

The Ethics of Scientific Coordination of Music Students with Intermediate Specialized Training

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ABSTRACT : The ethics of scientific guiding of music students with intermediate specialized training requires high professional and moral responsibility on the part of the teacher. The supervisor must be able to strike a balance between academic requirements and the actual level of training of the student, while cultivating critical thinking, intellectual autonomy and methodological rigor. Respect for the artistic individuality and learning pace of each student is essential, since the training of a young musician involves both the acquisition of theoretical knowledge and the development of a personal view on music as a cultural and scientific act. The ethics of student guiding also requires clarity in setting objectives, transparency in assessment, and the avoidance of any form of pressure or favoritism. The supervisor has an obligation to guide the student in choosing appropriate topics, structuring their research, and observing academic writing and quotation requirements, thus contributing to the development of adequate scientific behavior. In the case of students with intermediate specialized training, it is important to adapt one's language and teaching tools to facilitate the understanding of complex concepts while maintaining academic standards. The ethics of student guiding thus becomes a mentoring process based on trust, competence and mutual respect.

KEYWORDS : ethics of scientific guiding; intellectual individuality of the student; models of good practice;

Introduction

In Romanian music education, the training of young researchers often takes place in vocational institutions that combine intensive practical training with academic objectives.

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Students with intermediate specialized training are somehow in the middle: they have a solid technical foundation, but do not always have the theoretical and methodological tools required for thorough scientific research. This scientific coordination involves not only pedagogical responsibilities, but also a deep ethical commitment (Nica, 2019).

Scientific coordination cannot be confined merely to methodological guidance. It involves an asymmetrical relationship, in which the coordinator holds a position of epistemic and moral authority. It is precisely this asymmetrical relationship that requires a well-defined ethical framework: encouraging critical thinking, supporting independent inquiry, valuing personal progress, and, last but not least, recognizing the limitations of the student's level of training (Truța, 2024). This, an ethic of balance emerges - between a demanding and supporting attitude, between autonomy and guidance, between assessment and learning.

This paper is aimed at exploring the fundamentals and ethical implications of the scientific coordination of music students at an intermediate stage of their training, while also suggesting models of good practice adapted to the specificities of the vocational field.

Defining scientific coordination in music education

Scientific coordination in the field of music education differs significantly from classical forms of academic guidance. Music, as both an artistic and scientific discipline, requires an articulation between the sensitive, performing, and theoretical-analytical dimensions (Balint, 2017). This, in the case of music students with intermediate specialized training, coordination involves reconciling the accumulated practical experience and the need to develop coherent scientific thinking.

The coordinator/supervisor has the role of turning the musical gesture - often intuitive and subjective - into a critical, well-founded, accessible discourse. To this end, the research methodology must be adapted to the student's intellectual and methodological development, avoiding both overestimation and excessive simplification of requirements. We refer to students who often come from vocational schools, where the emphasis has been mainly on performance and less on theoretical approaches. Therefore, coordination involves:

- the development of basic research skills - formulating a hypothesis, structuring a work plan, selecting relevant references, knowing the rules of citation;
- introduction to scientific language specific to music – analytical terms, aesthetic concepts, critical vocabulary;

- **building a relationship of trust and cooperation** between the student and the coordinator, allowing for a gradual but demanding learning process (Opre, 2025).

This mission involves a nuanced understanding of what Bernard Gendron calls *articulation critique* (Gendron, 2002, p. 17), i.e., the transposition of musical practice into an articulated critical discourse. In the case of students at intermediate stages, this process must be guided with pedagogical tact and epistemological responsibility, without compromising the rigor of the scientific approach.

Another essential feature of coordination in this context is **the recognition of the specific value of musical thinking**. Although music students are researchers in training, we start from their minimal aesthetic/specialized experience, which can be used as a source of reflection. The role of the coordinator is, therefore, to channel this experience/basic knowledge into coherent forms of analysis. Scientific coordination in music education this becomes an act of translating musical gestures into concepts, of accompanying the student on the path of discovery of their own scientific voice.

Ethical grounds of scientific coordination

In addition to teaching, guidance or assessment, scientific coordination establishes a relationship of an ethical nature. This is based on a fragile balance between the epistemic authority of the coordinator and the student's need for intellectual autonomy. In the case of musicians with intermediate specialist training, this balance is all the more delicate, as their previous training has focused on performing reproduction and less on theoretical reflection.

Respect for the student's intellectual autonomy

One of the basic principles of coordination ethics is respect for the intellectual and aesthetic individuality of the student (Schellekens, 2022). Although the young researcher is at an early stage of their training, their opinions should not be underestimated, but cultivated with patience. The coordinator is not a provider of answers, but a provocateur of relevant questions. This attitude is also supported by the constructivist principles of modern pedagogy, according to which knowledge is actively constructed through social and cognitive interactions (Bruner, 1996).

Coordinator's epistemic responsibility

The coordinator must be a role model of rigor, intellectual honesty, and critical thinking. They have a responsibility to correct the student's methodological deviations, familiarize them with the norms of academic ethics (originality, avoidance of plagiarism, correct citation of sources), and monitor the quality of scientific discourse. In this sense, coordination involves not only professional competence, but also an ethic of rigor, avoiding compromises that could undermine the integrity of their scientific endeavors.

Avoiding abuse of authority and aesthetic manipulation

In the arts, a situation frequently encountered in music, there is a risk that students will automatically adopt the aesthetic views of their coordinator, especially if they do not have sufficient critical tools of their own. Ethics dictate that the coordinator's personal taste should not become a normative act, but rather a starting point for aesthetic dialogue. Imposing a one-sided perspective (e.g., a preference for a particular repertoire or performing style) can inhibit the student's creative and analytical potential. As Jean-Jacques Nattiez states, 'the act of performing is a semiotic act' (Nattiez, 1990, p.15) – that is, it involves a choice of meanings depending on context, history and intention. The coordinator must therefore avoid turning the mentoring relationship into a form of aesthetic dogmatism.

Balanced support: between empathy and objectivity

Ethical coordination also requires **a balance between empathy and objectivity**. During the training process, students may feel pressure to perform and be assessed. A balanced coordinator will channel their energy into constructive feedback, recognizing effort and supporting progress, while also being prepared to set clear boundaries when necessary. A lack of objectivity can lead to uncritical validation, just as lack of empathy can lead to blocks or even the idea of intellectual abandonment (Queloz, 2025).

Principle of responsibility

The commitment of the coordinating professor (Rosacrans, 1962) in the case of bachelor's degree theses by music students with intermediate specialized training involves a two-fold responsibility: academic and formative. On the one hand, the coordinator has the obligation to guide the student in complying with the rigors of scientific research, ensuring topic consistency, methodological validity, and compliance with university ethics standards. On the other hand, the coordinator must adapt academic requirements to the student's level of training, actively contributing to the development of writing, analysis, and critical thinking skills. In this sense, the professor becomes a mediator between university requirements and the specific potential of the student, who is at the intersection of artistic and theoretical training (Yao-Ping Peng, Ting Cai & Xiaoyao Yue, 2025).

This commitment also implies ethical involvement in assessing student progress, avoiding the imposition of topics that are inaccessible from a methodological or conceptual point of view. The coordinating professor must create a balanced working environment in which the student is encouraged to use their musical resources and previous experiences in performance or analytical listening, without being constrained by overly academic models. This, coordination becomes a process of supporting the autonomy and professional dignity of the future musician, in which research is not a mere bureaucratic formality, but a stage of intellectual and artistic growth.

In conclusion, the ethical grounds of scientific coordination in the field of music involve a constant adjustment between the roles of trainer, dialogue partner, and epistemological role model. This adjustment becomes essential when working with students who are at the intersection of practical training and intellectual development.

Ethical challenges in coordinating students with intermediate training

Scientific coordination of music students with intermediate specialized training (Msangya, 2025) involves a series of specific ethical challenges, found at the intersection between artistic education, theoretical training, and the demands of academic methodology. These students have not usually completed a full university course and often face gaps in their conceptual understanding and formalization of scientific discourse. In this context, the coordinator must responsibly manage a series of dilemmas: what standards apply? How is progress assessed? What does originality mean at this level?

Need for guidance in clarifying theoretical concepts

One of the major challenges is the epistemic gap between the student's practical experience and the requirements of scientific research. Many of the concepts of aesthetics, semiology, musical analysis, or the history of musical ideas may seem abstract or inaccessible without an adequate explanatory framework. The coordinator has an ethical duty not to penalize the student for systemic gaps in training, but to support them in acquiring clear and stable foundations. This requires additional teaching effort, but it is necessary in order to gradually explain concepts, provide concrete examples, and recommend accessible and relevant sources. It is essential that students do not simply imitate scientific form, but understand the meaning of their scientific endeavor (Katz, 1969).

Balance between demanding and encouraging

Coordination ethics involves avoiding two extremes: excessive tolerance that dilutes scientific rigor and excessive demands that inhibit student motivation. For those with intermediate training, the risk of discouragement is high, especially when their efforts are assessed against the same criteria applied to advanced students. A coordinator focused on respecting ethical principles will set appropriate goals, recognizing individual progress, which also involves offering constructive criticism. This approach is aligned with the principles of formative pedagogy, which focus on assessing the process, not just the final result (William, 2011).

Originality vs. level of training

Originality is an essential criterion in the assessment of a scientific paper. However,

at the intermediate level of training, originality must be understood in relation to context. It takes into account, for example, the novelty of a research topic, offering a personal view on an analyzed score, or the reasoned interpretation of a stylistic phenomenon. We note that imposing standards of theoretical innovation that exceed the student's actual level of training is contrary to the ethical principles of the educational process. The coordinator must distinguish between formal originality (conceptual innovation, theoretical contribution) and functional originality, which consists of the student's ability to relate information, argue, and coherently structure an approach (Corazza, 2016).

Tension between the performative and reflexive models

Music students with vocational backgrounds are often trained according to a performative model, where success is measured by the ability to perform highly difficult pieces, by the degree of virtuosity in approaching standardized repertoires, and by immediate receptivity to the mentor teacher's explanations regarding the content of the proposed score. Scientific research, on the other hand, requires reflexivity, critical thinking, and distancing oneself from the object of study. The transition from one model to the other involves an effort of intellectual reconversion and careful support from the coordinator, who must use the accumulation of interpretive skills without absolutizing it. We refer to this transition stage as one of the most important ethical challenges: how can the student's artistic identity be maintained without turning it into an obstacle to their theoretical development? (Fragkos, 2016).

Case studies and examples of good practice

In order to understand the practical applicability of the ethical principles discussed above, it is essential to analyze case studies or models of good practice drawn from the experience of scientific coordination of music students with intermediate training. These examples demonstrate that ethics is not just an abstract set of rules, but active teaching practice, configured in relation to the needs, level, and potential of the student.

Case study: structuring a research paper in a vocational context

At the UNAGE Faculty of Performance, Composition and Music Theory Studies, a final-year student enrolled in the *Music* program was encouraged to write a research paper on *The compositional style in Frédéric Chopin's piano studies*. Although her theoretical training was limited, she often stood out as a pianist in group recitals, acquiring rich interpretative experience in the romantic repertoire. Based on this premise, the coordinator suggested a gradual working model, which included three stages.

Guided reference exploration, with sources adapted to the student's level;

Writing short analyses on various topics instead of standard chapters to encourage personal expression;

Integrating elements of performing experience into the analysis of the pieces,

as a form of reflective expression.

This approach allowed for a coherent work, original in its personal angle of analysis and methodologically sound, without requiring a sophisticated theoretical apparatus. The coordinating professor's ethics consisted of respecting the student's training reality, relying on her authentic resources, and encouraging articulate musical thinking (Markham, 2017).

Good practice: learning through model analysis and dialogue

An effective principle in vocational coordination is learning through model analysis examples (Björk, 2023) an activity in which the coordinator suggests a model analysis fragment, discusses it with the student, and then they adapt it to fit the student's work. In this way, the young researcher does not formally imitate, but learns how to think in a structured way and write coherently. In the case of another bachelor's degree thesis written by a graduate of the *Music* program, thesis entitled -*Comparative stylistic aspects between Ludwig van Beethoven's Violin and Piano Sonata No. 5, Op. 24 and Johannes Brahms' Violin and Piano Sonata No. 2, Op. 100* - this method was used successfully, with the student analyzing, together with the coordinator, pieces of the same genre from the Romantic and Neoclassical stylistic areas, then applying the same principles in the commentary on the works under consideration. Constant dialogue between the coordinator and the student, in the form of regular meetings, written feedback, and encouragement of self-assessment, was essential. The result was a rigorous thesis, which, although not pretending to be theoretically original, was valid in its consistency, argumentation, and judicious application of the tools learned.

Avoiding an inappropriate model: the failure of standardization

A telling counterexample is the imposition of a rigid academic model on a graduate with a bachelor's degree in *music*, whose perception of research activity can be located at an intermediate stage. In this case, they find themselves in the unenviable position of having to go through all the known stages of writing a rigorous scientific thesis in a condensed and superficial manner: complex critical apparatus, comparative analysis, extensive references. The result will materialize in a thesis lacking in-depth understanding, produced mechanically, with passages taken from partially verified sources, which, in turn, are integrated irrelevantly. From an ethical viewpoint, this approach becomes problematic, generating frustration and disengagement, without achieving the desired educational objective (London, 2022).

These examples support the idea that coordination ethics requires differentiated pedagogy (Lindner, Katharina-Theresa & Schwab, Susanne 2020), adjusted not only to the student's level of competence, but also to the specificity of the musical field. In arts education, rigor is not opposed to empathy, and high standards must also include the human and aesthetic dimensions of training.

Conclusions and perspectives

The ethics of scientific coordination of music students with intermediate specialized training cannot be confined to a simple set of academic conduct rules. It is a complex educational practice at the intersection between pedagogy, epistemology, and the psychology of training. The coordinator is not merely a specialist sharing knowledge, but also a mediator between artistic sensitivity and scientific rigor, between performative tradition and the demands of modern research.

Throughout this paper, it has been argued that ethics in this context implies:

- respect for the student's specific training and valuing their performing experience;
- promoting a climate of trust, dialogue, and reflection that encourages the development of scientific thinking;
- avoiding the imposition of unrealistic standards or rigid research patterns;
- assuming a formative role that balances exigency with empathy, criticism with support, professional distance with teaching openness.

A coordinator who is conscious of ethical principles does not abandon rigor, but adapts it to the student's level of understanding; does not impose their own views, but encourages the development of a personal critical voice; does not oversimplify the content or turn it into an insurmountable obstacle. Therefore, coordination is not an act of authority, but a process of formative guidance, oriented towards autonomy, reflexivity, and meaning.

In the long run, adopting solid ethics in coordinating students with vocational backgrounds contributes to:

- improving the quality of education in arts institutions;
- training reflective musicians who are capable not only of performing, but also of critically understanding the art they practice;
- encouraging interdisciplinarity and dialogue between music theory, aesthetics, pedagogy, and cultural sociology.

There is therefore a need for a constant rethinking of the role of the coordinator in relation to the transformations of contemporary music education, in a spirit of intellectual responsibility and ethical openness. Only in this way can the act of scientific coordination become a true space for training and intellectual emancipation for young musicians.

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