

## **MUSIC TEACHING IN CONSERVATORIES AND PROCESSES OF INCLUSION OF PUPILS WITH DISABILITIES**

### **INSEGNAMENTO DELLA MUSICA NEI CONSERVATORI E PROCESSI INCLUSIVI DEGLI ALLIEVI CON DISABILITÀ**

**Salvatore Colazzo<sup>1</sup>**

University of Salento  
salvatore.colazzo@unisalento.it

#### **Abstract**

Current Conservatoires debate emphasises the urgency of attempting to make this institution accessible to music-studying students with disabilities. One impediment is a sort of "vice of origin" of Conservatories, which have always been oriented toward the valorization of talent through a pedagogy characterised by strict discipline. The requirement to include disability convinces them to reconsider their pedagogical perspective and teaching methodologies. Not only must conservatoires be inclusive, but they must also be fully integrated into society, freed from the logic of the "ghetto." This will fully and concretely implement the provisions of Law 508/1999, the application of which has proven and continues to prove more complex than anticipated at the time of its enactment.

Il dibattito attuale relativamente ai Conservatori segnala l'urgenza di aprire quest'istituzione all'esigenza di rendersi disponibile ad accogliere gli allievi con disabilità, che vogliono studiare musica. Un freno è costituito da una sorta di "vizio d'origine" dei Conservatori, da sempre configuratisi come orientati alla valorizzazione del talento, attraverso una didattica improntata a rigida disciplina. La necessità di includere la disabilità li porta a dover riflettere sulla loro visione pedagogica e sulle metodologie didattiche adottate. Non solo i Conservatori debbono includere, ma essi stessi devono essere pienamente inclusi nella società, liberandoli dalla logica del "ghetto". Ciò darà piena e concreta attuazione alle previsioni della Legge 508/1999, la cui applicazione si è rivelata e si va rivelando più complessa di quanto all'atto della sua emanazione si potesse immaginare.

#### **Key-words**

Conservatoires, disabilities, Law 508/1999, music, talent.  
Conservatori, disabilità, Legge 508/1999, musica, talento.

#### **Introduction**

In accordance with Law 17 of January 28, 1999, the so-called AFAM sector (i.e., higher education in the musical, artistic, and choral fields) initiated, with great delay, a process to include students with disabilities and SLD in order to ensure their right to study. The causes of

---

<sup>1</sup> Professore ordinario di Pedagogia Sperimentale

this delay lie in the history of Italian school and university institutions as well as in the attitude of our culture, which has hierarchized knowledge and relegated the arts to a secondary role in the education of citizens. The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that the success of this process is contingent on a detailed analysis of art institutions, specifically conservatories. Such an analysis cannot be conducted through regulatory intervention; rather, it must originate from within the institution.

## **1. From selectivity to inclusion: a difficult path**

From the standpoint of the so-called *capability approach* (Sen 1986), society should be responsible for ensuring that all individuals have access to education and cultural consumption (Saito 2003; Colazzo 2014). This means that it should offer a variety of options so that every life forms can flourish. The fewer choices available available in a social context, the fewer opportunities individuals have to pursue their own life goals. This invites us to investigate the self-representations of society. Can society truly provide equal opportunities for all? Is education truly accessible to all who wish to participate? Does everyone have the same opportunity to recognise that humans are more than the conditions that actually exist?

For today's sensibilities, education and culture have a meaning that is closely tied to the exercise of citizenship, i.e., to the rights related to national membership. Education and culture are therefore inalienable subjective rights: they must be guaranteed in order for everyone to achieve self-actualization by recognising their own needs and following their own path of development. This requires that the state and its institutions expand and qualify formative opportunities.

The improvement of educational opportunities should include both general education and access to the musical heritage, which the Italian population can hardly appreciate due to its low musical literacy. Low musical literacy has more impacts: insufficient access to understanding and use of musical language prevents people from developing their own intelligence, which, as demonstrated by researchers, requires music for fulfilment.

Conservatories are needed to play an important role within this theoretical framework by embracing a more inclusive concept of music while still providing students with a specific and high-quality education. The meaning of "specific and quality education" cannot be taken for granted; rather, it is the central issue to be discussed in light of new scientific findings by calling into question everything previously regarded as musical quality education.

The standard quality factor that conservatories have previously sought is incompatible with instances of justice and equity, which include inclusion. Lemma "quality" has always been associated with giftedness, talent, and meritocratic selection procedures in the traditional conservatory setting. An excellent paper recently published on *Micromega* (Cogliandro and Scognamiglio 2022) explains how meritocracy and inclusion are totally at odds: Schools, communities, and societies that aim for meritocracy are neither equality- nor equity-focused; therefore, mechanisms that mitigate the anti-educational effects of the meritocratic ideal must be investigated. Historically, all social systems considered it appropriate to accord privileged status to individuals or groups on the basis of particular traits, characteristics, or conditions. In traditional societies, selection was based on caste and socioeconomic background, whereas in more competitive liberal societies, selection was based on merit.

A common objection to school meritocracy is that so-called worthy students are often favoured by existential conditions such as family background and financial support. (Colazzo 2022).

"Certainly, there is also the element of personal effort, the ability not to waste one's talents and to respect the value of hard work, as well as a sacrifice mindset and a sense of duty". However, do not such elements, which are basically characterised by or related to the education received,

also have a dispositional component? "We are well aware that not everyone has the the same capacities for concentration, attention, and sacrifice; and if one has not received the proper education to cultivate these "qualities," does that constitute a personal deficiency?" (Cogliandro & Scognamiglio 2022).

## **2. The problematic nature of today's concept of inclusion**

Inclusion, according to the inclusion-related pedagogical literature, necessitates a new conception of school timelines and spaces — mental, cultural, and physical — as well as the abandonment of certain concepts that have shaped pedagogy and didactics up until now. Inclusion challenges pedagogy and didactics and prompts us to question whether what has been done to promote inclusion in the Italian school system thus far has been sufficient to make it a reality. The inclusion debate has led to the categorization of students into two groups: those that have been included and those who have not yet been included. The former are the recipients of standard transmissible didactics, while the latter are special, individualised, and supervised by specialised teachers.

Inasmuch as it does not encourage reconsidering didactics in order to make them more inclusive, i.e. accessible to all, this way of considering inclusion is contradictory. This is the challenge schools face today, and we are just starting to handle it (Bocci 2021). This is true concerning the school system. Regarding conservatories, the debate needs to be initiated, keeping in mind that the same debate outside of this field already has a history and a body of literature that must be considered.

*Disability studies* have led to the idea that inclusive education is not limited to students who need to be included in specific environments, but rather an effort to make schools inclusive through innovations in pedagogy, assessment, curriculum, and organisation. Inclusive education requires adjustments aimed at removing barriers that prevent the full realisation of students who would be excluded or marginalised in a traditional setting. Therefore, inclusive education promotes cultural change, particularly in how we consider institutions and personal relations. Inclusion is impossible without what Lapassade called "institutional analysis," i.e., a deep, genuine self-reflection by the institution on itself. Such self-reflection, while problematic for the institution, opens the door to new approaches that allow for a more effective response to new social instances (Lapassade 1974).

The issue of inclusivity in conservatories has the potential to function as a lockpick to unlock their self-referential enclosure.

Will inclusion be able to induce the institution to question its own vision, goals, and the social meaning of its own existence? This question lacks power due to the disparity between selectivity and the culture of inclusion, which necessitates a certain willingness to welcome, to be flexible, and to rebalance institutions, students, and their educational requirements. Consideration of inclusion in conservatories necessitates consideration of the pedagogical significance of the conservatory itself.

## **3. Rigidities of an institution**

Conservatories have been resistant to change in the past; today, they must become Schools for Higher Education that can perform multiple functions, such as education, research, and a third mission. In order to assume these functions, music schools should adopt a cultural perspective that adds value to diversity and provide a formative offer that allows different users to access

the study of music, considering that artistic avant-garde, demo anthropologists, neuroscience, and media communication have contributed to create new meanings and new approaches, claiming that music is the environment in which the acknowledgment of identity and the need for expression of a person coexist. These individuals engage in an implicit form of education that is frequently frustrated or fulfilled outside of formal educational circuits. There are many examples of conservatories' resistance to change, but one in particular stands out. After World War II, the prevailing opinion was that schools needed a democratic turn: Schools should break decisively with the past and the regime that used education to ensure conformism and establish a hierarchy of knowledge to clearly distinguish the elite from the people.

This requirement applied to all institutions, from elementary school to university, but not to conservatories, which continued to accept individuals whose integrity was compromised by their past.

An important document to analyse is the inquiry proposed by Guido Gonella (later Minister of Public Education from July 1946 to July 1951), who appointed a commission tasked with hypothesising questionnaires for school operators in order to obtain a general framework regarding schools. The commission was assisted by a team that was tasked with gathering specific and accurate data regarding the spiritual and material conditions of the time. When conservatories learned that the same questionnaire had been sent to schools and individual professionals, they immediately responded with scepticism. However, they responded by sending back approximately sixty questionnaires filled out by the directors of their institutes after interviewing the professors.

The commission that drafted the questionnaire believed that a change in programmes, curricula, repertoire, and overall organisation was required, and participants were persuaded to agree. It wanted to know if the existing institution met the current needs of music education, and if the answer was negative, the causes of this inadequacy should have been investigated. It appeared to direct the respondents' thoughts towards taking into account society's new needs for music, broadening their vision towards an education that is not only focused on the training of the virtuosic, but is also capable of responding to articulated cultural and economic needs associated with music and performance. Some of the questions concerned the relationship between general education and music studies, with the majority of respondents favouring the inclusion of a middle school in conservatory education rather than requiring a middle school licence for admission to the conservatory, thereby delaying the beginning of music studies until age 14. The commission also deemed it prudent to require conservatory music teachers to hold a certificate for pedagogical and teaching skills. When asked for their opinion on the proposal, the conservatory environment responded that teaching artistic subjects does not require a teaching credential. When asked if it would make sense to establish a chair in musicology, the response was also negative. Carlo Delfrati commented bitterly on this, stating, "It is evident from the questions and responses that there is no desire to question the underlying methodologies, framework, vision, or mission of conservatory education. Solfege is viewed as a prerequisite for beginning instrumental lessons, which serves as a paradigmatic example. "Despite the carnage of students tortured through the septiclavium before they can make the most basic contact with music, the teachers of the 42 music schools reaffirm the 'music ban' on the child at the threshold of his studies." (Delfrati 2017).

"The typical model for conservatory classes in 1948 was the same as it had been in the late 1800s," based on a direct relationship between teacher and students, and so it had to be for the interviewees. In fact, they proposed "limiting general cultural music through the addition of technical courses".

Nevertheless, the inquiry proposed by Minister Gonella did not lead to any effective result, since, although he was in charge of the Ministry for 5 years, he decided to take a pause for thought. This pause in the reform of conservatories lasted many years, even during the administrations of Segni and Moro, until the introduction of middle schools in 1963, despite continued opposition.

"Finally [Conservatories] will resign to 'undergo' middle school: [...] the 1962 Gui Law [...] had made middle school compulsory for all students, including music students; no one would be able to avoid it, including conservatories" (Delfrati 2017).

#### **4. Recent developments**

The team that prepared the questionnaire for the above- mentioned conservatories questioned teachers about the possibility of establishing "a) first grade musical schools as experimental schools to introduce students to music, theory, solfege, choral singing, history, and notions." B) second grade musical institutes, with the same function as conservatories. C) third grade musical institutes, as universities for talented youngsters." The response was: let's stick to the actual institutes, which are prestigious in comparison to other nations because they introduce students to music at a young age.

In 1969, Senator Andrea Mascagni proposed a reform to bring music studies in line with the Italian school and university system (Mascagni 2018).

Conservatories raised their voices against this reform, calling for the slogan "No to Secundarisation". Delfrati commented sarcastically:... At the end of the 1990s, it was believed that it might be possible to avoid the risk of secondaryization by proposing a reform that eliminated the distinction between the primary, secondary, and university levels in order to align conservatories with universities. "All universitarians" was the new slogan that welcomed Law 508, 1999.

The issue of aligning life and school, taking into account all of the changes that have occurred in Italian society and culture over the past few decades, is always the central and unresolved issue, as is the need to overcome the old didactics and develop a new one, in line with the new achievements of psychology, pedagogy, and neurosciences. Today, we are in a situation that drives us to recognise the absolute necessity of new tools for school and music education, so that the new curricula can meet the concrete needs of music in society. This requires abandoning the notion that the preparation of an executioner must emphasise virtue and genius.

The issue is not limited to repertoires, but also the didactic methodology, which must be updated through research leading to the propagation of scientific foreign literature on pedagogy and specialised musical didactics, as well as the development of national literature on the same subject. A study that allows us to overcome the dichotomy between general and musical education by recognising that basic musicality and its educability represent a cognitive and linguistic starting point that allows us to imagine a link between it and advanced musical education.

It is crucial to understand how the student learns, which implies that teaching is neither self-referential nor based on a predefined abstract ideal, but rather has a specific learning mode, thanks to a didactic planning capable of interactive regulation, based on the notion that teaching finds its own criterion in the monitoring and evaluation of the learning process.

Today, we cannot understand as meaningful the gap that has existed between general and musical education for so many decades, with each having substantially different goals, contents, and methods.

### **Closing remarks**

Accepting the challenge of inclusion is possible for conservatories today, but only if they finally overcome their tendency toward monoculture, i.e. pursue talent formation as their sole objective. Delfrati properly asserts, "The musical enthusiasm of the last fifty years has spawned never-before-seen fields of activity, including performance skills, animation, journalism, music criticism, musicology, new technologies, publishing, collaboration in film, entertainment, multimedia, entrepreneurship, and the cultural industries. Anyone can become a virtuous and brilliant performer in any of these fields. Assuming the school supports the aspirant through differentiated, targeted coursework " (Delfrati 2017). In such a school, with broad horizons, capable of recognising and promoting each student's resources, it is possible to imagine cultivating each student's unique abilities and providing opportunities to all through a design that is targeted, competent, and oriented. As a prerequisite for the adaptation of content and methods, a cultural redefinition is therefore urgently necessary. Inevitably, a rigorous teacher training programme and the introduction of research in conservatories will follow. Only through research will it be possible to comprehend the significance of the phenomena that influence the musical reality of today, which is increasingly characterised by the pervasiveness of computer media that enables millions and millions of people around the world to create music, including through the modification of sound sources of the most diverse cultural origins, widely and easily accessible on the internet. Without research on tools to implement innovative teaching, only ineffective teaching formats will be repeated. Conservatory didactics must be able to rely on a thorough and critical understanding of the most innovative proposals in order to graft their own practise into them; otherwise, they will be forced to blindly rely on what is already known and practised, leading to a replication of what already exists in forms that will prove dysfunctional over time.

### **References**

Bocci F. (2021), *Pedagogia speciale come pedagogia inclusiva. Itinerari istituenti di un nuovo modo di essere della scienza dell'educazione*, Guerini, Milano.

Brattico E. et alii, On the association between musical training, intelligence and executive functions in adulthood, *Frontiers in psychology*, 10, 1704.

Cogliandro G. , Scognamiglio C. (2022), I sistemi educativi devono essere inclusivi o meritocratici? "Micromega", 26 luglio; all'indirizzo: <<https://www.micromega.net/sistemi-educativi-inclusione-meritocrazia/>>

Colazzo S. (2014), La dimensione metodologica: strategie, metodi e tecniche della capacitazione, in Binanti L. (a cura di), *La capacitazione in prospettiva pedagogica*, Pensa Multimedia, Lecce, 2014, pp. 65-78.

Colazzo S. (2021), *Pedagogia civile, educazione al patrimonio, educazione alla cittadinanza*, "Nuova Secondaria" - n. 5 2021, pp. 4-6.

Colazzo S. (2022), Meritocrazia, voce dell'Enciclopedia di Bioetica e Scienza giuridica, Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, Napoli.

Delfrati C. (2017), Storia dell'insegnamento musicale in Italia, e-book, Antonio Tombolini editore, Loreto.

Lapassade G. (1974), L'analisi istituzionale. Gruppi, organizzazioni, istituzioni, Milano, Isedi.

Mascagni A. (2018), Scritti sulla musica, Armonium, Milano.

Saito M. (2003), Amartya Sen's Capability Approach to Education: A Critical Exploration, "Journal of Philosophy of Education", 6 may, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9752.3701002>

Sen A. (1986), Scelta, benessere, equità, trad. it. Il Mulino, Bologna.

Toto G. (2016), Intelligenza musicale e abilità correlate, "Educare.it – Pedagogia e Psicologia", Vol. 16, n. 7, Luglio 2016, pp.61-63.