

Form Tutors in the Joint Teaching of Music: Perspectives and Experiences

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I DOCENTI TUTOR NELL'INSEGNAMENTO CONGIUNTO DELLA MUSICA: PROSPETTIVE ED ESPERIENZE

ABSTRACT

In the Portuguese school system, form tutors (FTs) are an intermediate education management structure. The form tutor is responsible for a position of coordination and orientation with a «threefold function»: a relationship with students, relationship with the student's family and relationship with other class teachers. The joint teaching of music is a part of the educational system in basic education. It is optional and provides musical and instrumental training to students who are interested in taking it. In order to achieve this, there is a system, subject to protocols, between general education schools and schools specializing in teaching music. There is also the position of FT in specialized schools and it also includes a «threefold function». However, these FTs have the additional role of representing music teachers at the class council, which is held at the general education school. Thus, in these cases, both FTs have a fourth joint area, between the music school and the general education school, which makes the relationship between them even more complex. This paper is based on the analysis of empirical data obtained from the testimonies of FTs regarding their representations and experiences in leadership and the coordination of teachers among schools in which there is a joint teaching system. The aim of collecting narratives is to look into some of the main challenges and confrontations related to leadership issues, which we assume to be the focus of those who have the role of form tutor in that specific context.

Keywords: Collaborative work, Form tutors, Joint teaching system for music, Leadership, Teacher coordination.

1. INTRODUCTION

In Portugal, one of the ways to learn music is the joint teaching system for music. The joint teaching system is a public teaching system, even though it can be subject to protocols with a private school specializing in teaching music, as we shall explain more ahead. This is a part of the educational system in basic education. It is optional and provides musical and instrumental training to students who are interested in taking it. In order to achieve this, there is a system, subject to protocols, between general education schools and schools specializing in teaching music. Although general education schools try to merge all joint teaching system students into appropriate classes, the same class can have students from that regime and students who do not attend a joint teaching system.

Thus, the joint teaching system demands that schools specializing in teaching music (SSTM) (private or public academies, schools, conservatories) and general education schools work together. The representative from the SSTM, hereinafter referred to as FT2, is a central figure in this joint work in both schools of general and music teaching. We have chosen to designate this person as FT2 because students who attend this system also interact with a FT from the general education school, who we shall designate as FT1.

In the Portuguese school system, form tutors work as an intermediate education management structure, with leadership tasks among students, parents/SS included in key stages 1, 2, 3 and 4, developed by a teacher selected from among the general teachers assigned to the class. The FT is responsible for a position of coordination and orientation with a *threefold function*: students' career guidance, relationship with students' parents/SS and coordination of the educational activities of other teachers. Although legislation specifies that this position should only be given to suitable teachers, given the leadership tasks they will have to perform, in practice, it is given haphazardly to any teacher, regardless of his/her time of service, experience in leading groups, whether he/she has enrolled in specialized training or not and other variables.

In the case of joint teaching system classes, a representative of music teachers (FT2) becomes a participant in the class council at the general education school and, therefore, is under the direction of the general education FT1. Thus, in these cases, in addition to several other prerogatives performed (cfr. Lima, 2011) by this sole body, there is also a fourth task, as both FTs must guarantee the connection between the music school and the general education school, which makes their action more complex. This fourth joint area aims at implementing what is already established in Decree-Order nr. 691/2009, of June 25th, and becomes even clearer in Decree-

Order nr. 225/2012 of July 30th, for this type of teaching: «Both teaching establishments that offer study plans of courses attended in a joint teaching regime must establish the necessary mechanisms for purposes of pedagogical coordination and evaluation» (article 10, line 2).

In this paper, we have adopted an exploratory approach to FT tasks in the specialized teaching of music regarding the articulation between the school specializing in the teaching of music and the general education school. That is, to approach the coordination of teachers in the teaching of music and the articulation of this coordination with FT1, namely the FT of the general education students. We are expecting to see two sides or playing fields of leadership: FT2 (the FT of the SSTM) along with teachers of the same school and the articulation between the two FTs (FT2 SSTM; FT1 = general education). It should be mentioned beforehand that both share a common focus: educating children; but, each one does it with purposes, cultures, guardianships and identities which may be very different from one another.

2. METHODOLOGICAL NOTE ON THE INTERFACE BETWEEN TEACHING AND RESEARCH

The empirical work for the analysis of FT representations regarding their educational relations/coordination between FTs and SSTM teachers was based on interviews carried out by Master's degree students with FTs who were contacted by them. The interviews were based on a script created by students and teachers from the subject of educational coordination and form tutors, included in the program of the Master's degree in teaching, which also includes the teaching of music. This was a training process for promoting a shared research.

Thus, its preparation occurred in different stages: first, as this work was carried out with Master's degree students who should be introduced to research processes, a methodological approach concerning the research as a data collection strategy, focusing on its theoretical and technical principals, was developed; then, for each group, students chose one of the aspects of the FT's responsibilities – student academic guidance; teachers' pedagogical guidance, relations with parents/SS – and then developed a set of questions for it; this set of questions was later approved by the class. Afterwards, the team of teachers gathered the results from different classes, chose and systematized the questions and suggested a pilot survey which was then analysed again by each class in order to be validated.

In the case of the Master's degree class for music teaching, the final script also included specific questions pertaining to the independent action of FT2 from the specialized teaching in music. The final script resulted from the feedback received and each group used it in the interview conducted with the FT2 identified by them.

With regard to training of the Master's degree students, the direct contact with a teacher who was also a form tutor, in addition to a reflection regarding theoretical issues related to intermediate pedagogical management and the research element, provided an approach to the reality of everyday life within a school environment, which contributed to a better articulation between theoretical and practical knowledge of teachers involved. Later, the interviews were entirely transcribed and discussed in a group by each class according to a set of relevant studies and texts which were selected and suggested by the team of teachers and were related to the themes and issues discussed.

The following step in research, which had already been fully developed by the teacher-authors, was the processing of the information corpus collected in a total of 27 interviews (divided into subgroups: E1 – female, 26 years old; E3 – female, without information; E4 – female, 26 years old; E5 – male, 33 years old; E6 – female, 44 years old). In this paper, we shall only use information processed from 5 interviews, which correspond to interviews carried out with FT2s from the specialized teaching of music. The data were processed according to the content analysis technique, following the steps suggested by Maroy (1997); that is, after fully transcribing the question sheets and skimming the text. From this process, an analysis grid was created which included categories from the sheets created by us. Then, their content and final social interpretation was assessed.

Our goal in explaining the way in which knowledge was provided to our students is to account for the ethical principles we support in our role as teachers/researchers since we see ourselves as leaders dedicated to shared leadership processes.

3. LEGAL FRAMEWORK OF A FT WITHIN THE SPECIALIZED TEACHING OF MUSIC IN JOINT TEACHING

The joint teaching of music is part of the education system in basic education. It is optional and provides musical and instrumental training to students who are interested in taking it. In order to achieve this, there is a

system, subject to protocols, between general education schools and schools specialized in music teaching. This teaching system was created by Decree-Order nr. 691/2009 of June 25th as a consequence of the general principles defined by the Basic Law for the Education System, namely aspects which concern goals. It also pursues what is defined in Decree-Law nr. 344/90 of November 2nd. The principle of a flexible management of the curriculum is the basis for this system and increases the autonomy of schools, according to which they can choose Basic Dance, Music or Gregorian Chant as part of their programmes. In this law, the goal for basic education is, according to article 7, line c: «To provide physical and motor development, value hand-made activities and promote artistic education in order to raise the awareness of different ways of aesthetic expression, and to identify and stimulate skills within this domain». In Key Stage 4 the goals are: «To guarantee the development of rational thinking, reflection and scientific curiosity and deepen fundamental elements for humanistic, artistic, scientific and technical culture that may supply the appropriate cognitive and methodological support for any continuation of studies and inclusion in active life» (article 9, line a), and also to «provide students with the necessary knowledge to understand aesthetic and cultural manifestations and allow them to perfect their artistic expression» (line b). The study plan for students who attend these courses consists of a set of subjects which integrate common subject areas in basic education, replacing the subjects of Musical Education and Visual and Technological Education in the regular regime by subjects in the artistic area. The Basic Music Course includes Musical Training, Collective Classes and Instruments.

It is mandatory that art subjects are taught by teachers from a school specializing in music teaching. Students may attend them, according to proximity issues or organizational decisions, at either one or two schools. This means that students who attend general education at an EB2/3 school (a school for key stages 2 and 3) may have to go to a school specializing in music in order to attend one or all three subjects of the artistic element.

Although general education schools try to group students from a joint teaching system into specific classes in order to make the organization of schedules easier, it is possible that one class may have students from that regime and students who do not attend a joint teaching system. Teachers who teach music subjects or their representative, designated by a pedagogical council at their school, should participate in class councils at the general education school for articulation and evaluation purposes (point 3, article 8, Decree-Order nr. 691/2009). Although the aforesaid Decree-Order does not include this condition, the representative teacher is usually designated as the FT by the school specializing in music teaching. This position usually coin-

cides with that of Music Training or Collective Class teacher, as these are the ones who work with the entire group of students. It should also be mentioned that there are public schools specializing in music teaching, conservatories, which are based on an integrated teaching model (general teaching, specialized music teaching) which are governed by the same organizational regime as other basic education public and key stage 4 schools and, therefore, have a clearly defined FT.

At private or charter schools where music is taught, the existence of a FT depends on the rules of procedure, but it is always mandatory to choose a representative teacher in cases where there is a joint teaching system in order to represent the articulation with the general education school. Thus, in addition to career guidance tasks with students, coordination among teachers and mediation with parents/SS, the person holding this position has another task: that of representing music teachers at the class council held at the general education school and, therefore, this FT is under the direction of the general education FT. As we said above, this paper focuses and questions coordination among teachers at specialized schools and their articulation with (in)existent leadership and collaborative work practices (cfr. Roldão, 2007) between player groups in both schools involved.

Before we continue with the presentation and discussion of data, it is important to clarify that we see the FT as a central figure in the coordination and promotion of collaborative work between the teachers of a class and we do not limit his/her action to an administrative-bureaucratic sphere. The reduction of a FT's field of action to a bureaucratic management position, within current conditions, becomes increasingly insufficient; therefore, the work in this position should be that of educational leadership which means the «creation of conditions and contexts where teachers may learn new practices, such as professional community» and, also, «to support the growth of a team and networking in order to face challenges and increase students results» (Bolívar, 2012, pp. 62, 78, 79, respectively).

Thus, among the various underlying goals which come with the role of educational leadership played by the FT, we highlight collaborative work which has already been mentioned previously. At this stage, it is important to mention that this is:

[...] an articulated working process, thought of as a group, which allows a better achievement of the planned results, based on the enrichment brought by the dynamic interaction between various specific knowledge and various cognitive processes collaborating among themselves. It implies a strategic planning of the goal which guides (teaching) tasks and a suitable organization of all devices within the group which allow: (1) achieving what is sought more

successfully (desired learning objectives); (2) activating different potentials of all participants (in the context of group-subject, group-class or others) as best as possible in order to involve them and guarantee that productive activity is not restricted to only a few; and (3) increasing the knowledge built for each by introducing new elements that come from the interaction with all others. (Roldão, 2007, p. 29)

Despite all the potential virtues of educational leadership and collaborative work, it is necessary to recognize that both have their *tensions and dilemmas* (cfr. Hargreaves, 1998; Roldão, 2007; Bolivar, 2012), particularly, as in the case studied, when there is a set of students (class) who study under the guidance of two groups of teachers (SSTM teachers and GES teachers) and who are, therefore, subjected to two FTs (FT2 from the SSTM and FT1 from the GES). Furthermore, this scenario also includes teachers and FTs who belong to different schools with different cultures, each of them with particular interaction standards among teachers. Therefore, we assume that the FTs and teacher groups involved in the joint teaching system do not work in an isolated manner, but they also do not work with most teachers of the class (as a whole). On the other hand, they work in smaller subgroups, just like the general education subgroup and the music teaching subgroup. Thus, we are facing a situation similar to what Hargreaves (1998, p. 240) called *Balkanized cultures*. These are some of the aspects we explored in the analyzed context.

4. (IN)EXISTENCE OF LEADERSHIP(S)

Without a second thought, FT2s consider that within a collaborative work context among all teachers of students who attend a joint teaching system, «the greatest difficulty is the interaction with general education teachers» (I4). When, eventually, there is some type of cooperation between these two organizations and their agents, it usually is the result of the efforts of the music teaching school and its FT, when the general education school is interested in promoting, for instance, a Christmas party, to which music students can significantly contribute. Thus, there are FT2s who are advised «Early on, at the beginning of the school year, by the Director of Studies, to keep permanent contact with the general education FT» (I1); others start this process on their own initiative: «I was the one taking the first steps on the academy/regular school aspect and so I can talk about it because I was the first to go to the school» (I3).

These FT2s feel that they are also the ones who try to connect the two agent groups. Two FT2s expressed their opinion regarding this issue as follows: «In my case, I am aware that I am the one who links the two sides more» (I1), and «there is little cooperation between the academy and the school group, and I was the one who suggested all activities» (I4). In some cases, they even invite the FT1 to evaluation meetings at music schools, although this initiative has met with little response, as one FT2 explains: «[...] actually, he/she has never been present at a meeting and so we write down the guidelines and send them to the general education school. Usually, I am also not present at the evaluation meeting in the general education school» (I4), that is to say that bureaucratic resources are nearly the only instruments that guarantee a connection between teachers from one or the other school. Despite the aforesaid attempts, there are also discourses which indicate that «there is still a lot of work to do» (IE), because FT1s and teachers from regular education schools are still «a little reluctant» (I3) to receive FT2s.

In other situations it is even possible to see the total lack of collaborative work in each teacher group, whether they are from the SSTM or from the regular education school, for several variable reasons. Some are related to «administrative or other constraints which create difficulties or significantly discourage the possibility of different procedures» (Hargreaves, 1998, p. 193). We believe that this type of constraints take place among the organizations that manage both curriculum components, as «the fact that I am not there, at the school, makes things a little more difficult [...] I have already tried to speak to the Geography teacher and the Visual and Technological Education teacher and things are not that [...]» (I2). The fact that some curriculum areas which used to give space and the possibility to develop collaborative works between FT1s and FT2s as well as their respective teachers have disappeared, can also be seen as a political-administrative constraint, as I3 explains:

[...] because the *área de projecto* (class project) was the subject which used to unite the two schools the most, as there were joint projects between the two schools. There is an educational project at the school and in the class project we used to develop common projects between the two schools, which united teachers, students, parents ... it was great. This year, they took that away from us and we felt very sorry about it.

Furthermore, FT1s and regular education school teachers are not fully aware of the importance of specialized music teaching, as we have gathered from the discourse of this FT2: «[...] because, sometimes, general education school teachers are not fully aware of the issue of specialized artistic teaching in

music and, sometimes, they are not fully informed of what is going on and, sometimes, it is the FT at the academy who must explain, who must inform, who must be solidary and also motivate the FT at the general school» (I1).

According to some accounts, in other situations the issue is not only the lack of awareness, but also the lack of knowledge of the joint teaching system itself and of the formal possibilities for collaboration it implies. There are even situations where the general school tries to exclude those representatives from decision-making areas, thus ignoring any possibility of recognition for any type of leadership. From our perspective, this situation takes the shape of a *non-participation* scenario on the part of general education school teachers (cfr. Lima, 1992) to the FT2, as a representative of the school specializing in music, in the Class Council. The following account denounces this situation:

General education teachers didn't even know exactly what joint teaching was and I had problems, or rather, many problems, early on at the general education school. I can even tell you about a very funny episode: on the first evaluation meeting at the school group, they didn't want to let me in or want me to be part of the meeting and it was necessary to call the headmaster who brought the rules of procedure and had to tell the teachers that I was a part of the meeting and of the class council. (I4)

From this it is possible to see that there is an acute lack of new educational opportunities which, early on, makes any leadership opportunity impossible, especially when it must be previously based on collaborative work between the general education school and the music school. It is no longer about administrative and organizational constraints, but rather a different type of constraint of a political nature, namely concerning the social representations of an unequal status between the curriculum area of music and other academic subjects. FT2s say that there are regular education teachers who «psychologically pressure their students throughout the school year, saying that music is just a hobby and even encourage them to quit it» (I4) and that «[...] schools still largely don't accept music» (I4). The discourse of I2 also follows this philosophy, identifying a hierarchy between the subjects that compose the curriculum in joint teaching, which can be seen as a hierarchy between teachers; according to her, there is «a distinction between subjects which are deemed to be first or second class. This is also related to the students' workload which then makes time too scarce to handle everything [...]». This social representation regarding second class subjects is followed by a social representation regarding the existence of «second class teachers», reasons which may help us to understand why leadership processes are immediately blocked. How can a teacher who does not recognize another as his/her equal

in professional terms, feel that he/she is led by the other or respect the leadership that others rightfully try to develop?

We believe this situation of valuing only curriculum subjects is related with «the political-ideological environment and, in particular, the pressure to present justifications [which] strongly condition schools to essentially attend to the quantification of their results in very specific and previously defined areas» (de Lima, 2008, p. 366).

But, in any case, this minor status, given by general education teachers to the area of music must be qualified as unfavourable to collaborative work between agents in both schools.

5. FINAL SUMMARY

Going back to the dilemmas and tensions that this new situation of the joint teaching of music may create, and using only the narratives provided by teachers experienced in Form Tutoring in SSTM, it is easy to see that different levels emerge, especially when considering two basic concepts used by us and that, we believe, interfere in the action of form tutors: collaboration between teachers and leadership. Focusing on the FT2 as the pivot in such activities, we are able to verify that s/he receives leadership status from the SSTM directorate in order to conduct the coordination between teachers in those schools and to cooperate with the FT1 at the GES: as to internal co-workers, coordination is viable due to the local proximity, professional identity and reference of an organizational culture shared by them; in other words, it is possible because teachers share particular interaction standards; therefore, the intermediate leadership granted to them in common conditions has every condition for it to be carried out. As regards the relationship with colleagues of class councils of the GES, the situation is different: they live in different professional spaces and do not share the same cultural and professional identity; they live in different spaces when they go to class council meetings, which are statutorily unknown to most GES members; therefore, when leadership is mentioned, it is a circumvention; at best, there may be cooperation *agreements* between the FTs and not work developed by most class council teachers (as a whole). In this context, coordination between FT2 regarding FT1 does not exist and any collaborative work between teachers from one school or the other may be truly constrained. The situation described takes on the characteristics of *Balkanized cultures*, as it is more the type of collaboration that divides the two teacher groups and FTs (cfr. Hargreaves, 1998), because, if there really is collaboration, it only happens inside each group.

Thus, recognizing the complexity of the academic life of students in a joint teaching system, the existing *dissonance* between each of their FTs may have a serious impact in the entire learning process. There is still another challenge which was not mentioned in any of the discourses: the coordination role between FT1s and SSTM teachers. Besides, it is not the role of the directorate in any of the schools to indicate the FTs which will be in contact with the other.

When comparing this information with Bolívar, who advocates the existence of an educational leadership able to «create conditions and contexts so that teachers may learn new practices as a professional community», in other words, «to promote steps that stimulate interaction and joint work», we found that, according to the analysis carried out, there is still a long way to go in order to really implement shared leadership between FT1s and FT2s, and «support the growth of a team and the joint work capacity to face challenges and increase students results» (Bolívar, 2012, pp. 62, 78, 79, respectively).

Finally, it is important to mention that we consider the analysis carried out by us as exploratory and, above all, incomplete because, in the future, it should be compared with the representations and experiences of FTs from the SSTM who specifically participated in the joint teaching of music.

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Laws and Decree-Orders

- Law nr. 46/86 of October 14th – Basic Law of the Educational System.
- Decree-Law nr. 344/90 of November 2nd – It establishes the general bases for the artistic education organization at pre-school, school and extra-curricular contexts.
- Decree-Order nr. 691/2009 of June 25th – Creation of the Basic Courses in Dance, Music and Gregorian Chant.
- Decree-Order nr. 225/2012 of July 30th – Regulation of the Joint Teaching System for Music.

RIASSUNTO

Nel sistema scolastico portoghese, i registi di classe (RC) rappresentano una struttura intermedia di gestione. Il regista di classe è responsabile di una posizione di coordinamento e di orientamento con una triplice funzione: il rapporto con gli studenti; il rapporto con la famiglia dello studente e il rapporto con gli altri insegnanti di classe. L'insegnamento congiunto di musica è una parte del sistema educativo di istruzione di base. È un insegnamento opzionale e consta di corsi di formazione musicale e strumentale per gli studenti che sono interessati a frequentarlo. Per raggiungere questo obiettivo c'è un sistema, soggetto a protocolli, tra le scuole di istruzione generale e le scuole specializzate in insegnamento della musica. C'è anche la posizione di RC in scuole specializzate e comprende anch'essa una triplice funzione. Tuttavia, questi RC hanno il ruolo aggiuntivo di rappresentare gli insegnanti di musica presso il consiglio di classe che si tiene presso la scuola di istruzione generale. Così, in questi casi, i cosiddetti RC hanno una quarta area comune, tra la scuola di musica e la scuola di istruzione generale, che rende ancora più complesso il rapporto tra le aree. L'articolo si basa sull'analisi dei dati empirici ottenuti dalle testimonianze fornite dagli RC per quanto riguarda le loro idee sulla leadership e le loro esperienze di leadership e di coordinamento degli insegnanti tra le scuole in cui vi è un sistema di insegnamento congiunto. L'obiettivo del raccogliere racconti è quello di esaminare alcune delle principali sfide poste dal tema della leadership, che assumiamo essere il centro dell'attenzione per coloro che hanno il ruolo di RC, in quel contesto specifico.

Parole chiave: Coordinamento degli insegnanti, Insegnamento della musica, Lavoro collaborativo, Leadership, Regista di classe.