

VIABILITY OF DIDACTIC PRINCIPLES IN CONTEMPORARY PIANO EDUCATION

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SUMMARY. Our paper aims at developing a system of ideas meant to bring about excellence in the performing act, both from the perspective of the performing soloist, and in the light of the educator and trainer of young musicians, endowed with higher professional skills. In the context of our preoccupations and propensity for instrumental didactics, we have formulated the guiding lines and principles for a *novel* piano technique, from a contemporary perspective. We have outlined a *model* of interdisciplinary approach, complemented and enriched with disciplines such as biology, anatomy and physiology, biomechanics, acoustics, psychology, semiotics etc. returning therewith to the importance of didactic principles, shedding upon them the light of today's significances for piano education. We have submitted the main goals of the didactic process in the field of piano art, establishing accordingly, premises, conditions, accomplishments and perspectives in terms of evaluation within the instrumental didactics process, particularly highlighting the self-assessment skills.

Keywords: interdisciplinary approach, didactic principles, instrumental didactic process

Crystallized over time and constantly brought up to date, by their adapting to ever-changing social-historical conditions, didactic principles have constituted for specialized musical education, strong anchors, to support the firm theoretical orientation of a practical activity, endowed with manifest experimental, practical features. Modern pedagogy restates the general character, the normative character, the dynamic character and the systematic character of didactic principles. This is why we need to permanently relate to these general rules, with a view to building a development strategy afferent to our didactic approach, placed on solid bases, long verified by the multiseccular pedagogic practice, even if (and, perhaps, precisely because) we tend towards a personal approach,

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advocating for originality, in the field of musical-instrumental didactics. Therefore, we formulate the following viewpoints on the statements unanimously accepted by the pedagogical community, expressed through the *ten didactic principles*.

1. Principle of the scientific character inherent to education

Albeit our studying an artistic field par excellence, science is fully present in the continuous activity of didactic persuasion. We support and implement the scientific organization of the educational process, we ensure the rigorous scientific character of the knowledge transmitted to pupils and students and we endeavour to embed in their consciousness the scientific rigour, the permanent control of reason over the complex process of performing-related musical creation. We are convinced that genuine artistic performance cannot be fulfilled in the absence of thorough scientific substantiation, from multiple perspectives, through interdisciplinary approaches.

2. Principle of the applicative character afferent to education

refers primarily to the general requirement for education to prepare humans in view of their social integration, turning them into active and useful members of society. The current conception on the artist's role encloses his/her intense openness towards real world, his/her beneficial descent from higher spheres, from the category of spiritual elite isolated in the ivory tower, into the community with whom (s)he keeps up a two-way communication, absolutely necessary to his/her career as concerto performer. In the light of this principle, learning not only represents information acquisition and storage, but also equally assumes their usefulness, their real functionality. In other words, learning goals do not stop at *to know*, but particularly mean *to know* and *be able* to do something coherent, useful and beneficial, with the acquired knowledge. Old pedagogy drastically distinguished between the theoretical and practical character of education. The two approaches were firmly delimited, and musical school was considered first and foremost a specific training, of practical character. Amid the general musical education, thoroughly studying an instrument was primarily reckoned practical activity, as well as special skilfulness, acquired through the empirical transmission of the teacher's or professor's experience to the pupil or student, through hard study that consisted in practicing, in repeating until saturation, segments of skills. Modern education aims at enhancing both the theoretical background and the importance of practical activities. Nevertheless, the necessity to ensure the balance between information and their practical application speaks for itself. Therefore, the piano teacher/professor will endeavour to educate and train the pupil/student, endowing the latter with all theoretical aspects that underlie the accurate performance of a musical

piece, with the necessary knowledge for understanding style, epoch, technical, instrumental characteristics etc. All aforementioned information serve to better transpose in practice, an accurate and convincing performance.

3. Principle of intuition or correlation between sensorial and rational posits that the act of knowing must rely on the pupils' direct contact with objective reality. According to this principle, learning must be provided with a practical-intuitive character. In the old-school approaches, the role of intuition was disproportionately great as against the role of logic, whereas modern education grants intuitive learning and knowledge its proper place, yet balanced and enhanced within complementariness. Of our days, the conception on the **unity between intuitive and logic, between sensorial and rational, between concrete and abstract** prevails.

Learning is known to be a complex process of awareness, which relies on a sensorial basis. On the other hand, the act of thinking is successfully resorted to, with a view to achieving the mediated knowledge of reality. Thinking is notional, as a consequence of its operating with abstract categories, logical symbols, generalized ideas and significations. They are attained by conceptualizing information, by complex mental activity that results in notion configuration and crystallization. Conceptualizing reality data, generalizing rely on the contact with real objects and phenomena, on structuring mental schemes and *interiorizing* them.

Deeper nuances, further specifications are called for, with respect to the role played by intuition in the notion-formation process. In the light of traditional research, intuition was considered indispensable in the early stages of knowledge, and was meant to supply the images which, after adequate processing, would generate notions. In line with modern conception, **intuition is present throughout the process of knowledge**. Perceived images underlie the elaboration of reasoning, syntheses. On intuiting an object or a phenomenon, the pupil or student is receiving it through his/her senses, and at the same time with his intellect; in other words, with his overall cognitive experience, with the addition of the new impressions. This process is crucial for perceiving the artistic object, in our field of study and research, for auditory perception.

Representation is a dynamic phenomenon of active and creative combination between the impressions emerged at a certain point and prior cognitive experience. Within this process, impression not only represents a stage of knowledge, but also develops as active, continuous process. A characteristic of this process is that the concrete impression of image is in close connection to the rational part of the phenomenon. Here, intuitive images appear not only as simple sensorial impressions, on entering in direct contact with real life, but also as outcomes of a complex cognitive

action of selection, organization and processing, applied to perceived elements. In the aforementioned, the sensations and operations of reasoning participate alike.

Jean Piaget, promoter of genetic psychology, posited and demonstrated that the fundamental element of thought did not consist of images and their representations, as believed by the representatives of traditional psychology, but of mental-activity models, to wit operational structures. Hence, notions are not formed as a result of the simple impression of images on pupils' minds; but, first and foremost, the concrete operations are performed, which are afterwards transposed at mental level.

By this new perspective, intuition retains its importance, yet occupies another position. As a consequence, the priority goal no longer implies obtaining the greatest possible volume of images, in the pupils' minds, on the objects and phenomena of the surrounding world. Nowadays, there is about the quality afferent to the emerging notions, as this quality does not depend on the number of configured representations, but on how they are structured, within the mental schemes, into operations, as well as on how they are transposed on his/her mental level. In this light, it is very important that didactic materials, scores and musical-instrument methods contain, by their structure, stimulatory elements for intellectual operations, driving them into the act of knowing. The teacher/professor holds the important part of activating guided observation, of favouring the formulation of problems, as well as moments of reflection, occasions for interpretation.

All disciplines studied in school implement the principle of the unity between intuitive and rational, yet each resorts to specific ways. In terms of age cycles, likewise, this principle is applied in differentiated and nuanced ways. Hence, at young school age, the notional system is being built solely by intuition. As we move into the human being development, the role of reasoning, mental operations is on the increase and gradually prevails on intuition. Nevertheless, under no circumstance, any of the two components acts alone or by oneself. For the piano education, throughout tuition, the enhancement of both sides is of the utmost importance. An efficient, even proficient, piano education cannot be attained without permanently resorting both to intuition and reasoning. Stimulated to personally solve as many problems of a musical nature, in the musical pieces under study, pupils and students will develop and enrich their intuition, which facilitates their access to the rational comprehension of the senses inherent to the score. In this way, in the piano professor's pedagogical practice, as well as in all fields of high-quality learning, Immanuel Kant's idea, according to which *intuition deprived of reason is blind, and reason deprived of intuition is barren, dry* proves once again its validity.

4. Principle of the active and conscious nature specific to education also known as *principle of the active and conscious knowledge acquisition*, implies the requirement for pupils to appropriate their subjects to learn through active processing, by themselves, so as to succeed in understanding them, in grasping their essential features.

Contemporary society, a society of information and awareness by definition, is characterized, inter alia, by the rate of modification and amplification of the knowledge from variegated fields. In order to successfully cope with the current informational boom, pupils need be moulded from early ages, in terms of a sustained and systematic effort to conduct research, to fully comprehend the phenomena they face, to enhance and systematize the acquired knowledge, actively integrating them in their personal experience portfolio. In the traditional education system, pupils would learn by simply taking the information taught by the teacher, whereas modern school places the pupil in the forefront, in that (s)he is the focus of attention, having to achieve investigation, research, processing and evaluation activities. (S)he performs these activities independently wherever possible, throughout the learning process, being helped, assisted and guided by the teacher. Modern psychopedagogy highlights the indissoluble connection between learning and development. The more the pupil's psychic processes are involved in the act of learning, the more conspicuous his/her progresses at developmental level will be.

Active knowledge-acquisition calls for deep understanding. This means that knowledge will be activated, that the pupil/student will penetrate the essence of the phenomenon under consideration, that (s)he will establish causal connections between elements, that (s)he will be able to frame a notion into its afferent class, within its particular adequate system.

There is worth mentioning that Jean Piaget spoke of the *integration into a structure*, to present the act of knowing in education as a process of integration. Withal, the scholar referred to the process of accommodation as *modification of the assimilation schemes according to each new situation*. He explained that new knowledge were not summatively added, but were integrated into the pupil's system of knowledge and experiences. The successive modification of the assimilation schemes, with a view to integrating the new knowledge into personal experience, leads to gradually penetrating into the essence of the objects and phenomena, to grasping the connections with other categories of objects and phenomena. This process guides the apprentice to full understanding. He proves to have consciously appropriated knowledge, when assimilated information become functional, in other words, when (s)he can operate therewith by analyses, comparisons, transfer, and apply them in unknown situations.

Learning is an individual activity which, in the light of modern school, supposes active attitude, personal effort. The pupil investigates, (s)he

organizes the material and actively participates in his / her own development. The teaching staff members are preoccupied with helping pupils *learn how to learn*. Nevertheless, first and foremost, there is very important for pupils to understand the goal and consequentiality of learning. Therefore, they need gradually develop, throughout aging, the motivation for learning and education. In early stages, there is an extrinsic motivation, which develops into an intrinsic motivation, along with the promotion of school cycles. Internal reasons take shape and clarify simultaneously with the personality-formation process, with the intellectual I- operation development. Intrinsic motivation is activated by exercising various types of learning, resorting ever more to those types that require intellectual mechanisms. *Receptive-reproductive learning* and *intelligible learning* progressively give ground to the kinds of *operational learning* and *creative learning*, which involve intellectual activity in the highest degree.

The cultivation of the ***principle on the conscious appropriation of knowledge, skills and abilities*** results in the development of the initiative spirit and the independence spirit, of the curiosity for research and investigation, of the reasoning and speaking skills, of the ability to use the already acquired personal experience, to solve theoretical and practical problems, to practically apply the theoretical acquisitions. At the same time, the pupil will learn to express logically, concisely and aesthetically the results obtained after cultivating the types of operational and creative learning. For the piano professor, it is of the utmost importance to find by himself/herself, in addition to practical exemplification on the piano, the appropriate words to express and explain some technique-development processes, as well as some principles governing the musical-performing art. By communicating the above-said processes and principles to his/her pupils or students in an age-specific and accessible form, the teacher or professor also creates a verbalization model for the complex processes afferent to the piano art, which model the pupil or student model will appropriate and (s)he will seek, in his/her turn, with his/her own powers of phenomena grasping the and expressing the comprehended notions, to explain he goals (s)he sets and the sonorous ideal (s)he tends to attain etc. Verbal communication is an essential part of conscious and active learning, in the framework of the two-way relationship apprentice/tutor, pupil/teacher, student/professor, within the piano education. My personal experience fully confirms this pedagogic desideratum.

In conclusion, ***the principle of the active and conscious pupil/student participation in the educational process*** conveys the actual essence of learning in a modern view and decisively contributes to the formative efficiency of education. For the piano teacher/professor of our days, the judicious application of this principle is capable of significantly

raising the quality of the educational process, because, under his/her competent guidance, the pupil/student will succeed in discovering, by his/her own powers, the characteristic features of the musical pieces under study, their content, as well as the means to optimally solve the technical difficulties of the score/musical text. Hence, the teacher/professor exercises his/her mentorship, relying on the relation of active-cooperation with his/her younger partner who, far from blindly listening to the orders and dispositions of the former, or from imitating him/her, participates and takes initiatives for the purposes of his/her own formation. In this way, (s)he learns to formulate and solve problems related to his/her musical-instrument study, is passionate about the performance accomplishment, about the very process of the piano repertoire learning.

5. Principle on the thorough appropriation of knowledge, skills and abilities ensures that the knowledge, skill and ability base acquired throughout the learning process is kept and reactivated, wherever needed. The information store must be persistent over time, thoroughly assimilated and, at the same time, mobility need characterize the reproduction of the data accumulated by the pupil. With a view to correctly applying this principle, the pupil must be endowed with the necessary techniques for acquiring, consolidating and reactivating the knowledge and skills to be assimilated for each studied discipline. Thorough assimilation will be thereby achieved throughout the learning activity, from the early contact with new knowledge, on through completion, advanced study, to their integration within ever more comprehensive systems. In this way, in the pupils' and students' competence portfolio, ever richer connections will establish, meant to store, to selectively and systematically reactivate, with a view to reproducing these acquisitions. The enhancement of the functional connections between knowledge items, their stabilization within the system occurs by *repetition*, which is applied during each lesson, in some enhancement, consolidation sequences, as well in recapitulation, review and systematization specific lessons. Logical, creative repetition should prevail, which assumes connecting newly acquired knowledge to the previous ones. Each discipline requires its specific modalities of knowledge repetition, enhancement and consolidation. In terms of piano study, conscious and creative repetition is an essential procedure to repertoire assimilation.

In conclusion, the ***principle of thorough appropriation*** requires pupils to assimilate the new informational acquisitions so as to creatively use them wherever necessary, throughout their subsequent professional activity. This rules out superficial instruction, which is characterized by learning "in assault", at examination time, as such a learning results in equally rapid oblivion, in confusion, in a feeling of insecurity, which induce a

discomfort of uncertainty. The subjects to learn will be organized and systematized by logical units, with synthetic conclusions and schemes. The learning material must be judiciously selected, with focus on the essential. The process will be triggered by the pupils' comprehension of long-term knowledge, by their repetition in specific ways and then by knowledge verification, systematic practicing, with the final result of knowledge consolidation, of newly acquired information enhancement, by individual, rhythmical, sustained, motivated, responsible study.

6. Principle of systematization and continuity in the educational process reflects the requirement for the learning contents, as well as for the ways of organizing one's activity, to follow logic principles, to comply with a system targeting and ensuring continuing progress. In terms of content, the information to be assimilated ought to be logically and gradually organized, the intellectual processes and operations need be programmed and the skill-formation actions should be scheduled.

First and foremost, the curriculum disciplines need be judiciously selected. Therewith, the content of each discipline must be organized at internal level. Knowledge will be systematized in ever more complex structures, according to the model of the *ideas anchor* evoked by D. Ausubel. This approach will result in mental ordering and overview of the world in pupils' consciousness. Systematization also means continuity, consequence in information acquisition, so that the acquisition of the knowledge at a certain level should constitute solid basis for higher-level knowledge. Information organization by the logical criterion pursues the elaboration of a learning plan. The more logically and progressively the learning contents are ordered, the easier and safer the notional system of some science is acquired, which leads to the gradual deployment of mental operations. In this way, newly acquired knowledge are gradually integrated into mobile systems, capable of being restructured, resulting in higher-level structures, of broader scope.

In terms of continuity, today's society increasingly faces the problem of **permanent education** or **continuing formation**. Contemporary world is characterized by the rate of change, specific to the knowledge paradigms, to the social organization and structuring forms. Today's youth need be prepared to successfully comply with change, with system rupture etc. The issue of the continuity affecting all lifelong learning organization forms is ever more stringently raised in training youths from and for all disciplines. Specifically, musical performance bears the seal of mobility. A good instrument player is also a lifelong learner. This is an intrinsic feature of the profession. (S)he incessantly accomplishes his/her personal learning techniques and procedures, accepting withal his/her colleagues' good

ideas, useful suggestions, as well as beneficial influences from any other activity, even from personal experience. There is about an unlimited sphere of innovation, of creative attempts, of personal, individual syntheses. A high-performance instrument player is continuously progressing and transcending his/her ever more higher limits, aiming at attaining the excellence of the live artistic act, taking place in concert, with audience.

The piano professor obeys the rule of continuously improving, refining, perfecting oneself. The vocational-education exigencies are ever higher; the problem of the pupils' and students' yielding higher performance becomes ever more complex, in the context of contemporary life. Such challenges compel a good teacher/professor to enrich his/her methods, approaches, to incessantly reformulate his/her professional objectives. Nevertheless, the piano teacher from the optional, leisure-time education, ought to continuously adapt his/her ways of working with pupils. Firstly, (s)he should be particularly inventive in motivating his/her pupils towards complete, active learning, so that latter might enjoy music, yet without abdicating the requirements of pedagogic honesty. Then, (s)he must be particularly inventive in forging rapid, simple, efficient solutions for the pupils to manifest interest in the chosen musical pieces to study, without great investment of time and effort, which the amateur apprentice only possesses in limited quantities. A good teacher/professor manages to provide high-quality musical-instrumental education to pupils/students at all piano-development and genetic musical-endowment levels. (S)he ought to be educated and trained to efficiently work with apprentices of all ages, from the younger ones to enthusiastic elderly. Modern pedagogy sets high standards to the didactic act professed with subjects of all ages and receptivity levels. It is a challenge successfully faced, in terms of initial and continuing education for piano teachers/professors, by means of special working modalities.

7. Principle stipulating the observance of the age specificities and individual particularities supposes, first and foremost, the thorough awareness of the child's psycho-physical features, at various stages of his / her development. This principle pursues the didactic-activity deployment, in compliance with dynamics of the relation between development and learning.

The development of the child's psychic-structure in line with the evolutionary tendencies, the interaction between psychic processes within the educational process – all these aspects are in close connection to the learning mechanisms and to the functions fulfilled by education throughout the development of human personality. The attainment of superior structures, at all levels of the child's psyche, as well as the elaboration of new structures is governed by learning and practicing. Development directly depends on learning.

In line with the *stadial theory* in terms of child development, formulated by Jean Piaget, each child represents an individuality, (s)he possesses a structure and a level of the psycho-physical features, of the various personal endowments, in a unique and unrepeatable form.

The compliance with the individual differences between children, the distribution of the tasks, rhythm and working modalities based on each child's possibilities represents a consequential principle. For the piano education, it stands for basic lawfulness. I myself can attest, based on my own experience of having worked with young-age pupils to master's students, that I have obtained from each the maximal performance level, by formulating expectations, by requiring efforts and results adequate to the age and individual genetic endowment, I can prove that I have intensely worked, approaching sensitive, complex set of problems with exceptional children, achieving genuinely amazing outcomes, on presenting them, in an accessible way, pretentious systems, such as schenckerian analysis of scores.

8. Principle of accessibility to knowledge, skill and ability, derived from the principle above primarily refers to the content of the educational process. According to this principle, there is absolutely necessary to adapt the difficulty level characteristic of each task, to the age specificities and individual particularities, which supposes the transmission of knowledge in line with each pupil's level of understanding; withal, there being promoted, enhanced and stimulated the effort directed towards comprehension and assimilation, manifested by subjects. In the learning process, one should not avoid difficulties; on the contrary, one ought to courageously cope with them and overcome them by personal effort successfully guided by the professor. In the classroom, the learning material must be processed and submitted by teaching staff so as to be accessed, assimilated, by natural effort and to produce rich formative effects. Throughout the lessons, the teacher/professor will approach and deliver in a clear-cut and accessible way the content of the problems under consideration, will explain in a simple and appropriate manner the notions, rules, definitions. (S)he will make sure, in each lesson stage, that an adequate feedback has been achieved. Our personal practical experiences confirm that we can teach highly complex musical pieces for piano, to pupils/students with superior capabilities, even if the problems they raise allegedly surpass the normal age-specific possibilities. Success is conditioned by the teacher's / professor's adequate didactic strategy, by his/her sharing out the tasks and by assisting the pupil/student in his/her effort towards understanding and coping with difficulties in full awareness, out of free will.

To synthesize, **the principle of accessibility** supposes the pupil be capable to solve a learning task under normal conditions of psycho-physical

effort. There will be considered a) pupil's / student's age b) the volume of knowledge and skills to be assimilated for a particular discipline – both overloading and under-loading will be avoided, as well as the unilateral presentation of the learning material, c) guidance of the individual study, so that the tasks might be fulfilled, in other words to be concrete, realistic, d) rhythm of explanations, so that it might be followed by pupil/student, being adjusted by teacher / professor to this effect, in view of optimal perception.

A few rules stemmed from practical experience, whose validity has been established over time and whose application and observance are recommended, are of the utmost importance to increase the accessibility of the learning material. They are: **to learn following the path 1) from concrete to abstract; 2) from nearby to faraway; 3) from unknown to further unknown; 4) from particular to general; 5) from simple to complex; 6) from simple to difficult.**

I will mention, in conclusion, the requirement expressed by Comenius with respect to the role of music in the pupil/student-moulding process in school: "Everything accessible to hearing should be rendered available for hearing".

9. Principle of instructive learning, of the unity between instruction and education, stipulates that, in addition to scientific information, the pupil / student must be offered perennial, humanist values, constants of humanity. The educational process ought to display exemplariness, representativeness, with the final aim to mould a human personality which interweaves performance, ethics and professional deontology. The school will promote models to follow and will stimulate the current and future society's civic activism.

10. Principle of optimistic hypothesis supposes the teacher / professor always see the bright side of the child's personality, and treat the latter not as an underage underdeveloped being, but as human being in formation, with particularities for each developmental stage. The tutor / mentor must be exigent, rigorous, exacting; yet inspirited by love for children and youth, by respect and solicitude towards pupils/students, whom (s)he ought to consider collaborators and younger friends. Pedagogic optimism must be a frame of mind underlying the full deployment of the evolutionary path followed by the young artist or piano teacher/professor. The pedagogy of optimism helps us overcome obstacles, problems, crises and failures, which we should face as challenges and opportunities for progress.

As a consequence, by the set of problems under consideration and by the vision upon the aforementioned, we purposed in this approach to forge the way through to success, of this *musical-instrumental* educational process, which should meet today's expectations and particularly the

expectations of the future audience, upon the manner of forming artists endowed with multiple skills, capable of promptly coping with rapid changes, malleable and open to innovation, creative, yet provided with a solid set of basic values meant to ensure further evolution, in perennial perspective, for the musical art.

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