

Schools for the 21st Century

Responses from the perspective of music education (EAS/meNet) to questions raised in the European Commission's consultation paper of 11/07/2007, SEC(2007)1009.

In accordance with the European Commission's invitation to reply as a respondent to the questions raised in the paper "Schools for the 21st Century" and to make suggestions for European cooperation, this paper contains a number of comments that have arisen in the course of the work being done by the "European Association for Music in Schools" (EAS) and the COMENIUS 3 network "meNet – music education Network".

The EAS (European Association for Music in Schools) is the organisation of Music Educators (teachers, artists, scientists) who are committed to enlarging and improving music education throughout the countries of Europe. Members of the EAS are to a great extent involved in EU projects concerning music education in schools and music teacher training.

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„Music education Network (meNet). A European Network of Communication and Knowledge Management in the Field of Music Education" is a COMENIUS-3-Network supported by the European Commission's programme SOKRATES/COMENIUS. 25 institutions out of 10 countries are working as active partners, further 70 institutions currently out of 17 countries are associated partners of the network, coordination: Institute for Music Pedagogy Vienna. meNet is collecting, structuring and disseminating in different manners knowledge about music education in schools and Music Teacher Training in Europe with regard to "Bologna" and "Beyond 2010". Project duration: 10/2006 - 09/2009.

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1. Key competences for all

How can schools be organised in such a way as to provide all students with the full range of key competences?

Music education can serve as a model for self-determined learning as well as for social learning. A number of consequences for the organisation of all schools can be inferred from this.

As a special form of aesthetic activity for young people, the music curriculum in schools plays a unique role in aiding the development of general competences that are of vital importance in later life. Music and music education are essential for personal development, the promotion of creativity and innovative thinking as well as for social integration. Making, experiencing and understanding music enhances young people's ability to adapt flexibly to rapidly changing environments and to show initiative and self-confidence when structuring their private and professional lives. In particular, music education develops the key competence cultural awareness and expression.

Schools should be structured in such a way that flexible curricula encourage independent, autonomous and creative forms of teaching and learning. It should be possible to combine and integrate different areas of learning in an interdisciplinary manner. Curricula that support this strategy should encourage young people to gather their experiences of learning and acquire a wide range of competences as self-determined individuals and complete personalities, i.e. in a "holistic" way.

2. Preparing European students for lifelong learning

How can schools equip young people with the competences and motivation to make learning a lifelong activity?

In principle, music education in schools is founded on musical competences which have been developing from birth and continue to develop and evolve through one's whole life. This principle holds for every other area of school learning. Experiencing and learning about music is lifelong. Expertise relating to music is a constant among young people (young people as experts in "their" music) and this expertise is of great significance in classroom learning. Informal learning outside school combines with situations of formal learning in the classroom. This leads to a high degree of identification with the topics covered and reinforces the feeling that the student is himself or herself responsible for the learning process. Process and product-oriented teaching methods, such as those employed in project-based teaching, greatly contribute to making the subject matter meaningful for pupils and students. If students take responsibility for their own learning – in music lessons and generally – and relate lesson content to their own situation, if they and their products and results are in demand in the outside world, then attitudes, abilities and competences necessary for lifelong, self-determined development have been fostered in the young person.

3. Contributing to sustainable economic growth

How can school systems contribute to supporting long-term sustainable economic growth in Europe?

In the process of rapid economic, technological and political development in Europe, music and music education are among the basic needs of Europe's citizens. To ensure that it also has a beneficial effect on the economy in the future, education will have to develop in such a way that knowledge and competences are founded on and influenced by experience of a wide variety of different cultures and aesthetic practices. The ability to show initiative when tackling situations, to solve complex problems and problems that are not clearly defined, to communicate constructively, to combine formal and informal learning as part of lifelong education etc. are important for life in a knowledge society. The cultural, creative, social and communicative competences acquired through a self-confident approach to music, effectively influence a person's fundamental ability to exert a flexible, appropriate and sustainable influence on his or her personal and social life and own environment in changing circumstances.

4. Responding to challenges in our societies

How can school systems best respond to the need to promote equity, to respond to cultural diversity and to reduce early school leaving?

For young people, music provides much of the energy they require to develop their own identity. In the classroom, the fundamental approach found in students' expertise (relating to music, for instance) leads, as if automatically, to intercultural and transcultural learning and to common ground within cultural dissimilarity and diversity. This makes it possible to experience the culturally alien as an opportunity to learn, and as an asset. At the same time, the concomitant respect of others' dissimilarity reinforces the students' own position and counteracts racism and xenophobia. This is why teaching in the school setting should open itself up to the cultural life of the outside world so that music in school is in touch with real life and relevant to social practices: it must be

complemented by the students' participation in extracurricular cultural activities and by close cooperation with cultural institutions in a variety of different fields.

5. A school for all

If schools are to respond to each pupil's individual learning needs, what can be done as regards curricula, school organisation and the roles of teachers?

A flexible structuring of appropriate learning situations that is made possible by curricula and school organisation is one crucial point of departure. This applies not only to content, targets, time management and issues of space but also, as an absolutely essential element, the role of the teacher, which must be flexible enough to adapt to each particular situation. There will be situations in which the teacher will be required to keep the process under tight control; conversely, it may be more appropriate for the teacher to withdraw at times, adopting the role of mentor, for instance, or allowing external specialists (such as professional musicians, composers or concert organisers) to work with the students; similarly, it may be useful to have other, possibly older pupils take responsibility for guiding and accompanying the learning activities, as in "peer tutoring". Learning with and from each other and enabling members of the group of learners to take on the role of teacher for a short time ("peer teaching" / "peer learning") is especially well suited for meeting particular learning needs of all kinds.

6. Preparing young Europeans for active citizenship

How can school communities help to prepare young people to be responsible citizens, in line with fundamental values such as peace and tolerance of diversity?

The development of young people to self-confident individuals generally takes place in a social context. The learning of music provides a particularly good example of this. Experiencing and making music is an intensely personal experience which is, at the same time, practised in groups. Music – singing and playing, enjoying and analysing all its various forms and styles – is an inherently communicative exercise. In the practice of music, for example, in performances and outside school, the sense of community, the feeling of taking responsibility for one another and the practice of shared values play a fundamental role.

7. Teachers – key agents for a change

How can school staff be trained and supported to meet the challenges they face?

On the basis of experience of the training and further education of teachers for the school subject of music the following three areas of competence, which can also be applied generally, should be stressed:

a) Teachers must show themselves to be good learners, also in a way that is evident to their pupils. They must be able to present themselves as personalities experienced in education who unmistakably "stand for something" – as specific music experts, for example –, convincingly embodying their own values and at the same time must be open to and curious to discover different ways of experiencing the world and different value systems. They must place themselves at the disposal of the students' learning processes as a person and a personality with their own openly declared values, must allow themselves to be critically challenged and also be willing to adopt an increasingly less dominant role for the benefit of the students' learning processes.

b) Over and above their expertise in a particular subject, limited as this always is to some degree or other, teachers must have the capability of organising and guiding learning processes in which other specialist skills can be usefully deployed. Examples of this are cooperation with external experts, school outings to visit or participate in cultural events and strategically drawing on the students' own expertise. All this must be backed up by a convincing demonstration of the teacher's own competences and his or her ability to be effective with them.

c) Becoming a teacher, and then being a teacher, must be understood as a continuous, lifelong process. A teacher's training begins when he or she is still a pupil, encompasses the academic studies at college or university including practice sessions and periods of practical training and continues through the initial stages of the teaching career and the subsequent phases of professional advancement according to his or her changing personal circumstances. This means that becoming a teacher and being a teacher – from the first days of the degree course until long years have been spent in the profession – always goes hand in hand with a reflexive attitude towards one's own development. And this development needs constant external support, counselling and perspectives such as those provided by counsellors, mentors, coaches and supervisors.

Proposals for European Cooperation on Modernising School Systems

Education policy initiatives, along with proposals for strategies and concepts "from the top" – such as the European Commission's present working paper and the discussion it has started – make a large and positive contribution to the process of modernising school systems in the countries of Europe. Nevertheless, there can be no question that meetings at "grass-roots" level – of schools and training centres, of pupils and students, teachers and teacher trainers (college/university teachers, mentors etc.) are of far greater importance. Only by means of international encounters of this kind, "on the ground" at the various institutions themselves, can conclusions reached jointly so far and the shared moral concepts with regard to education and school organisation be developed in a sustainable way while at the same time the differences between the various countries and regions emphasised.

In principle, professional associations and other groups, along with projects (such as those carried out as part of COMENIUS, ERASMUS etc.) already provide a potential forum for meetings, the exchange of experiences and cooperation. What they need, however, is support of an entirely new quality on the part of the European Commission. This support should fulfil two aims: firstly, European associations and networks (such as the EAS) must no longer have to rely exclusively on private initiatives and funding; they must receive appropriate support from the European Commission. Secondly, notwithstanding the necessity for checks and evaluation, the administration of EU projects and networks must be realistic and practicable. The formal and bureaucratic obstacles to applying for and implementing projects remain unreasonably hard; consequently there is a danger that international cooperation could become the exclusive province of a circle of resourceful, highly-specialised "EU experts". A much greater number of the projects and networks must be easily accessible to all those who are potentially affected by, involved in or interested in them, i.e. pupils, students, teachers, teacher trainers and organisers of schools. Bearing in mind the great social, cultural and economic importance of education for the Europe of tomorrow the amount and quality of the support given must increase considerably.