or heard.

This complex process of knowledge also presents us with certain limits of an ideational or emotional nature, which can increase the orientation towards those intentional meanings that can balance the affective experience of the composer, performer or listener.

The problem of the specific musical language, the theory of signs and their meanings, which is in the area of semiotics, gives the field of music extensive rhetoric and polemics; thus, semiotics here marks the art of sounds in a communicative complex through which the composer transmits with the help of musical signs his own experiences, which the listener will decipher and filter through his own consciousness (Sergeant and Himonides 2016).

Moreover, in this idea we can also target levels of structural meaning, coming to see that the meaning of a musical discourse may depend on the social context in which it was created or in which it is heard (Olsson 2007).

In relation to the concept of a disadvantaged or vulnerable educational environment, we can outline a framework in which access to educational resources is restricted or adversely affected by a variety of social, economic or cultural conditions. These environments are characterised by a complex set of factors that can significantly influence the learning and development of pupils. Usually, a

vulnerable educational environment brings with it complex emotional experiences, accompanied by a heightened sensitivity to the social and emotional dimension, and is directed towards both group personality building and individual development through intercultural connections.

The term 'classical' and its association with classical music is a fascinating paradigm in the contemporary musical landscape. The term does not only refer to a specific historical era or musical genre, but brings into question a broader perspective on cultural evolution and the role of music within it.

When we say that classical music does not correspond to the present, we mean that it transcends the boundaries of time and becomes a window to timeless artistic expression.

Understanding the present as a historical and cultural fact or phenomenon suggests that classical music is rooted in its historical roots and that it retains a deep connection with its society and cultural context of origin. In this sense, classical music serves as a sound document of past eras, reflecting feelings, values and artistic techniques specific to each moment.

From a socio-affective perspective, classical music becomes a mirror of human emotions and experiences, capturing feelings that can resonate universally, regardless of the historical period in which it was created. Cognitively, classical music also provides fertile ground for exploring structural and intellectual complexity, challenging listeners to discover the deeper layers of compositions and engage in a mental dialogue with past creators.

Finally, the term "classical" does not simply designate a temporal label, but rather suggests that this musical form is classical in the sense that it is perpetually relevant, able to dominate chronological boundaries and offer a profound aesthetic and cultural experience.

In this way, classical music becomes a cultural treasure that can be appreciated and reinterpreted in any period, contributing to the richness and diversity of universal musical heritage, regardless of the social context in which it is expressed.

3. Hypothesis

In contemporary society, we see an alarming discrepancy between rapid technological progress and the level of culture in certain social environments. This discrepancy calls for a careful and consistent approach to improve the level of education and awareness at mass level. Despite the challenges, technological

development and innovation in education remain essential tools in preparing citizens for the complex demands of 21st century society.

The contemporary paradox also highlights a significant imbalance in the adoption of strategies and implementation of innovative methods in various fields, including music. In a context where technological developments and the pace of society do not always match the level of culture or appreciation for innovation, it is essential to explore innovative ways of integrating new technologies into educational processes.

When discussing the cultural and musical traditions of an ethnicity or nation, we recognise that their inclusion in the mainstream curriculum can make a significant contribution to deeper cultural understanding and the promotion of cultural heritage values. The ways in which music is taught and learnt are diverse and adaptable to the specific context of educational practice.

It is crucial to approach this complexity with a balanced sensitivity, avoiding excesses and disproportions in implementing technologies or adopting educational strategies. Research and exploration in this direction is seen as adding value to conscious and appropriate development. An integrated approach to vulnerability in educational settings can pave the way for intersectional research, highlighting distinct social realities and counteracting possible discriminatory contexts.

Having this broad contextual framework, we identify elements of interest that can guide consistent actions in achieving the proposed objectives, by adapting specific measures and procedures to the particular needs found in the educational environment. It is essential to act with care and adaptability, ensuring a comprehensive and sustainable approach to transforming and improving the education system.

4. Results and discussions

Research conducted since the late 19th century and continued in subsequent centuries has unequivocally shown the significant influence of cultural and social traditions on musical practices. We can say that the structure of some musical creations, at a given time, can directly reflect the social structure of a given society, if we were to quote the American ethnomusicologist Steven F., who notes that “for all societies, anything that is musically relevant will be socially marked” (Feld 1984, 406).

From this perspective, the American researcher highlights the close inter-connection between music and society, suggesting that the social context exerts a strong influence on how music is perceived, created and experienced. He argues

that music does not exist in isolation, but is deeply embedded in the social fabric of a community or society. This view highlights the importance of understanding music not only as an artistic or individual expression, but also as a social phenomenon, as it is shaped and directed by the specific social norms, values and dynamics of a community.

It is also explored how various musical characteristics, such as genres, styles or musical functions, are influenced and modulated by the social context, thus making music reflective of social changes and dynamics, capturing and conveying key aspects of a community at a given time. We thus see that the sociological perspective on music brings to the fore the importance of analysing the social context in which musical works are created and performed.

We can conclude by stating that in a society, music can function not only as a form of art or entertainment, but also as an instrument of communication and representation of collective identity. The relationship between music, culture and society is not surprising, as the literature has clearly established this fact, with many of the pioneers of this idea identifying a relationship of an anthropological nature between music, culture and society (Merriam 1964), (Herndon and McLeod 1979), (Locke and Lomax 1981).

In addition, it is argued that the interpretation and appreciation of certain types of music depend to a large extent on whether or not the music belongs to the culture in which it exists (Blacking 1973). Subsequently, other authors, wishing to highlight and better understand this relationship reveal that the link is so closely related that the three phenomena are virtually interchangeable, bringing into question the influences of new technologies, (Taylor 2001), (Wade 2004), (Berger 2014), (Hesmondhalgh and Meier 2018).

Another idea assumes that the social component of pupil numbers in a particular school is more closely related to school performance relative to other school factors, independent of the pupil's social background (Carter 2016:3).

Certainly, understanding how culture and society influence music and vice versa is important in a broad sense, but more important is whether teachers see this as a meaningful relationship. This is particularly important when considering how music is taught or methods used in a school or organisational context.

It is important that music teachers not only understand the uses of certain methods and ways of behaving, such as where and when, but also why these methods are preferred. Without this knowledge, teachers are likely to favour one approach over another, regardless of the type of musical culture they teach.

It is also necessary to use a variety of strategies in the classroom, as some students may have an advantage over others because they may have different experiences of learning music in their respective communities. It is therefore

essential that music teachers consider and implement different ways of delivering music/knowledge to their students (Barton 2018, 44).

In the field of contemporary musicology, the use of the methods of musical semiology and semiotics, phenomenology and musical interculturalism is emerging. The principle of the intercultural approach can be understood in two ways: in the short term, referring to the perspective of different cultures from the same historical period - synchronic, this being the richest field of reflection to date; and in the long term, as a regulating or catalytic force in the encounter of cultures belonging to different historical periods – diachronic (Cucoş and Cozma 1997, 39).

The application of the intercultural method in the analysis of musical discourse, therefore, uses methods from the sphere of semiology and musical semiotics to identify intercultural expressions, evident both from the point of view of structure and interpretation - syntactic, and the meaning of perception – semantic (Nattiez 1976:428).

The differentiation of scientific disciplines has led to their self-definition and isolation into different paradigms, which has now led to the need for collaboration and interference between the social and natural sciences in order to decipher and create a common universal language. Intersecting and adapting the methods of Husserl's phenomenology or hermeneutics, semiotics and semiology in the musical sphere highlights the assimilative nature of current scientific and cultural currents, while different cross-cultural approaches come together in an innovative strategy to address cultural and social diversity within contemporary music (Barbas 2010, 125).

Marking a vision of the whole structural ensemble exposed above, intersectionality, belonging, in my view, to intercultural approaches, is outlined as a window open to reality, through which possible problems arising in an educational environment can be interrogated, becoming then the lever through which, we can offer solutions when all these problems converge towards a point of intersection where we are deciphered distinct identities with certain specific features.

Intersectionality is a theoretical concept that was introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw in the 1980s to describe how different categories of social identity, such as race, gender, class, sexual orientation and others, intersect and interact in complex ways, influencing individuals' experience of society. In the context of vulnerable educational environments, the application of intersectionality involves recognising and addressing the complex interactions between different identities of learners in a holistic and equitable approach to ensure an inclusive and equitable educational experience for all (Crenshaw 2018).

The prerequisites for such action are based on the diversity and complexity of identity dimensions, in a socio-educational context clearly defined by its specific

characteristics, especially in vulnerable educational environments, the factors of intersectionality can thus include a wide range of strategies evident in actions and activities that explore sensitive areas of human existence.

Intersectionality offers a greater degree of inclusivity, providing a legal framework for seeing people whose identities and lived experiences are more complex but who deserve equal treatment under the law.

Its inclusiveness is also evident from the multiple fields of approach, it becomes indeed a possible solution to social problems, but I personally believe, only starting from a local analysis and approach in an organized and well-shaped context in the local community.

Drawn from recent teaching experiences, many of these strategies refer to the integration of best practices, in varied contexts, different contextual and gender sensitive discussions, summary research on ethnicity and culture, and a pertinent analysis of access to particularised resources, aware that educational equality is still a current dilemma perceived as misleading, often requiring an understanding of the whole socio-cultural context of the school to ensure adequate student performance.

All these strategies, rigorously enough thought out, can in certain situations be improved through music, through specific musical teaching techniques. The relationship between cultured and traditional music in the Romanian musical context can be perceived as one between two apparently opposite but deeply connected worlds.

This fact represents in musical synthesis not only a mirror of cultural diversity, but also an artistic expression of the constant evolution of musical identity in our country. It is a harmony that, over the years, has generated sound masterpieces, elegantly combining authentic tradition with the refinement of classical music.

It is clear that these characteristics must also be constantly present in educational environments, especially in those with a certain degree of vulnerability, following the application of strategies and methods specific to intersectionality.

Thus, we can see that at the heart of musical symbiosis we can find composers such as George Enescu, whose music transcends the boundaries between classical and traditional, managing to create a dialogue of sound between past and present, between rural and urban. The "Romanian Rhapsody" can be marked here as a reference work in this respect. Inspired by Romanian folklore, it brings to the fore the virtuosity of traditional music, interwoven with complex structures specific to classical music.

The repertoire can be adapted and expanded by different musical creations, composers or performers who aimed to interweave in their music genres and styles belonging to different eras, such as: Dinu Lipatti and the influence of folk music in piano music and his brilliant interpretation, the group "Taraf de Haïdouks" and Gypsy music having a repertoire rich in Balkan and Romanian influences, Gheorghe Zamfir who brought Romanian folk music and the unmistakable sound of the Romanian flute (nai) to worldwide recognition and appreciation, etc.

Returning to the implementation of a music curriculum in vulnerable educational environments, from an intersectional perspective we can see that each proposed objective can be assigned specific instructive-educational actions and activities, defined by didactic strategies adapted to the educational environment created, and in order to have full control over the results of the implementation of such measures, optimized measurement and control techniques can be used. An example of this is presented in the set of measures below for improving the instructional approach:

- Conducting research studies on cultural diversity and the educational context in disadvantaged environments.
- Organize workshops and seminars for teachers, focusing on the importance of worship music in the local cultural context.
- Develop tailored educational materials reflecting European cultural diversity.
- Integrate classical music into lessons on history and music culture, highlighting the links with European heritage.
- Conduct knowledge assessment tests before and after the integration of classical music into the curriculum.
- Observing pupils' participation in discussions and activities related to classical music.
- Organise workshops and training sessions for teachers, focusing on awareness and understanding of cultural diversity.
- Develop educational modules highlighting the contribution of classical music to cultural heritage.
- Conduct case studies and research projects to assess the impact of integrating worship music into educational programmes.
- Working with experts in education and music to develop strategies tailored to the specific context of disadvantaged backgrounds.
- Organise practical workshops for teachers to develop skills in teaching classical music.
- Implementation of interactive and experimental lessons to engage students in the process of learning classical music.

- Using online resources and multimedia tools to make classical music accessible in innovative ways.
- Establish a monitoring team to evaluate the implementation and effectiveness of the programmes.
- Organise regular meetings to identify and resolve any challenges or uncertainties.
- Adjust curriculum and strategies based on feedback and results.

5. Conclusions

From an institutional point of view, the Romanian education system is relatively developed, which obviously leads to the accentuation of negative factors such as the erosion of the sense of school participation and the polarisation of access to education due to social inequality.

Insufficient financial resources are reflected in the precariousness of physical resources and poor infrastructure in some educational institutions, creating a significant gap between developed and poor communities, and on the other hand, the lack of qualified human resources can cause many impacts on the development of the education system, these impacts can vary depending on the scarcity of resources and how they are managed. At local, national and European level in terms of education policies, access to education is clearly recognised as a fundamental right, necessary to prevent the risks of poverty and social exclusion and to support the social inclusion of vulnerable groups.

In short, education today is facing various challenges creating significant gaps due to both internal and external factors.

It is important to recognise the state of education and take action to address the inefficiency and indifference of some actors involved in the act of education, as well as the inequities resulting from the failure of these educational institutions to meet minimum standards of performance and quality.

In all this interconnected and interdependent social structure, music can orient and shape new perceptions or behaviours, create and sustain values, and thus become a social bond. At the same time, the "melodic line" as the foundation of the artistic message that makes you vibrate, breaks the barrier imposed by the way it is transmitted to be in perfect harmony with the soul of its receiver (Levinson 1998, 1–4), in a specific cadence given by the particularities of each personality.

Music education in the 21st century is taking place in a complex landscape of interdisciplinarity and diversity, demanding innovative approaches to respond to

contemporary needs and challenges. Practice attests to the fact that music, as an interdisciplinary discipline, connects with different dimensions of knowledge and culture, and its development in education should reflect this reality. The interaction between formal and informal music education becomes crucial in a diverse multicultural environment.

Contemplating the variety of musical contexts, the intersectional approach becomes essential by involving all actors in the formulation and implementation of public policies in education, to ensure the implementation of sustainable goals even in music education.

I believe that a balanced approach that emphasizes tradition and authenticity, but also innovation, is ideal and urgently needed in today's music lessons. Music education needs to evolve in a holistic manner to remain relevant and to meet the challenges of the 21st century, taking into account intercultural perspectives as well as technological innovation, while adapting and maintaining its connection to musical traditions and cultural values.

These musical concepts and the way teachers teach are culturally determined and reflect broader judgements about what is valuable to society/community and its inhabitants. In this sense, for music teaching and learning to be 'culturally sensitive', change is inevitable (Barton 2018:204–205).

By promoting diversity, creativity and dialogue between formal and informal education, music education can play a significant role in the personal and cultural development of individuals, and the approach of a classical repertoire adapted to the learning needs of the target group, benefiting from innovative concepts and resources, is an opportunity to promote inclusion, diversity and cultural understanding in society.

References

- Barbas, Valeria. 2010. "Perspective de abordare a interculturalității în contextul muzical contemporan din Republica Moldova" [Perspectives of interculturality approaches in the contemporary musical context of Moldova Republic] P. 125. In *International Conference of Young Researchers*, Vol. 8, R. Chișinău: Simbol-NP SRL.
- Barton, Georgina. 2018. *Music Learning and Teaching in Culturally and Socially Diverse Contexts: Implications for Classroom Practice*, 1st ed. 2018. Cham: Springer International Publishing: Imprint: Palgrave Macmillan.

- Berger, Harris M. 2014. "Call and Response: Music, Power, and the Ethnomusicological Study of Politics and Culture «New Directions for Ethnomusicological Research into the Politics of Music and Culture: Issues, Projects, and Programs»". *Ethnomusicology* 58(2):315–20. doi: 10.5406/ethnomusicology.58.2.0315.
- Blacking, John. 1973. *How musical is man?* Seattle/ London: University of Washington Press.
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé, online interview. 2018. „What Is Intersectionality?”. Accessed at 22.06.2022”.
- Cucoş, Constantin, and Teodor Cozma. 1997. "Educația interculturală: dileme actuale și soluții de perspectivă" [Intercultural education: current dilemmas and prospective solutions]. In *Filosofia educației: imperative, căutări, orientări*. Chișinău: Simpozion internațional, ediția V, p. 35–41.
- Feld, Steven. 1984. "Sound Structure as Social Structure". *Ethnomusicology* 28(3):383–409. doi: 10.2307/851232.
- Handy, Charles B. 2015. *The Second Curve: Thoughts on Reinventing Society*. London: Random House Business.
- Herndon, Marcia and Norma McLeod. 1979. *Music as Culture*. Darby, Pa: Norwood Editions.
- Hesmondhalgh, David and Leslie M. Meier. 2018. "What the Digitalization of Music Tells Us about Capitalism, Culture and the Power of the Information Technology Sector". *Information, Communication & Society* 21(11):1555–70. doi: 10.1080/1369118X.2017.1340498.
- Kurkela, Vesa. 1993. "Deregulation of Popular Music in the European Post-Communist Countries: Business, Identity and Cultural Collage". *The World of Music* 35(3):80–106.
- Levinson, Jerrold. 1998. *L'art, la musique et l'histoire*. Paris: Éd. de L'Éclat.
- Locke, David and Alan Lomax. 1981. "Cantometrics: An Approach to the Anthropology of Music". *Ethnomusicology* 25(3):527. doi: 10.2307/851562.
- Merriam, Alan P. 1964. *The Anthropology of Music*. 8. paperback print. Evanston, Ill: Northwestern Univ. Press.
- Nattiez, Jean-Jacques. 1976. *Fondements d'une sémiologie de la musique*. Paris: Union générale d'éditions.
- Olsson, Bengt. 2007. "Social Issues in Music Education". In *International Handbook of Research in Arts Education*, ed. by L. Bresler, 989-1006. Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands.
- Quigley, Colin. 2016. „Confronting Legacies of Ethnic-National Discourse in Scholarship and Practice: Traditional Music and Dance in Central

-
- Transylvania". *Journal of Folklore Research* 53(3):137–65. doi: 10.2979/jfolkrese.53.3.02.
- Sergeant, Desmond C. and Evangelos Himonides. 2016. "Gender and Music Composition: A Study of Music, and the Gendering of Meanings". *Frontiers in Psychology* 7. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2016.00411.
- Taylor, Timothy Dean. 2001. *Strange Sounds: Music, Technology & Culture*. New York London: Routledge.
- Wade, Bonnie C. 2004. *Thinking musically: experiencing music, expressing culture*. New York: Oxford University Press.