

## Music Education in Luxembourg: A critical Review

### Introduction. Freinet and Rousseau

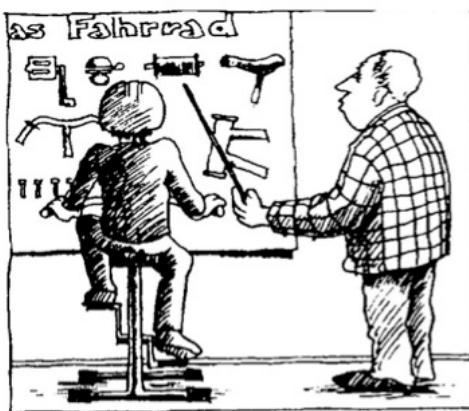


Figure 1. Analyzing a bicycle (Freinet 1994, 167)

„Let us be honest: If we would let pedagogues teach children to ride a bike, we would have few cyclists. Before sitting on a bike, you should have analyzed it from top to bottom, learned its basic parts and successfully completed many tests with the mechanical basis of the transmission.

After this – but only after this – should the child get permission to sit on a bike. Oh, beware. Don't let them blindly drive on a difficult trail, because it could possibly threaten pedestrians. Pedagogues would have developed effective tutorial bikes, fixed at a tripod (to a base), so that their pupils could learn without any risk to keep themselves right on the saddle.

Fortunately, children ignore these far too complicated and methodical plans of their teachers. In a barn, they discover an old bike without tires and brakes and secretly learn to mount it, as every child does: without any knowledge of rules and principles, they seize the machine, go straight to a scarp and land in the ditch. With some persistence they try again and again – and in record time, they are able to ride a bicycle. Practice makes perfect” (Freinet 1980, 21).

„A good deal of traditional music education has worked deductively: the formal rules have been taught in the abstract, for example, through verbal description or written notation, rather than in the practical context of making sounds themselves. ... This is putting the cart before the horse” (Hargreaves 1986, 215).

Freinet's metaphoric criticism about too much theory in the practice of education has already been considered by Jean-Jacques Rousseau about two centuries before. His extensive novel about education in five volumes *Émile* has been conceived in the spirit of the Age of Enlightenment. Rousseau's remarks about music education are rather short—this is surprising, because Rousseau also was a skilled musician —, but they are a part of a progressive view of education that he expounded, in order to educate a free-thinking child and to avoid too much authoritarianism in the teaching process. Transferred to music education this implies a reorientation which, in Luxembourg, has barely been carried out. So, what are Rousseau's views of learning through experience in music education? More than 200 years ago, the French philosopher, writer and composer required an intuitive occupation with music **before** musical “literacy”. Children's first contact with music should be a creative one. Rousseau's arguments, emphasizing that music learning should have a strong orientation towards practice, are the following:

1. Rousseau highlights that we cannot learn the functionality of our organs, before having used them. Transferred to music, this assertion means that music should be practiced before being learned. Before reading and practicing music, a music pupil should compose it, should listen to it and should simply enjoy it.
  - Interest and understanding should come from the inside. Musical feeling should come before music education, and creativity should come before interpretation.
  - Freedom, discovery and activity are three terms to paraphrase the first contact with music that emphasizes “learning by doing”.
2. Rousseau compares the faculty of reading a language text to reading music. Both are based on signs and conventions.
  - However, in reading a language text, we convey our own thoughts and in reading music texts we mostly transfer the ideas of others.
3. Solfeggio, under certain circumstances, is difficult and has no utility at all. It ought to be reserved for singers and should not become a universal method for the first steps in musical training (Rousseau 1762, 229-237).

In bringing out these early views about music education, I want to clarify the vision for parts of music education in Luxembourg that are supposed to be reviewed. I refer mainly to music schools, but partially also to music in schools. The methods are based upon an outmoded methodology of two neighboring countries, France and the French speaking part of Belgium, Wallonia, that for a long time gave priority to “literacy” instead of to well-balanced practice-oriented training (in putting more the accent to penalizing than to reinforcement.) However, during the last decades, in these countries, the *solfège* method has been replaced by a less rigorous approach, with the aim of keeping beginners pursuing music instruction instead of giving up after the first hurdle.

## Music Education in Luxembourg

In Luxembourg, music education has to be seen from several angles.

### Music in General Education

In primary schools, music belongs to a canon of more or less important disciplines that should give children a sound basic education during the first six years. A teacher, who is responsible for every school subject from mathematics and languages to sports, is also supposed to teach music and this for one hour once a week.

In secondary schools, the curriculum has been recently changed, and music is included in the weekly curriculum for two hours only in the first year of seven. In secondary schools, specialized teachers are responsible for music education. Following his orientation, the student can choose music as a main subject for the last four years up to the end of secondary school. In this case, the curriculum includes, music theory, history and music practice. In addition, s/he has to take instrumental courses at a music school. Only the gifted students will opt for this apprenticeship that will be very time-consuming, because general and specialized music training (i.e. music school) have to be combined.

In general, during the last few decades, several attempts have been made to give music education a more up-to-date and attractive design. This has led to an enormous expansion of the topics. Traditional issues such as art music, folksong practice, music theory, Orff instruments and recorder have been supplemented by jazz, rock, pop, rap, hip-hop and techno music. Dance and movement have become a part of the courses, and during the last decade new technologies have been integrated into the curriculum. Finally, the methodical spectrum of the teaching design has been subjected to a permanent process of change. Students face a varied diversity of topics and methods, but the disadvantage is that the increase of knowledge and competence remains negligible. Many students don't take music education in general schools seriously, and in some cases the situation justifies their negative attitude for reasons of a non-reflected alignment to today's supposed requirements. And thus, music risks to be no longer an obligatory subject in primary schools and its weight in the canon of subjects could diminish substantially in secondary schools to an extent that even fundamental knowledge would no longer be guaranteed. The reason is that music education denies learning success: the oversupply paradoxically under-challenges students. Music lessons lack outer and inner continuity (Gruhn 1999, 66). To a weak integration of music in primary schools comes the deficiency of a step-by-step music curriculum in secondary schools. As a result, it happens far too often that in secondary schools, pupils come for the first time in contact with music education. In primary schools

music education often has to give way to “more important” subjects, but in secondary schools specialized teachers teach music lessons at fixed time-slots. While in higher classes pupils have the option to choose a specialized music curriculum, the majority of pupils completes their school career with only two hours of music as a subject in the first year of secondary school, if at all. Interdisciplinary facilities in primary schools remain unexploited, and co-operation of music teachers with other specialist subject teachers hardly ever takes place.

At the university level music is taught in four study programs; as an optional course in the Master of Luxembourgish Studies, as an optional course in the Bachelor of European Culture (BCE), as an obligatory course and as optional courses in the apprenticeship of future primary school teachers and as an optional course in the Bachelor of Social Sciences.

However, in both latter programs the number of lessons was substantially diminished since the foundation of the university in 2003 and the conversion of the old degrees to the new bachelor-master-Ph.D.-system, while in the two former, new music courses were established. Until now, no specialized music studies are offered at the University of Luxembourg. Nevertheless, some possibilities offer themselves, but, until now, the political will is lacking.

### **Music in Social Education**

During their apprenticeship, social educators benefit from a solid music training in relation to their future employment. To what extent music acts as a part in their daily dealings with their clientele remains to be researched. The recipients of this form of music education are children, adolescents and elders. We can also add music therapy activities under this category. The chances of this relatively recent field in Luxembourg should not be wasted:

1. Extracurricular music activities are not strictly limited in time, as is the case in schools
2. With well-chosen activities talents could be discovered at an early age and in a playful way.

Some, although not all topics of general music education activities are used in the social educational work, while others are specially designed for this domain.

### **Specialized Music Education**

Beside music courses in the general education system, a specialized and more profound music education is offered in three conservatories, in seven music schools and in local music courses. The financing comes from the municipality and the community administrations. Furthermore, a few private music schools offer courses in a limited number of popular instruments and in singing.

Number of pupils	General education	Music schools	% of school population
<b>Luxembourg</b>	47051 (primary) 37941 (secondary) <b>Σ 84992</b> (MEN 2010)	5124 (Conservatoire) 5479 (Music school) 4114 (Music courses) <b>Σ 14717<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>17,3</b>
France	14.955.000 (INSEE 2010)	280.000 (Ministère de la Culture2009 <sup>2</sup> )	1,9
Germany	11.676.338 (Statistisches Bundesamt Deutschland2010)	237.116 (VdM 2010)	2,03
Switzerland	1.267.458 (Bundesamt für Statistik 2009)	243.000 (Bundesamt für Kultur 2006)	19,2
Austria	1.091.500 (Statistik Austria2001)	206.000(Statistik Austria 2011)	18,9

While music lessons in schools convey a more general knowledge about music or propose musical activities that can be accomplished without prior musical training, music schools offer individual instrumental courses and provide musical skills. Music education in general schools could reach 100% of the school population, i.e. about 85.000 pupils. Almost 15.000 pupils attend extracurricular music courses, i.e. 17,3%. This seems to be a respectable result, compared internationally. However, a basic music education should be available for everyone of school age.

Since 1998 a law governing the harmonization of music education (Legilux 1998) was adopted to standardize programs and teacher careers which until this date, in a small country like Luxembourg, varied from school to school and from region to region.

The preamble of the law stipulates three basic aims:

1. To develop musical taste and interest in children and give them the possibility to participate in musical life (Strangely enough, the term “competence” is not mentioned),
2. To provide a specialized education to prepare for higher studies abroad and
3. To give adults the possibility to improve their musical knowledge.

<sup>1</sup> Data communicated on 13<sup>th</sup> April by the secretary of the commissioner of music education in Luxembourg; pupils in private music courses are not added (probably not more than 1000).

<sup>2</sup> There is no exact date indicated at the Internet page. However the information suggests that it has been published after 2008.

As a consequence of this law, a number of regulatory statutes have been elaborated upon in order to realize the targets of the national legislator. This has resulted in a rigid set of rules, which is difficult to satisfy in some cases. The focus is on instrumental training, on vocal training and on dance education. But, before his/her first steps on the instrument the pupil has to complete the first of three years of solfeggio. This pedagogical approach seems to be very close to the Kodaly method that also stipulates the first year of vocal training with the aim of becoming acquainted with Hungarian folklore before starting to play an instrument. Yet, the solfeggio system doesn't put the accent on vocal training, but on abstract musical expertise such as sight-reading, music theory – and this at the age of only eight. The critics of being elitist may be true for Kodaly's method in a certain sense (Hargreaves 1986, 221-2), but it applies far more to the solfeggio system, not in an economic sense, but in the sense that only a small number of gifted children can be successful, whereas less talented pupils resign, revolted by music that is simple. Solfeggio has been taught to thousands of pupils during the last decades, but it has nothing to do with music and music education, and the pleasure taken in music was mostly slowed down and not increased. A better adapted method taking into consideration the real needs of instrumental courses and with regard to the knowledge of developmental psychology could lead to more satisfying outcomes. A less talented pupil could eventually play a second part in a wind band or s/he could acquire interests and skills as a late developer.

Music pupils have to attend five years of solfeggio courses and, apart from this, obligatory secondary subjects such as harmony education, additional sight-reading courses and ensemble music, respectively chamber music. The specialized solfeggio levels 4 and 5 lead to university studies. In reality, the degree of difficulty of these courses is already approaching the academic level, but for 11 to 12 year old pupils! Here again, the critics of elitism are to be renewed.

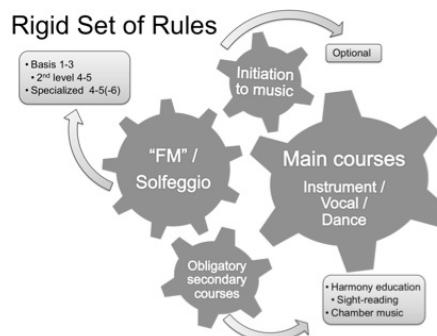


Figure 3. Study plan (CMNord 2011)

To what absurd excesses solfeggio training can lead, is shown in a lesson, where key changes occur even within a bar.

Nº 25

**Allegretto**

M.E. 4221

NIVÉRD, Lucien: 25 Leçons de Solfège élémentaire, Paris, Eschig 1934, S. 16

Imprimatur Roland Prie et fils - Paris  
TM : rok-54

Figure 4. A Sight-Reading Lesson (Niverd 1934, 16)

This has nothing to do with musical practice, but with sight-reading training. Sight-reading as a form of musical literacy undoubtedly has advantages in assimilating new literature, but musicality is not trained, and the result will often be a mediocre interpretation. Musicians with good solfeggio knowledge, respectively sight-reading skills need less time to rehearse a new piece. Yet, this is exactly where the problem lies, and disadvantages should not be ignored. The less important time exposure to comprehend a new musical text often has the lack of the necessary diligence in the detail as a consequence, whereas musicians not trained with the solfeggio/sight-reading system need much more time. But the result will attract attention: rehearsing down to the last detail will allow a kind of fine-tuning implicating quasi automatically a high-class interpretation<sup>3</sup>. Nevertheless, future professional musicians will replace sight-reading facilities with their knowledge of repertoire.

<sup>3</sup> The number and the excellence of symphonic orchestras in German-speaking countries compared to those in French-speaking countries is an evident indicator to underline this statement.

The calls for music education being more than just learning skills, should also be heard in Luxembourg, and music education as a holistic concept should increase the involvement of both educational systems, music schools and general schools, so that music education for everybody should be encouraged and should give every child the chance to achieve a personal level and to take pleasure in music. Trying to push every child to a unique high level is illusory and demotivating for the majority of music pupils and their parents. Music education should foster creativity with the implementation of composition and improvisation in a non-competitive, playful environment. Playing by ear would be an option, and formal notation skills might in the first step be unnecessary. Furthermore, music education should provide an appreciation of artistic qualities and cultural heritage. Finally, it should try to combine intuitive musical ability instead of musical knowledge, automatically implementing many of the rules without the student being aware of them and without having to explain the processes behind.

Music education could also be a form of social training, but with respect to the abilities of each individual. However, currently in Luxembourg it is too rigorous, and even the solfeggio system is partially transferred to instrumental education. The reason is that current bearers of responsibility and older teachers have completed their studies in the French speaking part of Belgium and have grown up with this system that may be well adapted for future professionals, but not for school children. Furthermore, these teachers never completed didactics and methodology courses or had the system assessed by external experts. German philosopher Adorno complains about pedagogues who seem to take themselves too seriously and impede too much individuality in music education (Hargreaves 1986, 216-18).

“If the productive force of music is currently being managed by technical specialists, then everyone who ostracizes the technical specialist automatically becomes the enemy of the productive force” (Adorno 1984, 810)<sup>4</sup>.

Yet, an improvement of the system has been initialized in making obligatory methodology courses for prospective teachers, where reflection and mutual exchange may contribute to an improvement and further development of didactical methods.

In order to keep less gifted children in line, parents in the Luxembourg system often have to refer to extrinsic motivation. So less talented children may succeed in reaching a certain level. However, as soon as they become adolescents, they give up their studies, whereas skilled students, having also been forced, may relish the idea of becoming a professional musician. Extrinsic motivation may or may not play

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<sup>4</sup> Original text: “Wenn die musikalische Produktivkraft gegenwärtig vom technischen Spezialisten verwaltet wird, dann ist, wer den technischen Spezialisten verfehmt, der Feind der Produktivkraft geworden”.

a role in the decisional process for beginning young musicians and during their music curriculum. The following figure places extrinsic motivation in the middle of interest and gift and between intrinsic motivation and no motivation. It leaves open different possibilities of interrelationships and offers more possible readings, as for instance this one: A gifted, but not interested child could become interested in learning music after extrinsic motivation. However, in Luxembourg, there is a risk that gifted and interested pupils may become uninterested and which lingers in the constraints of an inflexible and outdated system where the most carefully drafted shapes of extrinsic motivation will prove inadequate. Extrinsic motivation may make sense; however, instead of motivating our children, we should make serious efforts to find out what discourages them (Guirard 2002, 13).

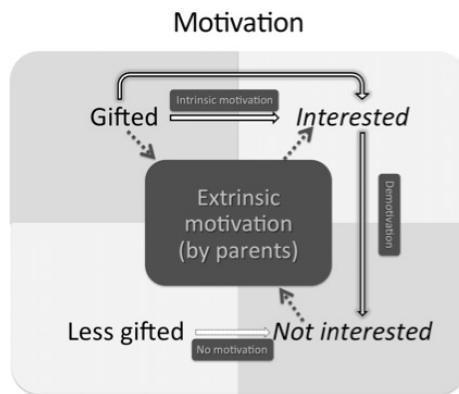


Figure 5. Motivation

Not only disadvantages...

To continue on a more cheerful note: As a result of the law of 1998, not only were the curricula standardized, but the pay scale of the staff in music schools was adjusted to the salary of general school teachers which finally allowed them to make ends meet. Many musicians from abroad were attracted by better financial situations than in their original countries. This has resulted in an unprecedented flourish of musical life in Luxembourg. Not only music practice in the inner circle of music schools, but also amateur musical life (presently) enjoys a revival, because the more gifted pupils who successfully endured the system enrich amateur ensembles, mainly wind bands, and also smaller rock and pop bands of the Grand-Duchy. The number of musicians does not increase, for the reasons just outlined, but the level of their musicianship rises. The lack of acceptance of the solfeggio method by eight to ten year old children and their parents stands in stark contrast to musicians well prepared for academic studies and to the increase of musical performance of amateur bands and ensembles in the country.

As a result, the change of repertoire from lower grade pieces to difficult oeuvres becomes noticeable. Sight-reading abilities and enhanced instrumental expertise make difficult pieces accessible. Thus, the aim should not be to abandon, but to change the system for beginners and to adapt it to today's needs and to educational achievements for advanced pupils and for prospective music students.

## **Assessment and Evaluation**

A comparison between general education and music education cannot be evaluated by quantifiable methods, and the difference in quality is more easily intuited than based on scientific research. The PISA assessments from 2000 to 2009 are the only benchmarks for general education, and there music education remains unconsidered (MEN 2000, PISA 2003, ELTERNRAT 2006, PISA 2009)<sup>5</sup>.

Why should music education be assessed? "Teaching is assessing", because "... that what is taught is not necessarily learned" (Faultley 2010, 59-60). Teachers want to have feedback on their teaching achievements. In Luxembourg pupils are evaluated in exams at the end of the school year. These exams are taken too seriously, are time-consuming, and the learning process during the school year often exclusively pursues this objective. In contrast, the educational system is rarely assessed, but only selectively adapted and ... "dis-improved" instead of being improved. A critical review seems not to be desired or is even feared. Assessments for the future of music education (and music associations; the majority of trained musicians remaining amateurs) must find answers to the following questions:

- 1) What is the impact of a change in lifestyles mentality during the last decades? and ...
- 2) ... How should music education be adjusted in relation to present living habits and conditions?
- 3) How can music schools and general schools interact?
- 4) What should be the reaction in relation to the change of taste?
- 5) How can music education be positioned in relation to new media and ...
- 6) ... How to take profit from new media?
- 7) How can young immigrants be integrated more effectively into the system?
- 8) How can extracurricular music education compete with other "leisure activities"? etc.

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<sup>5</sup> cf. comparison between OECD-countries.

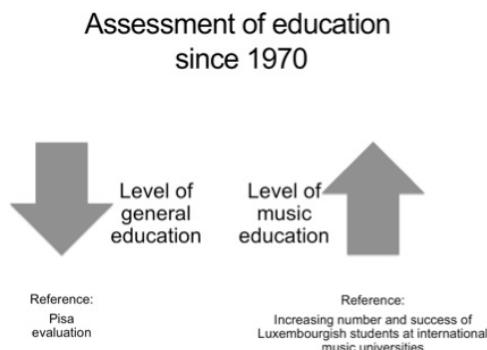


Figure 6. Assessment of Education

## Outlook

In the context of the constructions of new curricula throughout Europe, arts and art education are integral parts of the humanities, and research on music education should transcend questions of pedagogy itself and become also an integral part of educational sciences ranging from philosophy to didactics, encompassing theoretical models in psychology, in sociology, in epistemology and even in “hard sciences”. This transversal point of view comes from francophone countries, whereas German scholars support a more disciplinary methodology<sup>6</sup>. The question is, how Luxembourg should take advantage from both systems, the long tradition of German scholarship and the all-encompassing approach of francophone educational sciences. This includes the question of music teachers in Luxembourg in the face of the new issues of competency-based education in today’s changing school landscape. How should future music teachers be trained in order to integrate an educational community that has fundamentally changed during the last decades from a vision of school subject towards competencies? In this sense, emerging opportunities should be detected and not wasted. The new evolution should not be tantamount to an admission of powerlessness, because this new evolution is already reality in general and in music schools in Luxembourg.

Scholarship on music education has to remain open-minded towards general educational sciences and address interdisciplinary issues, aspiring to reposition in the global field of education scholarship and to open new perspectives, but also to offer its disciplinary knowledge to other fields in order to bring forward common aims. Luxembourg, where German and French tradition meets, offers ideal conditions for this kind of scholarship.

<sup>6</sup> cf. School music institutes in German speaking countries, vs. institutes of educational sciences with integrated music education in French speaking countries (with few exceptions).

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