ERASMUS THEMATIC NETWORK FOR MUSIC

poli fonia

A set of competences for Pre-college Music Education

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Introduction

The variety of pre-college training models that exist in Europe show there are many possible effective approaches to nurturing young musicians. Within such diversity and in the spirit of the *Bologna* process, the development of a series of competences for pre-college training is likely to facilitate understanding of the common elements that exist in pre-college systems as well as articulate the connections with the learning outcomes devised for 1st cycle study.

A description of the learning outcomes for the 1st and 2nd cycle studies in higher music education has been arranged in three parts by the Tuning working group of the Polifonia project[1]: practical (skill-based) outcomes, theoretical (knowledge-based) outcomes and generic outcomes[2]. The pre-college working group applied these same divisions to the pre-college level in the form of competences, as learning outcomes are a result of a structured curriculum which often is not present in the pre-college phase.

This set of competences is not designed to set standards to which level each skill should be taught at pre-college institutions. It rather emphasizes the continuum of music education and gives some ideas about the skills that would be important to gain already before the higher education level, so that a student will be better prepared to meet the demands of the 1st cycle. This method, which is currently only a theoretical model, will need to be tested. It must also be pointed out, that higher music education institutions are not expected to test all these competences during the entrance examination. The set of competences, which can be found below, can be more used as a checklist during the pre-college phase.

In developing an ideal set of competences for the pre-college pupil that will establish a strong connection between the pre-college phase and higher education, it is important to acknowledge the practical (skill-based) outcomes, the knowledge-based outcomes and the generic outcomes that are taught in primary and secondary schools. This set of competences is described in the following form:

♦ *Practical (skill-based) outcomes*

The *Bologna* process brings a new way of measuring practical learning outcomes. For example, it advises us not to demand a certain set of pieces a student should master, but rather emphasizes the artistic and technical learning outcomes (described as competences) a student should achieve.

The way of formulating the competences can be seen from an example that explains what "skills and artistic expression" exist after pre-college level: "At the completion of their studies, students should have begun to develop the ability to create and realize their own artistic concepts and students should be developing the necessary skills for their expression". The same kind of definition has been created also for repertoire skills, ensemble skills, for practicing and rehearsing, reading and writing music etc.

The students should also master some verbal skills so that they should be able to talk and write about their music making and improvisational skills. Nowadays the ability to

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[1] More information on Polifonia can be found at http://www.polifonia-tn.org.
[2] The learning outcomes for the 1st, 2nd and 3rd study cycles in higher music education can be found at www.bologna-and-music.org/learningoutcomes.

improvise at least at some level is already considered to be a basic skill to all musicians. In addition, performance and communication skills have gained in significance.
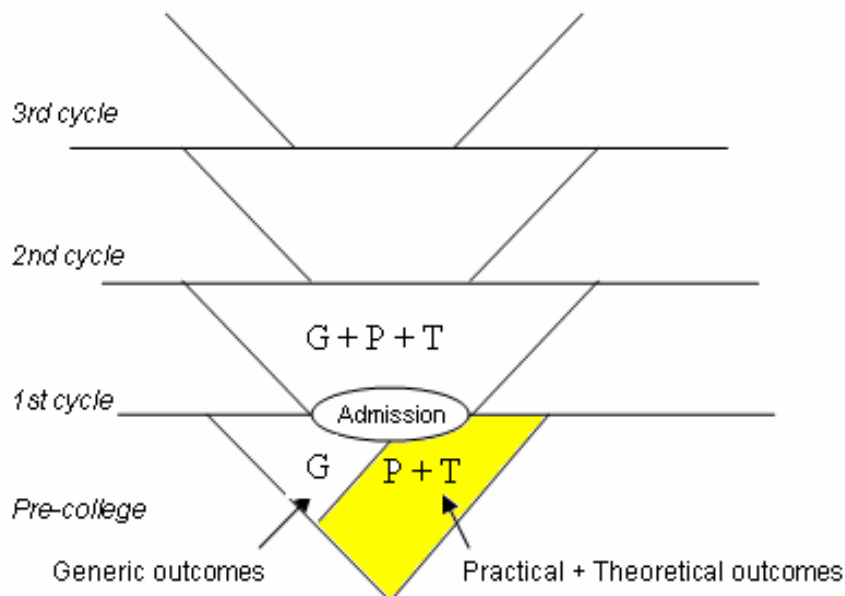
♦ *Theoretical (knowledge-based) outcomes*

The theoretical or knowledge-based outcomes contain elements such as the understanding of musical material and the context of different issues. "Knowing a representative selection of the mainstream repertoire of their principal study" and "musical styles and history" can be mentioned as examples of these. Basic knowledge of the possibilities of modern technology is another important outcome for young musicians today.

♦ *Generic outcomes*

The definition of generic outcomes is a good example of the influence the *Bologna* process has brought to music education. Traditionally, the focus of teaching has been mainly music-oriented, but recently the wider context (general education and personal development) is taken more into account. Institutions are expected to update their approaches to teaching and learning according to this development.

Students applying for higher education usually have a secondary school level qualification. Therefore, entrance panels in higher music education focus on the musical (Practical and Theoretical) competences. The generic competences such as 'independence, psychological understanding, critical awareness and communication skills' do not necessarily have to be tested during the entrance examination, as these competences are typically developed in general education.

However, a pre-college teacher can increase the awareness of students of the fact they will need other skills than just playing the instrument and encourage students to develop an open attitude so they can cope in a globalized and competitive world. As mentioned before, higher music education institutions do not necessarily test all generic competences at admission, but they could ask themselves if it is wise not to do so at all.

Later on, when the pre-college pupil has become a student in higher education, each subsequent level of study, e.g. 1st cycle, 2nd or even the 3rd cycle, will have its own entrance examination and its own mix of generic and musical competences. The higher the level of education, the more professional skills and knowledge will be involved.

The set of generic outcomes for the pre-college level contains four different general competences: independence, psychological understanding, critical awareness and communication skills. This division is identical to the division used for the generic outcomes in the 1st and 2nd cycle, but the way the competences have been formulated has been adjusted to be more suitable and relevant for the pre-college level. For example: after finishing the first cycle, the student is expected *to work independently* on a variety of issues, like gathering, analyzing and interpreting information. At the end of the pre-college level, the formulation might be: 'the student *has begun to develop independence* in gathering and using information'. Psychological understanding, for instance, contains elements such as developing and using imagination, intuition, emotional understanding, creative problem-solving and managing performance anxiety. From this point of view, the main focus should be to encourage the student to work and develop his/her musicianship critically and as independently as possible. The main focus will then be to build a continuum from the early stages to the professional level.

Practical (skill-based) outcomes
Skills and artistic expression ■ After the Pre-college phase, students should be ready to demonstrate some experience of creating and realizing their own artistic concepts, as well as some necessary skills for their expression
Repertoire skills ■ After the Pre-college phase, students should be ready to - show evidence of their experience and, where appropriate, performance of some representative repertoire of the Principal Study area - show evidence of their experience of a variety of appropriate styles
Ensemble skills ■ After the Pre-college phase, students should be ready to describe their experience of interacting musically in ensembles
Practicing and rehearsing skills ■ After the Pre-college phase, students should be ready to demonstrate their experience of basic practice and rehearsal techniques as well as their understanding of good habits of technique and posture which enable them to use their bodies in an effective and non-harmful way
Reading and writing skills ■ After the Pre-college phase, students should be ready to demonstrate sufficient skills for the communication of musical scores relating to their Principal Study area
Aural, creative and re-creative skills

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▪ After the Pre-college phase, students should be ready to demonstrate some fluency in recognizing by ear, memorizing and manipulating the materials of music

Verbal skills
- After the Pre-college phase, students should be able to talk or write about their music making

Public performance skills
- After the Pre-college phase, students should be ready to demonstrate some awareness of the behavioural and communicative aspects of public performance

Improvisational skills
- After the Pre-college phase, students should demonstrate readiness to develop the ability to explore some of the patterns and processes which underlie improvisation

Theoretical (knowledge-based) outcomes

Knowledge and understanding of repertoire and musical material
- After the Pre-college phase, students should be ready to demonstrate knowledge of a representative selection of the mainstream repertoire of their Principal Study
  - Students should be ready to demonstrate knowledge of the basic elements and organizational patterns of music

Knowledge and understanding of context
- After the Pre-college phase, students should be ready to demonstrate
  - knowledge of the main outlines of music history
  - familiarity with musical styles
  - a basic understanding of how technology can be used in the field of music
  - some knowledge of the music profession

Generic outcomes

Independence
- After the Pre-college phase, students should be ready to demonstrate
  - some independence in gathering and using information
  - some independence in developing ideas
  - some evidence of self-motivation

Psychological understanding
- After the Pre-college phase, students should be ready to demonstrate some effective use of - in a variety of situations -
  - their imagination
  - their intuition
  - their emotional understanding
  - their ability to think and work creatively when problem-solving
  - their ability to think and work flexibly, adapting to new and changing circumstances
  - a growing awareness of how to self - manage performance anxiety

Critical awareness
- After the Pre-college phase, students should be ready to demonstrate some ability to
  - reflect constructively on their own work and that of others

Communication skills
- After the Pre-college phase, students should be ready to demonstrate effective communication and social skills, including the ability to
  - work with others on joint projects or activities
  - show skills in teamwork
  - integrate with other individuals in a variety of cultural contexts
  - present work in accessible form
  - have appropriate Information Technology (IT) skills