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Music in Schools: Teaching and Learning Processes

Paper relating to subtitle of the Conference: 2. **Music teacher's competences at different educational levels**

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Title: Standards of Professional Competence for Music Teachers and Education Reforms

For different subjects and scholastic levels, professional standards identify what music teachers must do both in and outside the classroom, within the institution itself, and in the context of the territory it belongs to. When standards of competence are considered common rules, the professional field and its resources become clearer and models of reference can be re-used. These tools of knowledge help professionals recognise their professional identity.
In our opinion, standards for music teachers remain difficult to define for the following reasons:

1.There is neither a global view about the music teacher's professional role nor a new and different general mentality about different music professions, especially in music education and learning / teaching processes, when we consider the large range of specializations in our field.

2.The teaching career is not taken into consideration enough, and initial and subsequent teacher training is not well connected.

3.The application of music studies reform at the different scholastic levels is not complete and the music education system is not yet manageable in an efficient way.

We know, however, that professional competences, even for teaching music at the different scholastic and academic levels can be defined and measured from international perspective. Changes in the music education system in Italy over the last 15 years pose the following questions:

What kind of knowledge and competence do teachers need?

What is the current representation of their social role and professional practice and what does it mean to be a music teacher today?

First of all, we should consider the teaching profession as merely a vocation or, worse, a fall-back from a more prestigious career in performance. We can, instead, find an "organic" meaning of the teaching profession and its development by following in these four directions:

1. Professionalizing teaching.
2. Offering high professional levels in teacher training and career possibilities.
3. Optimising institutional autonomy and its relationship with the social, cultural and territorial context.
4. Taking advantage of and using new technologies to find different visual corners for music teaching.

1. Professionalizing teaching

The change, as far as the professional perspective on teaching, is related to a change in institutional organisation and the new role of schools in Society. The teacher must work to manage and function in complex situations related to larger contexts and public responsibility.

More than in the past, the teacher's role includes professional knowledge and competences and public responsibility. This fundamental aspect of the teaching profession develops into commitment to students, to educate them as participating and aware citizens.

The mentality, which is both social and self-imposed by the teachers themselves, of considering the teacher, who is seen as *self-referential*, the *only* point of reference in student training and in the process of artistic development, is no longer a functional way to think about the professional teacher's role and competences in a complex and efficient teaching perspective.

The professional teacher's experience and competences can be considered in different ways, following these approaches: a) highlighting, in concrete contexts, how teachers work and how these practices can be useful for contributing to honing and/or changing (in a bottom-up form) teacher expertise; b) clearly defining the functional demands of the scholastic system, as a top-down perspective to describe the teaching profession from an ideal and referential point of view.

The current laws about the school system and teachers, and their employment contract - achievement of the social partnership deal -, offer us a third way, general and local, ideal and pragmatic, to redefine the professional teacher profile.

We can think about teacher competence and professional practices following what society needs now in order to provide an efficient public service and what the law establishes for

State-employed teachers.

The current national employment contract (2007) defines the profile of the professional teacher as having: 1. competence in the subject, 2. psychological knowledge, 3. pedagogical and methodological competence, 4. competencies in management, as well as 5. research, 6. undergoing evaluation processes, 7. documentation. The same contract requests constant updating for teachers and development and growth through continuing education and training, teaching experience and re-organisation.

So, competence in the subject is only one of the professional requirements for teachers.

Two ways to manage the teacher updating are expressed: thinking about the practice (points 5., 6., 7.) and managing the daily practice (*modus operandi*, as expressed at points 2., 3., 4.).

To promote processes of human, cultural and professional development for teachers, as established for the different levels of school, the teaching function is based on: a) cultural and professional autonomy of teachers; b) the work of the teachers in individual and collegiate/group form; c) consistent continuing training.

The teacher's professional identity, then, becomes authoritative, growing both through practice and thinking back on experience in teaching/learning specific subjects and educational relationships.

A long path of study through continual professional updating is necessary and compulsory in this perspective. But the law does not ask for verification and certification of this.

2. High professional levels in teacher training and career possibilities

Initial teacher training, for all teachers at the university or academic level, and recruitment procedures are, at present, the objects of reform.

Teachers are distinguished as: a) pre-school teachers, b) teachers in the primary school cycle: elementary school and first level secondary school (middle school), c) teachers in the second cycle: secondary (high) school.

Primary school teachers can teach every subject, including music. In the secondary school, teachers work only in the subject area of their specific degree and related to the name of the position earned.

Specifically, for music teacher training, academic study must offer the student a context where s/he can develop a musical and professional profile. This path (which is long and complex) for academic pedagogical studies, started more than 30 years ago in the Italian Conservatories through the subsequent changes of the Department of Music Education. The Department of Music Education changed many times aiming to find an equilibrium between the subjects of music, psychology and pedagogy in teacher training.

At present we need to take into consideration not only these aspects of professional training, but also the attitude of teachers to constantly update and even change professional perspective in the school of autonomy. The autonomy of the institutions needs and contractually establishes a flexible professional attitude of its teachers.

This is a critical aspect of initial teacher training: to develop, as a professional attitude, the habit of seeing change *simply* as "work that we must do," and finding the adequate tools to do it in the best way possible. Our points of view can become richer and more varied

through daily use of new and different technologies. In this way, we train the habit of always approaching the activity in new ways. In fact, every kind of technology we use can efficiently change our point of view about a problem. This is a professional approach we need to cultivate constantly. Perhaps one of the most important contributions of new technologies as didactics is to remind teachers that they are working to set the context where learning processes should be started up and improved. It doesn't mean giving up the tools that come to us from the past. Integrating new perspectives and tools does not imply replacing one way with another, but using another approach.

So, initial teacher training works on music subjects and didactics but also on practising the many different professional aspects, meeting the real contexts where music can be performed and experienced. In the same way, the students in academic didactic training can test their competence (through internships, workshops …), and teachers who are already employed can find a network of advice and professional support in institutions like conservatories and universities. In this way the system can improve and hold high professional levels in teacher training and career possibilities, enjoying a good relationship with the territory reality, and basing work on the autonomy of the institutions.

3. Optimising institutional autonomy and its relationship with the social, cultural and territorial context

Teacher competence training, even for music, is the best way to elevate the quality of the School: concreteness, autonomy, responsibility, relating to the territorial context and professional innovation.

It is probably true that the low prestige of the teacher (not only music teachers) can be balanced by a new consideration about the relationship between school and territory, learning and professional opportunities for students, knowledge of people and the real possibility of access to the culture and its tools. In the music context, we can also take into consideration the role of music in human education and development, as a common and accessible resource.

The Department of Music Education tried, throughout the years, to define the different content of varied curricula and degrees to find adequate answers to the changes in what society asks from musicians and, specifically, music educators. In the first part of its history, it tried to define a specific Pedagogy of Music, Methodology and Didactics, and integrate them with knowledge of other scientific contributions. Then there was the more recent wave of instrumental teaching, researching new approaches to these processes and developing creative solutions to instrumental didactics.

This process of change highlights the necessarily different relationship between the Conservatory and other schools: the foundation of professional development is exchange and integration.

The music teacher profile is changing into a broader professional practice: teachers need to design, manage, operate, and evaluate their methodological choices, the quality of the relationship with their students and the relationship between students and the music or instrumental path of study.

The system needs the complexity to be experienced using these tools and different points of

view less in an individual form, more in a collective way.

Autonomy needs institutional spaces open to research, to test new educational perspectives or didactics, playing a cultural leadership role in and outside the institution itself. And choices, decisions, responsibility, competence, participation, and motivation are issues of collegiate living.

This change in perspective concerning the school and people who work within it, also concerns music teachers: this role identifies a trained professional, not a musician who could not find employment as a performer! It is necessary to love music but also education.

The Department of Music Education aimed to change the professional mentality following the irreversible change of the music professional profiles society needs.

Now the music teacher is a professional in education: at this point we are looking at different specialized roles in educating or teaching music, using the music experience to support the processes of learning, discover new horizons through music and different technologies.

4. Taking advantage of and using new technologies to find different visual corners for music teaching

It may be interesting to focus our attention on one of the possible relationships between new technologies and teacher competence. New technologies may be considered well-known tools, but used in a new way, or new real resources that force us to find different perspectives concerning usual subjects.

They are still tools to think, read, practice, compose … music[1]. It is possible to create, for example, a different relationship between the sense of time in action (reading, performing individually or in a group, improvising, etc.) and a clear inner representation of what we are playing, using the resources offered by computers. For example, for some years now, the Departments of Music and New Technologies and Music Education of the Conservatory of Trieste, are working on a longstanding research project, for the uses of *EGGS[2] (Elementary Gestalts for Gesture Sonification)* in educational contexts. It is a system that transforms gesture and body movement into sound and graphic signs as well, supporting the organisation of inner music representation through listening, moving, playing.

In fact, there is (or it is increasingly possible to create) useful software to manipulate sound, visualize music structure, change the "points of listening," and process music or sound events.

This kind of experience needs psychological and technological competences, and, generally, a new attitude about managing the time of the lesson, working in a group, choosing subjects of teaching, listening, performing, identifying learning problems, etc.

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[1] **DominoesDominium: playful** *tools for …* *by Cristina Fedrigo*, presented in this Conference in a workshop, is a longstanding research project to create and develop tools for creativity in game form. The game is based on rules in both individual games and simple group games, and is inspired by card games and dominoes. This kind of experience refers to media use in learning-teaching processes.

[2] Concerning EGGS, see: Maurizio, M., Polotti., P. 2008. http://www.visualsonic.eu/eggs.html [01/10/11] This site offers tools for better understanding how the EGGS System works, specifically for professional uses.

Concerning EGGS, *The Research Programme: Gestural expressiveness, Sound, Representation*, aimed at testing and developing resources for multimedia in artistic and pedagogic areas, see: http://www.cristinafedrigo.it/ and http://www.conservatorio.trieste.it/artistica/eggs-project/eggs-project

It is very important, from this perspective, to undertake research paths with high-level students, teaching them to manage complexity, to think in "polyphonic" ways about teaching, learning, and looking for music education experience. The most important competence for a music teacher is considering the infinity of music. This is probably the most important competence and a new daily requirement.

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