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EXTENDING MUSICAL EDUCATION – ROMANIAN LEGISLATIVE AND CURRICULAR REFERENCES

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Summary. The National Curriculum is the architecture of meaning and organization of school education. It defines, organizes the educational offer and guides the design, implementation, and evaluation of learning. In the current Romanian legal framework, the curriculum appears at the student's decision from the school's offer, namely an offer through which the student chooses according to his or her own needs and interests. The change in terminological emphasis is visible from the school's decision to the student's decision. This move emphasizes not only the autonomy of the school institution, but also the student's right to participate in configuring his or her own learning path, including the offer with possibilities for curricular customization for teachers.

Keywords: music education, curricular benchmarks, optional subjects/courses, curricular expansion.

EXTINDEREA EDUCAȚIEI MUZICALE – REFERINȚE LEGISLATIVE ȘI CURRICULARE ROMÂNEȘTI

Rezumat. Curriculumul Național este arhitectura de sens și de organizare a educației școlare. El definește, organizează oferta educațională și orientează proiectarea, implementarea, evaluarea învățării. În cadrul legal românesc de actualitate, apare curriculum la decizia elevului din oferta școlii, respectiv o ofertă prin intermediul căreia elevul alege în funcție de propriile nevoi și interese. Schimbarea de accent terminologic este vizibilă de la decizia școlii la decizia elevului. Această mutare subliniază nu doar autonomia instituției școlare, ci și dreptul elevului de a participa la configurarea propriului parcurs de învățare, inclusiv oferta cu posibilități de personalizare curriculară pentru cadrele didactice.

Cuvinte-cheie: educație muzicală, repere curriculare, discipline opționale, extindere curriculară.

In Romania, the School-Decided Curriculum (abbreviated SDC) represents one of the most important areas of flexibility in the National Curriculum, as it allows the adaptation of the educational offer to the real needs of students, to the specifics of the educational unit and to the resources of the community. In recent Romanian curriculum literature, this component is presented as a segment of the National Curriculum through which the school can develop particular learning paths and build its own curricular project, starting from the interests of students, the local context and the available educational opportunities [1].

In the current legal framework, for primary, secondary and high school education, the theoretical and vocational track, the Pre-university Education Law no. 198/ 2023 uses the phrase Curriculum at the Student's Decision from the School's Offer (abbreviated CSDSO). The law specifies that the common core is made up of compulsory subjects for all students,

and the optional component is proposed for all students and can be developed at national, regional, local or educational unit level. Each student has the opportunity to choose school subjects or fields of study from the school institution's offer, depending on their needs and knowledge interests, and the board of directors approves this offer after consulting students and parents and in relation to the available resources.

From a pedagogical point of view, it is important to understand the relationship between the traditional formula SDC and the current legal expression CSDSO. Essentially, both refer to the same idea of curricular flexibility, but the emphasis is increasingly shifting towards the student's participation in configuring their own learning path. This change is consonant with the principles of the current National Curriculum, which promotes student-centeredness, personalization of education, flexibility and the construction of differentiated learning paths.

Curricular status of the optional component

The optional component does not have a peripheral status, but one integrated into the architecture of the National Curriculum. Romanian curricular documents show that this is not an optional addition in a weak sense, but an area structurally provided for in the educational framework plans, with the role of supporting differentiated learning paths, distinct performances and connecting the school to the needs of the community. In the same logic, the reference framework of the National Curriculum emphasizes that the relationship between the common core and the flexible component is essential: the former ensures equal opportunities and coherence of the system, and the latter allows for the customization of learning paths according to the interests of students and the resources of the school [1].

For music education, this curricular positioning is particularly important. Music is a common core subject in certain levels and forms of schooling, but its formative possibilities often exceed the time strictly allocated in the curriculum. The optional component allows precisely the valorisation of dimensions that, although very important for the student's training, cannot be sufficiently developed within a single weekly lesson: choral singing, instrumental ensemble, musical creation, musical technology, local heritage, the relationship between music and other arts, artistic projects or broader performative activities [3].

The optional component as a space for flexibility and customization

One of the essential functions of the optional component is the personalization of the learning path. The curricular support documents of recent years show that the offer of optional courses must be built starting from a needs analysis and from the consultation of students, parents and the community. This analysis includes the learning interests of the students, the opportunities and resources of the educational unit, the local socio-economic

and cultural specificity, the experience of previous years and the potential for institutional development. In other words, the authentic optional course does not arise from the simple preference of the teacher, but from the meeting between the educational need, the school resources and the social relevance of the offer.

Applied to music education, this logic means that the school can build optional musical courses according to the real profile of the students and the community. In some contexts, the need may be to deepen choral singing; in others, to capitalize on local traditions; in others, to explore digital technologies or film music. In areas with a strong local musical tradition, the optional component can support cultural identity and community heritage; in highly digitalized urban environments, it can support the connection between music education, media and contemporary creation. This openness is fully compatible with the current principles of the competence - and student-cantered curriculum [6].

Types of optional subjects/courses and their relevance for musical education

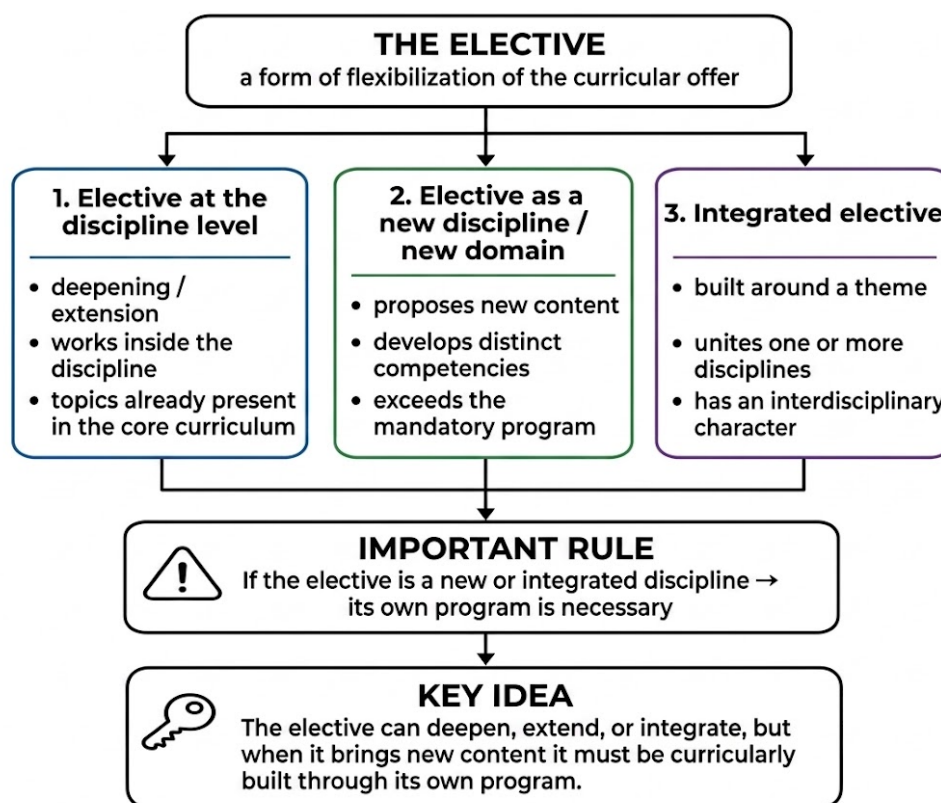


Figure 1. Types of optional subjects

The curricular and supporting documents essentially distinguish three main types of optional subjects/ courses. An optional subject can function at the level of the discipline, by deepening or expanding themes already present in the common core. Another optional subject can function as a new discipline or new field of study, when it proposes content and skills distinct from the mandatory discipline. In the third case, it can also be an

integrated optional subject, when it is built around a theme that brings together perspectives from one or more curricular areas. In cases where the optional subject proposes a new discipline or an integrated approach, a separate curriculum is required, developed according to the model of official school curricula [1].

For music education, this typology is particularly fertile. An optional subject at the discipline level can deepen choral repertoire, active listening, applied musical language, instrumental initiation or musical culture. An optional subject as a new discipline can introduce themes such as music and digital technology, local musical heritage, music in film and media, choral project or school instrumental ensemble. An integrated optional subject can articulate music with literature, history, geography, visual arts, dance, theatre or media education. From this perspective, the optional component becomes a space for controlled curricular creativity and coherent extension of music education.

Why does musical education need a curricular extension?

The need to expand musical education through the optional component derives from the formative specificity of the school subject. The mandatory hour can provide a common core of training, but the musical discipline has, by its nature, a practical, expressive, relational and cultural character that requires time for exercise, recovery, experiment and project.

The secondary school curriculum explicitly emphasizes that the new approach encourages the study of instrumental music, the use of new technologies, the diversification of repertoires heard and performed, and the emphasis on the affective-attitudinal and action dimensions of student training. In addition, it recommends encouraging initiatives for choral singing and the creation of syncretic artistic moments at the school and classroom level [2].

At the high school level, the horizon is even broader. The new music education curriculum for grades IX–X promotes creativity and personal expressiveness, the development of critical thinking and musical analysis, the integration of modern technologies, digital production, reflection on current music, and the relationship of music with other arts and contemporary society. All of this shows that current musical education can no longer be reduced to musical repertoire and musical audition in the traditional sense, but needs additional curricular spaces for experimentation, creation, projecting, and cultural expansion [4].

Clear opportunities for musical education expansion

A first opportunity is to *deepen interpretive practices*. Through a choral optional subject, vocal ensemble or instrumental ensemble, students can work at a pace more appropriate to the real formation of skills: breathing, intonation, group homogeneity,

phrasing, accompaniment, differentiated roles, stage presence. The secondary school curriculum explicitly recommends the creation of choral groups at school level and encouraging initiatives to use accessible instruments, from percussion to electric piano, guitar, recorder or traditional instruments.



Figure 2. Clear opportunities to expand musical education

The second opportunity is *the development of musical creativity and expression*. The optional component can create space for improvisation, elementary composition, accompaniment, sound design, audio collage, podcasting or creative response to auditions. The current high school curriculum legitimizes such directions by recommending the use

of simple technological means for accompaniment and improvisation, through own musical productions and by capitalizing on students' creativity in current contexts of communication and expression.

The third opportunity is *the extension of music to technology and digital culture*. Music can be curricularly connected with audio editing applications, collaborative platforms, digital production, and the analysis of the functions of music in media and online culture. In an optional subject, these topics can become consistent training cores, not simple episodic inserts. The new high school curriculum explicitly supports the relationship between music and media, the functions of music in digital culture, and the critical analysis of contemporary musical products [5].

The fourth opportunity is to *develop the cultural and identity dimension of musical education*. A musical education optional subject can capitalize on the local musical heritage, the traditions and customs of the area, the connection between music and identity, or the relationship between folklore and contemporary creations. The middle school curriculum insists on cultural diversity, on the value of historical traditions specific to the geographical area or ethnic minorities, and on the possibility of capitalizing on the rich repertoire of songs and dances for the purpose of culturalization and spiritual enrichment.

The fifth opportunity is *interdisciplinarity*. Musical education / music is naturally linked to the Romanian language and literature, history, geography, visual education, dance, theatre, physics, biology and technology. The middle school curriculum explicitly talks about heteronomic and interdisciplinary cultural approaches and about the relationship of music with literature, fine arts, history, geography, mathematics, information technology and sciences. In an integrated optional subject, these bridges can become a principle of curricular construction and can support meaningful projects for students.

How to rigorously design a musical education/ music optional subject?

A musical education/ music optional subject should not be built intuitively, but rigorously. The curricular support documents stipulate that each proposal must include at least: the name of the optional subject, its type, the grade and level of education, the duration, the number of hours per week, the argumentation of relevance and a brief presentation of the content. In addition, when an own curriculum is required, it must be built according to the model of the official programs, with a presentation note, general competencies, specific competencies and learning activities, contents, methodological suggestions and bibliography.

This requirement is very important for the music teacher. A valuable optional subject is not a collection of attractive activities, but a coherent educational offer, justified by needs and oriented towards learning outcomes. Expanding music education through the optional

component does not mean “more of the same”, but building a new or in-depth path, with a clear curricular identity. That is why the analysis of needs and the articulation of competences are mandatory steps, not simple formalities [1].

Limits and success conditions

The opportunities offered by the optional component are real, but they do not automatically translate into educational success. Success depends on the existence of an authentic needs analysis, real consultation of students and parents, the material and human resources of the school, the skills of teachers and the capacity of the institution to build a coherent offer. The supporting documents clearly show that the development of the curricular offer involves stages of consultation, debate, notice, and approval and that this offer must then be publicly presented to students and parents for the expression of options. In other words, the expansion of music education through optional subjects is also a matter of curricular management, not just individual initiative [1].

At the same time, not every extension is automatically valuable. A musical optional subject becomes relevant only if it responds to a real need and offers something distinct from the common core: deepening, extension, integration or contextualization. If it simply repeats the contents of the compulsory lesson without any formative added value, it loses its curricular legitimacy. Therefore, the decisive criterion is not the spectacularity of the theme, but coherence with the student's training profile, with the school's resources and with the aims of musical education [6].

The Curriculum at the School's Discretion, or in current legal terminology the Curriculum at the Student's Discretion from the School's Offer, represents one of the most important ways to expand and deepen musical education. It allows for the personalization of the learning path, the development of disciplinary or integrated optional subjects, the use of local resources, the connection of music to technology and media, the deepening of interpretative practices and the development of creativity and cultural competence. For the musical discipline, this curricular area is particularly valuable, as it offers time, flexibility and relevance for formative dimensions that go beyond the possibilities of the compulsory lesson. The expansion of musical education through the optional component is therefore not an ornamental addition, but a real opportunity to build richer, more personal and more meaningful learning experiences for students.

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