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## Music teaching as culture: introducing the *pontes* approach

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### *Abstract*

The *pontes* (bridges) approach may be viewed as a teaching guide for action in music education. It may help music teachers to articulate the different aspects that surround the teaching–learning process, especially those related to cultural interfaces, such as: the student’s personal characteristics, the elements and essence of the sociocultural context, student’s knowledge and previous musical experiences, and the new knowledge to be learned. The *pontes* approach implies significant musical encounters between the student and the music. *Pontes* relates to: positive attitude, observation, naturalness, technique, expressiveness and sensibilities. This article is based on the partial results of a study about the music pedagogical knowledge of the masters of musical oral traditions. It is organized in two sections: (a) the theoretical basis for the proposed practices; and (b) specific examples for the use of *pontes*.

### *Key words*

formal education, informal education, in-school, music teaching, out-of-school

### **Theoretical foundations**

Recent studies have been developed that focus on the music class in the Brazilian school curriculum (Hentschke, Oliveira, & Souza, 1999; Oliveira, 1991, 2000, 2001a, 2001b, 2003–06; Oliveira & Costa Filho, 2000; Souza, Hentschke, Oliveira, Del Ben, & Mateiro, 2002) and on the masters of musical traditions from Bahia, Brazil (Oliveira, 2003–06; Souza, Hentschke, & Oliveira, 2003–06). They show that music is done at school for different purposes including, among others, recreation and cultural events. But its use as an educational and cultural activity is less frequent. Teachers and schools do not have enough tools to facilitate the use of different musics in the school context. This becomes a complex task for the music teacher and for the school, mainly if the music class includes music appreciation and performance practices (Arroyo, 1999; Gomes, 1998; Prass, 1998; Rios, 1996; Stein, 1998).

Music is part of the compulsory Arts program in the Brazilian system of education, which includes Music, Dance, Art and Theatre at the basic level. But several difficulties constrain

the quality of the music education programs developed for regular schools. These include: the short duration of the music lessons; the lack of adequate infrastructure for music lessons; the tendency to organize the school calendar around festivities, visitors, educational trips or other such events; the high level of truancy; the lack of teachers' competence to teach the whole diversity of musics that abound in the region; and the lack of articulation between formal and informal music and artistic activities. In spite of these problems, one can see examples of good teaching, and many professional pop and classical musicians who started learning music in out-of-school programs are developing successful music careers. In some regions music is even at the center of the social life of the community. *Capoeira* groups and *Candomblé* religious communities in Brazil use music as one of the most important supports for their lives. Many non-governmental organizations of the third sector use the artistic languages, especially music, as the main support for curricular development, with social, cultural and professional benefits for the participants.

Other studies show that people learn music in social relationships, with opportunities and motivations found in the local context where they live (Gomes, 1998). Sociology of music education studies shows the diversity of musical practices that exist in society and that help the process of musical transmission for the population. Music education is provided not only in schools (Brandão, 1981), but also through social interactions in the cultural context and through communication media such as TV, internet or other self-instructional didactic materials.

In this text, we assume that music education methods and systems, defined as formal and informal, in and out of school, must be seen as distinct and complete. They seem to have specific methods and characteristics, and should be well understood and respected in their integrity and special features. If schools and music teachers are using world musics for music appreciation and performance activities, they may need to identify partnerships with practitioners who have knowledge about the traditions and the different contexts, and who may develop active exchanges between tutors and experiences in and out of schools.

Music education practices should provide teaching–learning pedagogical structures that do justice to the complexity of culturally diverse societies. Teaching music nowadays means that the music teacher should be prepared to deal with difficult choices about the musics to be taught, the contexts, the tradition, problems of authenticity, and special features of the teaching methods. A contemporary approach for music education must consider time-honored values as well as creativity and innovation. Consequently the music teacher should be prepared to deal with people who are part of living traditions, should know how to adapt to new circumstances in order to survive as a professional and keep music teaching alive and vital.

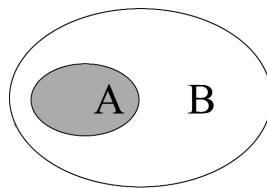
### ***In-school and out-of-school music activities***

Educational planning is developed to different degrees, both in formal and informal musical settings. All activities have different levels of planning, dimensions, intentions, timings and contexts. These processes include mental actions, reasoning, values, reflections, interpretations, and human critical perceptions of people in relation with the world. In essence, the variable for the music educator is the relationship between the spontaneous and the conscious, and all other relationships that may appear significant during the educational encounters between teacher and students. These mental actions are conceived by individuals in relationship to their past experiences with the world, with people within their circle and with the communication media. Are these media 'informal'? Sometimes the spontaneous encounters may display more 'formal' bridges, pedagogical actions or activities than in formal contexts. Some cultures display bridges that are crystallized and formalized in the communities through practice, modeling or through the processes of oral transmission.

There are implicit formal and informal characteristics in all musical activities; there may be different degrees of them in each pedagogic activity. It seems that formal and informal activities in music are never totally different or opposed.

A link with Euler's Math theory from the 18th century (Machado, 1988) can be made in order to explain a relationship between the concepts of formal and informal. Euler conceived four basic propositions, explained by diagrams. For the purpose of explaining the relationship between formal and informal contexts in music pedagogy, the following examples are given.

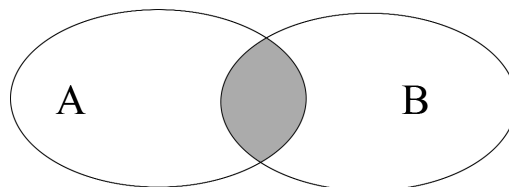
In the first proposition, every A is B; all elements of the set A belong also to set B. In this case, set A is included in set B. This means that all elements of activity X done inside the school are present also in activity Y and developed in an out-of-school context.



**Figure 1** Proposition 1: set A is included in set B.

- **Example:** All the musical and other structural elements of the traditional play songs performed by the students from the first grade of the elementary-level school are present also in the playground songs sung by children in free-play contexts out of school.

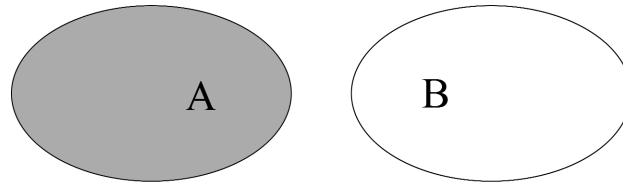
A second relationship sees some of A overlapping with B, or there is at least an element that belongs, simultaneously, to A and B. A relationship of intercession exists between A and B. This means that at least some element of activity X done in a school context is present also in activity Y and developed in an out-of-school context.



**Figure 2** Proposition 2: there is an element of intercession between sets A and B.

- **Example:** The musical improvisation, developed by music teacher John in the classroom, using a syncopated rhythmic pattern with percussion instruments, is also present in the performance of street musicians, an out-of-school context.
- **Example:** The elements of conducting the performers of a percussion group by a leader who rehearses in a technical music school are also present in the rehearsals of the young band 'Lactomia' directed by a music leader in the neighborhood of Candeal de Brotas, in an out-of-school context in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil.

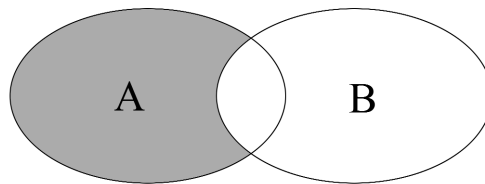
A third relationship exists when A is not B. When A and B do not share common elements they are distinct or separated. This means that all the elements of activity X done in a school context are not present in activity Y done in an out-of-school context.



**Figure 3** Proposition 3: sets A and B are distinct.

- **Example:** All elements of the traditional music score-reading activity done in a school context (such as music conservatoires) are not present in the music of 'Capoeira' activities done in an out-of-school context.

A fourth relationship exists when some part of A is not B, or, there exist some elements of A that are not B, or, A is not a subset of B. This is a set of differences, which means that some elements present in activity X done in the school context are not present in activity Y done in an out-of-school context.



**Figure 4** Proposition 4: some part of set A is not B.

- **Example:** There are some elements in a choral activity in four parts that are developed in the school context which are not present in free group singing done in the 'Terno de Reis', a performance of traditional music that takes place in an out-of-school context in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil.
- **Example:** There are some elements in a rehearsal of a wind instrument band with percussion done in a school context that are not present in a rehearsal of pop music bands of the 'Pagode' music genre done in an out-of-school context. Although these bands have similar characteristics (the sound and pop music repertoires preferred by young people), the students in the school context work with greater degrees of expression when exploring the parameters of intensity and agogic excitement.

The basic assumption adopted here is that there may be different relationships between formality and informality that surpass pedagogic and artistic musical activities. As an example, let us take the concepts of improvisation and composition. The improvisation may be a process of creation with less erudition (formality) and more flexibility (informality), but with planning (formality) and preparation (formality), despite being instantaneous (informal).

- **A further example:** the curriculum as a document (formal) also provides recommendations for practice (informal), which is worked and applied during music classes by the teachers, who improvise and make some innovations (informal). Teachers' experiences and their personal thoughts and values are incorporated through more informal ways. In essence, even schools' curricula may share the formal and informal concepts. The music class plans developed by music teachers are a reflection not only of a curricular document, but also from the practical actions of teachers in daily school, home, family

and community activities. Teacher education, developed in academic or community settings, may have learning–teaching structures that are registered in the teacher’s memory, so the degree and relationship of formality and informality may vary.

Art music (formal) contains elements of the oral tradition, elaborated and documented in scores or films, videos, CD-ROMs, and so on. The repertoire of popular music is mainly transmitted orally (informal). But at the same time it also has formal characteristics such as documentation in records, videos, booklets with tablatura and pop chord symbols.

The formal reinforces the analysis and the planning. The informal reinforces the making, spontaneity and expression. Depending on the level of consciousness of the participants, a teacher may create or organize several bridges of teaching that are adequate to the contexts, the repertoire and the individuals. This includes cognitive, affective, psychomotor and sociocultural aspects.

Both academy and community may get more positive results if formal and informal processes of music education are studied respecting the integrity and essence of the systems. The limits can only be respected if we as music educators analyze and study them carefully. The inadequate and poor use of world musics in and out of school must be avoided, since one of music education’s aims is to preserve the integrity of all music. According to Carlos Brandão (1981), nobody escapes from education: in streets, in churches, in musical groups, life is always mixed with education; schools are not the only place where it happens and the teacher is not the only practitioner. Since children spend a lot of time in schools, they must be prepared to include music as an important cultural and learning activity.

### ***Applications of the pontes approach***

The concept of *pontes* (bridges) may be considered adequate to deal with formal and informal music education practices. The use of the *pontes* metaphor was chosen to inspire teachers to develop and build paths of thoughts and specific knowledge transitions that may facilitate or motivate the development of the student. It may help music teachers to articulate all the different aspects that surround the teaching–learning process, especially those related to cultural interfaces, such as the student’s personal characteristics, the elements and essence of the sociocultural context, the student’s knowledge and previous musical experiences, and the new knowledge to be learned.

Music teachers should have enough information (theory and practice) to develop appropriate educational teaching–learning structures and bridges that will facilitate their interactions with students, the context, the methods, the curriculum, the school, the music repertoire and performance styles. Teachers have to be conscious of their limits. The teacher may always try to self-actualize in order to cope with the cultural dynamics. Music students may, at first, suspend value judgments about the music repertoire and avoid developing an attitude of prejudice.

The music teacher may be considered a creator of teaching–learning structures. Educational *pontes* are built between what the student knows and the new knowledge to be learned. But sometimes the teacher has to be flexible enough to admit that the student is also a creator of *pontes* as well as being a learner.

The principle around the *pontes* approach is that each didactic situation may be similar to another but they are never the same; they are all unique. In order to deal with educational situations, music teachers need to learn and practice the design of several teaching–learning structures and different *pontes* to fit each didactic situation and develop a natural flexibility. I will explain the concept below.

The teacher’s professional responsibilities are very similar to the music composer, since there are creative actions involved with curriculum and class planning. And this task involves

musical knowledge, intuition and creative insights as well. When the music teacher works, he or she at first develops some thoughts about how that subject (a song, a concept, a musical value judgment, a fingering, a scale, a rhythmic motive, a new musical repertoire, and so on) can be conveyed to the student. Then, the music teacher thinks about some activities that can facilitate the process, and a first draft of the plan is drawn up. This is called the 'teaching-learning structure'. It is not yet a class plan since the time variable has not yet been considered, nor other constraints that will limit the ideas conceived. Sometimes this structure may be a whole module or even a whole project that will take several 'classes' to develop. Others may take only part of a class to develop.

*Pontes* may be used during all the different phases of the creative design of plans, since the mission of the teacher is to facilitate the education of the student and develop significant musical encounters between the student and music. But the concrete identification of these *pontes* may be more obvious during the creative 'improvisatory' or 'informal' activities that the teacher develops when the class is in progress. The teacher at this moment makes or induces the 'sewing', the 'suture', or the final connections between what the student is learning or being motivated to learn and the subject being taught. These are the *pontes* or bridges in *action*. But in all different phases of the design of the teaching structures, the teacher may be using this concept of bridges in *thought*.

These are the main characteristics of the *pontes* approach:

- positive approach or attitude, perseverance, articulation power, and ability to sustain student's motivation, believing in student's potential for learning and development;
- observation capacity: carefully observe the student, the context, the daily situations, repertoires, and representations;
- naturalness, simplicity in the relationships with the student, the curricular and life content, with the institutions, the context and the participants: trying to understand what the student expresses, or wants to know and learn;
- techniques fit for each didactic situation: ability to design, develop and create new adequate teaching-learning structures (of different dimensions);
- expression: creativity, hope and faith towards the development, the expressiveness and learning ability of the student;
- sensibility towards the several different musics, to the artistic languages in general, to nature and the environment, to the needs of the students and the different contexts.

The use of the *pontes* approach may be easy or difficult. It depends on many different variables. These include:

- teacher's style;
- teacher's previous experience in music and in education;
- teacher's flexibility;
- teacher's personal and cultural values;
- flexibility of the actual context.

The different qualities or competencies of the music teacher in these particular points may help the development of a good attitude towards the facilitation of teaching some types of subject matter and music repertoires. If the teacher's training includes a broad repertoire both in theory and in practice, and he or she participates in a high level of creative and analytical activities, the perspective is better than for a music teacher who is trained through a very traditional curriculum. Previous educational and musical experiences in the family,

community and in social gatherings can add great value to the teacher's development. The teacher's sensibility and ability to observe and deal with different students, colleagues, contexts, problems of discipline and value judgments may also facilitate the development of teaching structures under the *pontes* approach.

Other important points are the personal and cultural values that a teacher has developed during his or her life. Some teachers are very religious, some are very technically oriented, some are teacher-centered, and others defend a free student-centred approach. All these types of personal value affect to differing degrees the attitude of the individual music teachers towards flexibility in the facilitation of learning. Finally, the use or development of significant connections and articulations mostly depends upon the degree of flexibility of the school and the administrative body, the educational philosophy of the pedagogic program, the nature and knowledge of the teacher, and the nature of the cultural context.

## Using the *pontes* approach

Pedagogical examples are given below to illustrate the *pontes* approach.

### **P: Positive approach**

Mary comes to the class without having studied the school's musical repertoire. Since she started to go to the movies, watch TV soap operas and go out with her boyfriend, she has had less time to study piano and listen to the music assigned in the music class. What does the music teacher do to motivate and give new instruction to Mary? Paul, her music teacher, using the concept of *pontes*, chooses not to speak specifically about this, because it is a hard subject to talk about, even though he obviously prefers her to come to the class knowing the new assigned repertoire well. Paul asks her to listen to a section of the new repertoire, performed by him. Then he plays a CD with the same piece of music (not a very long section) and starts to draw out Mary's ideas on each performer's interpretation, comparing each performer's ideas and techniques. Paul gets Mary motivated to discover new insights into the piece that she was not curious to know about before, e.g. how it may sound when ready to be performed to an audience. Then Paul asks Mary to perform a difficult section, very slowly. He shows her that the new fingering could assist the performance of that difficult section. Mary plays many times, gradually increasing the tempo. Paul sings the melody with Mary, claps the rhythmic motives, even comes up with some dance steps to illustrate the rhythms, and makes Mary create other melodic and rhythmic combinations similar to the ones used by the composer of the piece. After many repetitions, Mary discovers that she is able to perform that hard section of the piano piece really well. This accomplishment motivates Mary to find more time to study the new piece of music. Later, Paul asks Mary to perform (solo and duo) the same repertoire for her parents and close friends, during a small party organized at his studio. After that performance, Mary decides to dedicate more time to study the piano and organizes a musical group to perform chamber music by different composers, and Brazilian pop music.

### **O: Observation**

Music teacher John presents his class with a traditional song from a distant nation of the world. As soon as the music starts to be played, he notices some discipline problems. Immediately John asks the students to represent different life situations among the young generation using the music chosen for the class. They represent these situations with drama,



composed music, body movements, letters to the teacher and to colleagues, drawings, etc. Then John connects this with the knowledge to be taught, using group discussion/evaluation.

### ***N: Naturalness***

Paul is teaching Beethoven's Fifth Symphony in a regular Brazilian public school. Students are well behaved and listen to the music. But when Paul asks about the music and its content, he discovers that they were not really listening and the learning results are very poor. Paul is a very social person and knows his students well. He has information about where they live, their families and knows something about their life histories and tastes. Instead of insisting on asking questions about the music, Paul gives them some musical instruments such as drums of different sizes, a lot of bottles and some water. Then he asks the students to fill the bottles with water, and turns them into musical instruments. They have also to combine the sound of the bottles with the tuning of the drums in order to perform the main theme of the Fifth Symphony. After a very enjoyable performance, Paul asks the group to divide in two, and asks the first group to organize an improvised performance (almost a composition) taking the theme of the Fifth Symphony as the main motive. Once they are ready, they present to the second group. These students make critical comments about the improvisation of the first group. Then Paul asks the second group to do the same task, and the first group makes the critical comments. After these activities, Paul talks about musical taste, asks questions about the content of the symphony and makes them listen again to Beethoven's masterpiece. The students' reactions are totally different from the first time. They show that they have developed a real knowledge of that piece of music. With this example we can illustrate two characteristics of the *pontes* approach: naturalness and technique.

### ***T: Techniques fit for each didactic situation; ability to design, develop and create new adequate teaching–learning structures (of different dimensions)***

Music teacher Fred brings his students to visit a community and asks the students to participate actively in all musical gatherings, exploring all the possibilities around the masters of music of that community. Students make a report to other students of what they have learned and observed. They perform the entire repertoire they have learned and produce public performances for other schools of the region.

### ***E: Expression***

Jane teaches a music class, and Mr Brown, her post-graduate supervisor, makes some observations. This is an undergraduate-level Theory of Music class. There are 20 students in the room. Most of them are at the beginning of their university life, so they are a little shy and reserved. Jane tries to teach the concept of melody in different cultures, using a variety of musical examples from different nations. She notices that most of the students show some prejudice against the selected repertoire, but she does not take any noticeable pedagogical action to change her class plan. When Mr Brown notices that almost no student is participating, he asks her permission to articulate a new activity, motivated by a student's question: 'Professor Jane, don't you think these musics are too unmusical? They don't seem to have a real melodic line.' Then Brown proposes that everybody organize a circle and he tells the students to play the game of 'a telephone without a line' (he whispers a phrase to a person, who is supposed to pass it to the next student in the circle). The person does not repeat the phrase. Next, Brown asks the students to repeat a phrase with a melodic line. It is interesting to observe that the phrase turns out very different at the end. This activity stimulates the students to express their feelings of surprise, joy and fun. Then Brown asks them to create

a motive (rhythmic at first) that is significant to him and pass it to the others. Then he asks them to create a melodic motif and pass it to the others. Following these activities, Brown tells them to listen to the music excerpts presented by Jane. Then the teacher proposes the organization of an improvised choir, taking the main motives used in the musical example. Those motives are then explored by the group and presented to other music teachers and students from the school. Brown and Jane notice that after all the activities the student's faces and attitudes are very different from the way they were at the beginning of the class. The students (and Jane!) are singing the musical motifs with expression and creative inputs, motivated by the leadership of Brown's conducting gestures.

### **S: Sensibility**

This competency is one of the most important, and needs to be present in all programs of music teacher training courses and at all times during the music class. Among other aspects, teacher preparation should include experiences and theoretical knowledge about:

- the specific characteristics of the different types of music;
- artistic languages in general (music, dance, plastic arts and theatre);
- the environment;
- the needs of the students and the citizens of a society;
- the nature and organization of different sociocultural contexts; and
- the different pedagogical styles and attitudes related to the different types of music.

The concept of sensibilities is inclusive. When dealing with music cultures, both teacher and student must use perception to gauge each pedagogical situation or musical nuance, or a combined integration between perception and the intellect to deal appropriately with the general or specific impressions that come with each music activity. But at the same time, the music teacher must develop the capacity to control teaching situations, even though he or she is easily moved or affected by natural agents, special types of music or human relationships.

There are different forms of dealing with sensibilities. For example: Bernard is teaching a North American song to Brazilian students. Although he is trained to sing that song, he has a strong foreign accent. Feeling that the melody sounds strange, the student Mary suggests a listening experience for the whole group of students. She says that she has that music on a CD. Bernard feels that Mary's suggestion can help him to improve his language skills. So, he incorporates Mary's suggestion in the next class. Both students and music teacher show sensibilities both towards the music performance and the teaching-learning situation.

### **Conclusion**

This article has focused on the application of the partial results of a study of the music pedagogical knowledge of masters of music from oral traditions and its relevance to the practice of music teachers in school and out-of-school contexts. It presented the theoretical basis for the proposed approach, explained the *pontes* approach, and presented some examples in order to facilitate its application into the practice of music educators when using a culture-oriented approach to music education. Although this knowledge comes from Brazilian experiences, it is possible to generate other perspectives and applications in international contexts.

The teaching of music nowadays has to consider many different variables and conditions

in order to be efficient, adequate, and musically and socially meaningful. Classical methodologies are still valid and efficient, but the world and society have changed gradually. Information on different types of music from different cultures may be readily available in a few years for both students and teachers. Consequently, teacher preparation programs need to consider more flexible, creative and competent curricular options, promoting musical and personal development motivated by the discovery of different types of music.

Schools are socially and politically required to teach and promote music, in spite of the plurality and effectiveness of informal music in community settings. But in order to get the advantages of the plurality of community music and the knowledge displayed by the masters of music, schools need to incorporate new approaches with more informal activities, repertoires, pedagogical processes, materials and music-making know-how and productions. Not only the music teachers but also the generalists must understand well the appropriateness of different approaches used in and out of the school contexts. The application of both perspectives should be done in accordance with the needs of the students and the institutions. Teachers may plan exchanges between in-school and out-of-school activities or apply valid processes to enhance the whole process of education in music. These attitudes will certainly provide better quality to the teaching–learning process and to the discovery of new worlds of sounds.

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## Abstracts

### ***Musikunterricht als Kultur. Anmerkungen zum PONTES Modell***

Das *Pontes* (lat. = Brücken) – Modell kann als eine Handlungs-Anleitung für den Musikunterricht verstanden werden. Es soll Musiklehrern helfen, verschiedene Aspekte zu bestimmen, die den Lehr-Lern-Prozess betreffen, insbesondere solche, die auf kulturellen Bezügen beruhen wie: die persönliche Individualität der Schüler, die Bestandteile und Wesenszüge ihres soziokulturellen Hintergrunds, ihr jeweiliges Wissen und ihre musikalische Vorerfahrung sowie neue Lernerfahrungen. *Pontes* ist auf wichtige Begegnungen von Schülern mit Musik gerichtet; *Pontes* bezieht positive Haltungen, Beobachtung, Natürlichkeit, Techniken, Ausdrucksfähigkeit und Sensibilität ein. Dieser Beitrag beruht auf einzelnen Ergebnissen einer Studie zum musikpädagogischen Wissen der Meister oraler Musiktradition. Er ist in zwei Teile gegliedert: (a) eine theoretische Begründung der vorgestellte Praxis und (b) einzelne Beispiele zum Einsatz von *Pontes*.

### ***La enseñanza musical como cultura: Una introducción al enfoque PONTES***

El enfoque *pontes* (puentes) puede considerarse como una guía de enseñanza para la acción en educación musical. Puede ayudar a los profesores de música a articular los diferentes aspectos que acompañan al proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje, especialmente aquellos relacionados con los puntos de contacto culturales, como las características personales del alumno, los elementos y la esencia del contexto sociocultural, los conocimientos y experiencias

musicales previas del alumno, y el nuevo conocimiento a ser aprendido. El enfoque *pontes* implica encuentros musicales significativos entre el alumno y la música. *Pontes* se relaciona con: actitud positiva, observación, naturalidad, técnica, expresividad y sensibilidad. Este artículo se basa en los resultados parciales de un estudio sobre el conocimiento pedagógico musical de maestros de tradiciones musicales orales. Se organiza en dos secciones: (a) las bases teóricas de las prácticas propuestas; y (b) ejemplos específicos para el uso de *pontes*.