

Children's instrumental ensembles in the training of the interpreter. A proposal for the class at UAA-UAZ**Los conjuntos instrumentales infantiles en la formación del intérprete. Una propuesta para la clase en la UAA-UAZ**

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Abstract

The professional training of the musician is a result of an integral accumulation of knowledge that is gradually perfected starting from the basic level, in which organizational forms of teaching-learning come together, such as the group lessons or ensembles (vocal and instrumental). In this kind of subject, primary skills that provide students with artistic and sociocultural values are developed. Unlike the musical education that is taught as a part of the general education, at the infant level in art schools such as the Academic Unit of Arts of the Autonomous University of Zacatecas (UAZ), the process is oriented towards the artistic technical development of the student. However, in the specialized literature and practice, it was possible to appreciate that there are contradictions in the conception of the pedagogical process. These facts motivated the objective of this work: to generalize curricular and methodological alternatives for the instrumental ensemble subject at the UAZ Academic University of Arts based on the analysis of manifest contradictions in the pedagogical process at the infant level. The methodology used includes the analysis of documents and participant observation, which led to the proposal of alternatives of a curricular and methodological nature for the subject of instrumental ensembles.

Musical learning, Instrumental ensembles, Methodological alternatives for the infant level**Resumen**

La formación profesional del músico es el resultado de un cúmulo integral de saberes que se perfeccionan paulatinamente desde el nivel básico, en el que confluyen formas organizativas de enseñanza-aprendizaje como la clase grupal de conjuntos (vocal e instrumental). En dicha clase, se forman o desarrollan habilidades primarias que dotan a los alumnos de valores artísticos y socioculturales. A diferencia de la educación musical en la enseñanza general, en el nivel infantil en las escuelas de arte como la Unidad Académica de Artes de la Universidad Autónoma de Zacatecas (UAZ), el proceso se orienta hacia el desarrollo técnico artístico del alumno. No obstante, en la literatura especializada y la práctica, se pudo apreciar que existen contradicciones en la concepción del proceso pedagógico. Ello motivó el objetivo de este trabajo: generalizar alternativas curriculares y metodológicas para la clase de conjunto instrumental en la Universidad Académica de Artes de la UAZ a partir del análisis de contradicciones manifiestas en el proceso pedagógico en el nivel infantil. La metodología empleada incluye el análisis de documentos y la observación participante, lo cual propició la propuesta de alternativas de carácter curricular y metodológico para la clase de conjunto instrumental.

Aprendizaje musical, Conjunto instrumental, Alternativa metodológica nivel infantil

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Introduction

Nowadays, the professional training of the musician is pursued in its entirety in order to equip the performer with the knowledge that allows him to express himself in a versatility of musical genres and styles. The process involves many years of preparation, usually from childhood to university studies or, as the music pedagogue Zoltán Kodaly (1882-1967) said, it starts before birth itself (quoted in Vernia-Carrasco, 2019).

There is documentary evidence of particular and multidisciplinary studies from different areas of knowledge, such as medicine in general, psychology and pedagogy, on the ideal ages for learning music and its relevance in the general education of children, taking into account their psychomotor and cognitive development. Experience also shows evidence, from very early stages, focused on discovering and capturing talent. However, in the practice of teaching linked to the learning of a musical instrument, different levels are recognised, which, in some countries, make the age of the children coincide with the cycles of general education, i.e. basic, upper secondary and higher education (Águila, Núñez, & Raquimán, 2011; Vernia-Carrasco, 2019).

Although there are music teaching academies for pre-school children, and they use their own methods with very dissimilar objectives, in the case in question, the Academic Unit of Arts of the Autonomous University of Zacatecas (UAA-UAZ), the Educational Programme of the Bachelor's Degree in Music with emphasis on instrument, in its 2011 study plan, recognises and integrates the previous levels. Four levels of musical education are typified here: Infant, from the age of 8, which corresponds to primary school; Basic, from the age of 12, which is ideally carried out together with secondary school; Upper Intermediate, which corresponds to high school studies, and Advanced, equivalent to the Bachelor's Degree; at this last level, the student becomes a professional musician playing a specific instrument (Unidad Académica de Artes, 2011).

At the infant level, the child is introduced to musical initiation; the focus is on familiarisation with the chosen musical instrument, as well as with the technical bases of performance. Its objective is to promote an integral development in the child's artistic and musical training. This stage is taken during eight semesters, and from the fifth semester onwards, the Instrumental Ensembles class is introduced (Unidad Académica de Artes, n.d.).

The curriculum for the infant level includes the selection of a musical instrument from among the following: flute, clarinet, trumpet, French horn, guitar, piano, violin, viola, cello, percussion and saxophone. In spite of their variety, and the little experience the children have in handling them, the assignment of the ensemble group is made only once, without taking into account the general and particular characteristics of each instrument (timbre-sound classification, types of tuning, sound production, tessituras, harmonic or melodic correspondences, among others). In this way, the ensemble class at infant level has two ways of being approached: one, through a single heterogeneous instrumental ensemble, and the other, as a homogeneous instrumental ensemble where pupils can use their own instruments or substitute instruments (small keyboards, recorders and percussion instruments); in the latter case, the classes become a repetition of their counterpart in the artistic teaching commonly taught in primary schools.

Practice shows that the difference between one type of ensemble and another indicates the need for a different methodological approach and different objectives in each case, but we do not have the syllabus of the subject that explains the objectives and contents, nor the profile of the teacher who teaches the subject.

These and other contradictions observed in the teaching-learning process, which will be dealt with later, have given rise to reflection on the importance of this subject being taught at infant level and on the most appropriate methodologies to implement. In this sense, the aim of this work is to generalise curricular and methodological alternatives for the instrumental ensemble class at the Academic Unit of Arts of the UAZ, based on the analysis of the contradictions manifested in the pedagogical process at the children's level, in such a way that their application will influence the development of primary skills that will give the students artistic and socio-cultural values that will have an impact on their formative process.

In order to achieve this objective, the methods of document analysis and participant observation were used, their contrastation allowed the observation of the results of the work with the children during the musical training and their subsequent insertion in the following levels of study; the recognition of the theoretical-practical experience in the preparation of the classes of both instruments and instrumental ensembles, as well as the results of the public presentations carried out by the pupils at the end of the semester.

Development

There is an abundant bibliography which values the significance of musical learning in the first stages of general education; in this sense, arts education becomes a basic subject in primary and secondary education. Music education, as part of arts education, has a positive influence on each of the developmental spheres of a child's education; for example, psychomotor development corresponds very closely to music and exploits the sound and movement possibilities of the body. Playing a musical instrument ensures the infant the appropriate recognition of his or her personal value (self-esteem), stimulating a motor and emotionally balanced development (physical contact with objects that have the capacity to respond sonically, encouraging creativity, auditory sensitivity and the management of affective feelings), but playing an instrument as an ensemble potentiates these and many other formative capacities at this important stage of life. In this respect, the famous violinist Yehudi Menuhin (1916-1999) emphasised:

Music and the arts invite participation and constitute an antidote to the obstacles to harmony among men. Making music is not only playing or singing, it is also listening. By learning from an early age to listen to others, children discover what tolerance is. (Yehudi Menuhin Foundation Spain, 2004).

Although the art of making music or practising an instrument in general is useful in many ways, it is worth clarifying that, although children who study music in a specialised school are not guaranteed to go on to the higher level as professionals, for those who do manage to complete the process, the formation of their artistic career begins at the very beginning. It is a long enough path and will last, in the first instance, until the end of the Bachelor's Degree in Music with specialisation in instrument.

Therefore, it is necessary to point out that, for this stage, although there are similarities between music art education in primary schools of general basic level and music classes in an art school, differences are identified fundamentally in the objectives and methodologies, even when dealing with children and similar contents can be developed.

In this sense, reference is made to a previous research carried out by the authors: "Interactions in children's musical teaching with professional and artistic educative ends" (Juan-Carvajal & Vdovina, 2020); in it, some indicators are shown that contribute to general artistic teaching with infants, and others that are specific to the training of children who are perceived, in the first instance, as future professional performers. One of the main differences would be, precisely, the instrument selected, as from then on a direct interrelation with the instrument is created that will last for the rest of the time that the studies are carried out and, possibly, for the rest of one's life.

In a music school with selective characteristics and professional development perspectives, the teaching of music is given from these primary levels, starting not from a specific class, but from the set of several that complement each other in the final objective of the integral formation of the instrumentalist musician, and which are given, some individually and others collectively, such as: the instrument, solfège, musical appreciation and choral ensembles with multi-voice and instrumental development. All of this helps to increase physical abilities and skills such as sharpening the ear (harmonic and melodic), rhythm control, intonation, tone and timbre recognition, hand positioning, posture and body movement, all of which favours artistic technical development.

The objectives pursued and the methodologies used in the work with the children in these schools have as their main aim to guarantee the learning of a specific instrument with quality and creativity, focusing on musical growth. In this sense, the work is focused on individualised attention to each child, ensuring, through agreed classical methods, the progressive learning of the technique for playing a specific instrument, taking into account in each case, the particularities of the development of each student in the cognitive process. It should be noted that specialised teaching implies a reciprocity in which: on the one hand, the presence of one or even two teachers for each child is necessary (the instrument teacher and, in most cases, the piano accompanist teacher), for at least two hours a week, in addition to the group classes, and on the other hand, the support of the parents for the individual study required at home, which balances the cycle of the training process. Generally, at this primary level, pupils are introduced to the musical training of different instruments (piano, violin or guitar, among others). For this, unlike other general education schools, or private schools and/or workshops, an entrance profile is required, for which students undergo a selection process by means of an initial test of musical, physical and psychological aptitudes, where the level of development in general education, according to age, is also taken into account. This test is usually carried out by the teachers who make up the academy of the instrument selected by the child, who is accompanied by his or her family members.

In the profile for entry to the infant level at the UAA-UAZ, it is desirable that the applicant shows aptitudes such as a good sense of tuning and rhythm, the ability to coordinate, memorise, muscular flexibility, discipline, constancy, and that he/she can adapt to teamwork (Unidad Académica de Artes, n.d.). Latorre (1995) cited in Lozano (2007) refers that between 7 or 8 years of age is a good time to introduce the child to systematised musical learning, since the psychological changes that occur in the infant are conducive to learning music. This can be psychologically supported by Piaget (1977 and 1991), who identifies the stage between 7-8 and 11-12 years of age as the period of concrete intellectual operations. Piaget (1977) states that it is in this cycle that intellectual operations are initiated, among which we can mention logic, moral and social feelings of cooperation.

From these readings it can be inferred that, independently of other criteria or the beginning of learning from the age of 4 as is the case in private or special schools, in the UAA, within the infant level, two fundamental stages are identified: a first one that goes from 7 or 8 to 9 or 10 years of age, in which concrete intellectual operations begin to form, but at a very simple level, and a second one, which starts from the latter and continues until approximately 12 years of age, where their development is completed; this final period is the ideal time to begin work on instrumental ensembles.

Instrumental ensembles as a subject are foreseen as a space of primary necessity in terms of experimentation, and are basic in the formative context as they are where the skills acquired in the instrument class and the knowledge learnt in the rest of the subjects or didactic units are put into practice, with the facility that the ensembles make it possible to work on the repertoire corresponding to the different periods and cultural styles (Conservatorio Municipal Elemental de Música de Herrera, 2009).

The instrumental ensembles class at initial levels

Once a criterion has been established regarding the preference for the beginning of the instrumental ensemble class, the appropriate syllabus for that level must be known, which includes the methodology, the composition of the groups, as well as the determination of the ideal profile of the teacher who teaches the subject.

Lorenzo (2018), states that the pedagogue Fernández Cobo (2005) pointed out that in its beginnings the instrumental ensemble class generated a great disorientation due to the lack of regulation, specific content, objectives to be achieved and criteria to be taken into account for evaluation, and suggests that today the subject has managed to establish certain canons not only transversal educational standards, but also in terms of musical and artistic techniques, aural distinction, chamber music experiences, all of this with activities that favour the development of social evolution, collective and individual musical reflection and active participation in musical culture.

Several authors, including Lorenzo (2018) and Lizárraga (2012), agree that instrumental ensemble practice benefits the social and collective development of the student, so they propose as objectives of the instrumental ensemble class that students are able to play in groups made up of several instruments. However, the authors leave basic criteria such as tuning and tempo in the background, considering that if the apprentices can maintain correct compliance with these latter aspects during performance, this constitutes a plus for the class.

The above idea shows a contradiction, because if we talk about the ability to listen to each other, it is because, in the first instance, the pupils can listen to themselves, and from there, they are integrated into a relationship with others. It can also be understood that, if we are talking about a musical ensemble which aims to contribute to the training of the instrumentalist and not to the realisation of music as an element of general artistic training, then the care of technical development is basic, and this requires attention to primary aspects such as tuning, rhythm and the elementary treatment of sound.

All this would lead us to the partial conclusion that, at this initial stage, it would be advisable to begin with the creation of small ensembles, made up of the same or similar instruments (belonging to the same families) such as, for example, several violins (first and second) and cellos, understood as the first string ensemble, or a set of woodwind instruments, which may or may not include a harmonic instrument (piano), or there may also be ensembles of instruments with these characteristics such as four-hand pianos or guitar ensembles.

However, we reiterate that the instrumental ensembles class should certainly provide the student with the practice of playing in groups, preferably starting with ensembles of the same family or, if there is no other, of varied instrumentation, although with similar characteristics, with the aim of exploring different sonorities, timbre combinations and facilitating listening and collaborative work that will prepare them for their future projection in many areas of life, including that of becoming a professional musician.

Musical practice in ensembles aids the teaching of music at the infant level, which favours the integral formation of the child, individual and collective development and the creation of habits of respect and standards.

Its procedure is gradual, that is to say, it becomes more complex as the child progressively moves on to more advanced levels. Intonation, the ability to interpret a selected repertoire and the appropriation of basic concepts on a technical, competitive, social and cultural level are developed with the gradual increase in the diversity of content inherent to the different academic levels. In this sense, it is important to be clear about what and how an ensemble should be, and what its importance is in the formative development of the instrumentalist, as well as the methodology of the class, which requires the existence of a syllabus.

In principle, both the ensemble class and the instrument class are complementary. In both, more than one voice is practised, but there is a fundamental difference in their objectives: The instrument class emphasises individual and competitive work, while the ensemble class has a collaborative approach. From a practical point of view, this can be seen in the existence of numerous initial violin methods, for example, where children play the first voice and are accompanied by their teacher.

These methods are fundamental to give confidence and security to the pupil who feels stimulated by being supported by his teacher; however, if one analyses these scores, one can see that the role of the second violin is that of accompaniment, and that it complements the rhythmic motor and harmonic movement thus creating the foundations of the knowledge of the constitutive, formal and structural elements of music. The same happens when the piece or the children's concert is accompanied by the piano accompaniment of a teacher who plays, precisely, the complement of all the mentioned parts.

When talking about the ensemble, one can say that exactly the same thing happens. There is a second, a third and perhaps many other voices, but unlike the instrument class, the repertoire used here is not written for a solo voice and other accompanying voices, but becomes more complex in the exchange of roles, between all the voices, and therefore, they must all be listened to and followed in a different way. The objective and therefore the learning and methodologies are dissimilar, and also start from a good selection of the material to be used.

Lorenzo (2018) has suggested that the teaching-learning model to be followed should start from constructivism and apply group dynamics such as collaborative and cooperative learning and situated learning, always from the perspective of the socio-cognitive paradigm and/or the socio-cultural paradigm. It expresses that the use of cooperative learning in the social construction of knowledge is an essential element of the class, always observing the whole as a harmonious whole, with a single musical objective, regardless of the attention to the particularities of its members.

In this methodological approach, unlike the competitive and individualistic approach, the members of the cooperative group - our instrumental or vocal ensemble - are aware that group performance depends on the effort of all; this awareness of being part of an ensemble that seeks a joint purpose motivates the members to make an effort and to obtain results that exceed the individual capacity of each one of them (Lorenzo, 2018, p. 52).

In the same way, the use of group techniques is invited as methodological tools developed through serial activities in terms of the level of difficulty that facilitate the results.

Taking as a basis what is expressed by Serrano and Pons (2011), the characteristics of the constructivist model put forward by Vygotsky can be listed, in relation to the ensemble class: the teacher professes more of a guiding role during the teaching-learning process, which is more interesting than the final product, "the assembly of the repertoire is but the excuse to address the planned competences" (Lorenzo, 2018, p.53). Thus, from a social perspective in the construction of knowledge, the ensemble is a dynamic group that is in action and change, in which students construct new knowledge starting from that already apprehended. The resulting dialectical activity makes it possible to approach new learning by facilitating and making content and activities more flexible in a more dynamic way.

As can be seen, the model facilitates several factors that trigger motivation and the creative capacities inherent to the students who, from the collective, interact by supporting solidarity and plurality. It has the advantage of increasing the child's motivation. Its practical application includes: normalisation, the habit of listening and silence, (respect and tolerance), learning the relationship between colour-sound and their relationship, from the instrumental or choral with the emotions of joy and sadness, among others. This supports the idea that children can be stimulated through various complementary subjects such as solfège, which is also basic at this stage of the process, where together with the instrument and the different ensembles they end up creating their own small compositions.

As part of the methodology, it is important to define when and how to start. Different authors agree in recognising that to start teaching the subject of children's instrumental ensembles it is necessary to have spent at least two semesters of musical education, due to the obvious lack of technical, theoretical and musical skills that the student presents. In our opinion, it may even be later, however, from the very first moment it is possible to begin choral practice with several voices, in relatively large ensembles, which would prepare the start of instrumental ensembles for when there are sufficient minimum technical skills to develop the ensemble.

At the infant level, the subject aims, among its primary objectives, to bring children closer to music in a pleasant and entertaining way; but it also develops communication, affectivity, creativity, concentration and motor skills, among others, as well as fostering values such as respect, honesty, compliance with rules and collective work, all of this combined with the reinforcement of the mastery of the selected instrument.

Agudiéz (1996) suggests that, for the initial course, where students are still beginners, it is necessary that the first ensembles to experiment with are duos and, as they get more practice, they proceed to form larger ensembles.

For his part, Lorenzo (2018) proposes a series of criteria that should be taken into account when creating ensemble formats in the classroom, all based on the type of students in the centre:

- a) Ensembles of similar instruments or of the same family, this, as has already been expressed, can be very beneficial for the instrumentalist who is starting out in the subject.
- b) Groupings according to the age of the students, mainly marked by the stages of cognitive development: infant, adolescent and adult.

- c) Pairing according to the level of skill they present in the instrument, which does not necessarily mean that they must be in the same semester or course, always depending on the particularities of each instrument.
- d) Group formats ranging from duos, trios, quartets, chamber ensembles (for string instruments), bands (for woodwind and/or brass instruments) to larger ensembles such as symphony orchestras.

If we carry out the process of discriminately choosing a group of children with a view to a possible professional future, we consider that orchestral activity, in the symphonic sense, should begin a little later, after the group ensemble classes have been developed, and starting from the recognition of the instrument families themselves: strings (fretted, plucked and plucked); woodwinds (woodwinds and brass); and percussion ensembles.

A little more time in ensembles or small orchestral ensembles of a single family (fretted strings, guitar ensembles, percussion, woodwind, brass) guarantees attention typified by a methodological model, which is fundamental at these levels to avoid problems and bad technical habits, body posture, tuning and rhythm, text reading, among others.

Although, in general, there is a similarity in the result of collective and collaborative work which, as we have already seen, benefits not only musical performance, we must not lose sight of the fact that in professional schools which contemplate these levels as previous ones, the process of individualised work with the pupil is defended from the first moments of teaching, hoping that these, who have already passed a selective and discriminatory process of abilities and aptitudes towards music, can maintain and develop them coherently.

We have already noted that there are different schools, different levels and different ages at which music studies can begin. In some cases, such as the UAA-UAZ, as has been mentioned, there is an infant level where children arrive between the ages of 8 and 11, and from the age of 12, they move on to the next Basic Level.

It happens that pupils can, without having any knowledge of music and without having attended the infant level, enter directly to the basic level at 12-13 and even older. This happens in many music schools in some countries, and therefore needs to be taken into account when composing ensemble types for the instrumental ensemble class.

An essential point would then be to take school levels into account when putting together ensembles. This has not been made clear in the previous proposals and hence, perhaps, the contradictions when talking about the beginnings of teaching the subject with small groups of duos or trios, in contrast to large orchestras.

In the case of children, it would be ideal to create ensembles or chamber ensembles such as a small orchestra of violins, or of violins with cellos, for example, but in the case of instrumental ensembles starting at higher levels (young people and adolescents) where there is already a basic mastery of the instrument, a discipline of study created and an adequate handling of solfège, then it is ideal to begin with duos and trios, as these groups will have other objectives, specific to the complexity of the level of study and the psychomotor development of the young student.

Once the characteristics of the possible ensembles have been proposed, it is time to look at the duration and frequency of the lessons. Observation and analysis showed that the practice of the subject requires at least one hour of work for small ensembles (duos, trios and quartets), which is similar to the approaches already seen by Agudiéz (1996) and Lorenzo (2018) in terms of class time.

Ideally, one hour would be available for small ensembles of up to 6 or 7 students. With less than an hour, it is impossible to develop this subject given that they have to take out instruments, tune them - and this is a task that should take time -, rehearse the repertoire calmly and correcting mistakes, suggesting musical ideas, analysing details, making themselves heard among themselves and working in subgroups. They should also clean and store the instrument afterwards (Lorenzo, 2018, p.59).

This aspect of duration must also consider the school levels and the ages at which the ensembles start, as young people and adolescents are already more skilled in the contact and handling of the instruments and, in many cases, are able to tune them by themselves. Depending on the characteristics of the schools, the programmes may propose different times for each subject. In some schools, solfège is practised on five working days, while ensembles (orchestra type) are given only once a week, as is the instrument. In fact, we are of the opinion that no lesson should last longer than the instrument lessons, which are the main objective of the training.

Based on what Lorenzo (2018) says about time, we consider that the frequency of the classes could be from one to two hours a week, which would be conditioned by the regulations in the syllabus, the capacity of the teachers and the structure of the school.

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The selection of repertoire is another controversial point even today. The tendency to observe different ensembles at mass cultural events and civic events has led some to defend - as the only option - regional and folkloric tradition as the main part of children's cultural education. Although these events do not correspond to professional training, but to the subject of artistic education in general primary and secondary schools, there are currently manifest tendencies in Latin American education systems that music education, even in specialised schools, can and should change the European tradition of using a "classical" repertoire to a nationalistic formative repertoire. To this end, contemporary composers have taken on the task of creating works to increase the children's catalogue of different instruments, with traditional thematic elements (which we consider, in any case, a real success for the development of Latin American culture).

This is an issue that we have logically seen overcome, for example, in the Soviet school towards the second half of the 20th century, where the children's repertoire for specialised music schools was created by working teams composed of composers, pedagogues, and methodologists who chose traditional and folk songs close to the essence of children and made the relevant didactic arrangements for the creation of a children's school.

This kind of proposal is understandable and praiseworthy for the formative development in the cultural sphere of children. The danger would be if it were to become the only option, and above all if it were to be applied to all the interrelated subjects (solfège, complementary piano, instrument, choir, in addition to the ensembles), as there would be an absence of the universal cultural vision in the formative perspective of the students; keeping the classical programmes already tested in force and complementing them with new didactic compositions would make it possible to enrich the repertoire and obtain pertinent and satisfactory results. However, and in the case we are dealing with, i.e. children's ensembles, we must consider that sometimes (and especially when it comes to ensembles of the same instrument), the function of the instruments in folk music is very diverse, and does not always correspond to the didactic proposals and the formative objectives; in the case of using this type of repertoire, we must be very attentive to the particular distribution of the voices, to the quality and the purposes of the musical arrangements.

Agudiez (1996) states that if there is a good relationship between the elements of the group, resolution is easy. Generally, teachers of fretted strings and woodwinds (mostly violinists and flautists) have works that can be accompanied by piano, but, depending on the technical and musical level, it is necessary to find those that have enough quality and musical dignity to favour the achievement of the objectives proposed in the programme. The need to differentiate the class of instruments with accompaniment from the class of ensembles has already been mentioned, and this also affects the selection of repertoire. It is desirable for children to be able to perform repertoire with at least two voices (even if accompanied by piano).

Lorenzo (2018), considers it important to motivate students by involving them in the choice of repertoire, suggesting the need to perform both traditional folk music from different cultures and the great masterpieces of classical music. For her, one of the great challenges is, precisely, the assignment of the repertoire to those ensembles that are non-traditional or similar in terms of timbre and family of instruments. It is here that the ability to adapt and arrange works with the professionalism of a methodologist, rather than simply transcribing notes, plays a fundamental role. In general, these transcriptions are made of folk and popular works, although also, to a lesser extent, of other pieces from the classical repertoire. In this case, the selection must respond to the methodological objectives and the motivation must be achieved by the artistic challenges aspired to in the ensemble, above all, when it is a question of children in the middle of their formative stage.

In community work, it would be desirable that the repertoire of the children's ensembles positions the children in congruence with the context. This forms them with values of identity and helps them to be happy and aware of their social role; in addition, it is up to the teachers and methodologists of the music schools to ensure that this repertoire, together with a more extensive and international one, is of sufficient quality to enable them to learn basic concepts that allow them to know, appreciate and interpret music with the discipline and rigour that will guide them in their academic training.

In the case of a mixed ensemble, it is necessary to be selective with the catalogue; even if a popular repertoire is used as a basis, it must be for several voices, there must be a balance of instrumental sound and arcades and fingerings must be worked on (for example with fretted strings), and/or phrasing, breathing, distributions and sound balances must be worked on: the skills learnt in the instrument class must be tried to complement each other in the development of the learning process.

An essential point when choosing the repertoire is the number of works to be performed, which in these initial levels should be a single work in a short format; other songs or other movements can gradually be incorporated if it is a classical work. Small musical forms in binary or ternary combinations and children's songs are ideal for this type of initial work, in the case of children's ensembles.

The assessment process in the subject is quite complex, as in the vast majority of the subjects that make up the curriculum; in this sense, according to Lorenzo (2018), it would be ideal if teachers from the same institution were to use a common assessment rubric, which would facilitate the assessment of learning. However, there is a need for clarity and precision in the objectives to be achieved per course, as well as a repertoire that, although broad, is appropriate for the achievement of the required competences.

Considering the above, assessment processes can be very different in each academic institution. In many cases, the programmes themselves cannot be totally objective in the definition of evaluative parameters when it comes to artistic creation or musical performance. Some elements can be pointed out, but their assessment by the evaluators will still have its shades of subjectivity, even in professional life and in competitions. This is not something to be concerned about at these early levels: for the children, the option of public performance is more than a necessary motivation for their growth. Playing in public and showing the results of their rehearsals and lessons is fun and can fulfil the objectives of the subject if it is taken into account that the important thing is the formative process and not the partial results.

Finally, it is necessary to address the profile of the teacher. According to Lorenzo (2018), the assignment of teachers for the subject is sometimes based on the criterion that if the ensemble is a string ensemble, the teacher should be a string teacher, if it is a wind ensemble, the teacher should be a wind teacher; it is worth asking, then, what happens with mixed ensembles? How many types of ensembles can exist and what should their specific characteristics be? From this point, it would be appropriate to ask what would be the ideal profile for the teacher guiding these ensembles?

The pedagogue has a fundamental role in the development of the class, in the sequence of learning and in the individual and collective results. From the above aspects and the proposed questions, it can be inferred that the teacher's profile must include certain general and specific knowledge related to the particularities of the instruments. Above all, the teacher must possess a general and formal musical culture that allows him/her to be selective in terms of the organisation of the class, the choice of the appropriate repertoire for each group, the make-up and nature of the groups, the correct analysis of the objectives and methodologies, and a perspective of the results to be expected.

In this sense, the teacher must have completed formal music studies, including a bachelor's degree where, among other subjects, he/she has had the necessary experience to know not only a specific instrument but also general complements of the families of instruments, the characteristics of the types of tuning, mastering musical forms, harmony, as well as artistic genres and styles. They must also have experience in ensemble practice (not to be confused with chamber music, which is in itself another specialisation and does not correspond to this level) and, of course, have studied pedagogical training in order to be able to handle educational work with children appropriately.

It is desirable in the current circumstances, that the teacher has basic knowledge of software and computer music programmes and can arrange, instrument, transcribe, orchestrate and create for didactic and specific purposes to meet the needs of each student. Creating a favourable climate for the development of the class, together with all of the above, will facilitate the experience and the academic evolution of the learner.

Methodological alternatives for the Instrumental Ensembles class at the Infant Level at UAA-UAZ.

The methodological alternatives suggested here are based on the analysis of the Study Plan for the Children's Level of the Academic Unit of Arts of the Autonomous University of Zacatecas, where the subjects, semesters, ages and instruments to be studied are defined.

Based on the constructivist educational model, it is proposed to carry out activities that encourage cooperative and collaborative learning, taking into account the level at which they are working. The class time established in the current curriculum map at UAA-UAZ is two hours per week divided into two sessions on different days; however, in the initial semesters, this could be reduced to 45 minutes per class, as the level of attention should be kept active at all times, whether playing or interacting in some other way.

Games, challenges, and fantasy stories are an excellent means of communication in the early ages. There are many initiatives to develop in the classroom, the pieces can be sung and solfeggio'd, the teacher can play them on the piano, emphasising each of the voices, and create simple variations that stimulate creativity in the child's playing, etc.

The teacher should have essential knowledge of the different types of instruments that make up their groups (in the case of several groups with different characteristics), as well as a basic knowledge of the piano, an instrument that should not be missing in the classroom. He/she will also have to help students with certain difficulties that they do not yet manage on their own, such as, for example, assembling and/or tuning some instruments.

In view of the research carried out, and with the knowledge of the curricular map of the children's level at the UAA-UAZ, it is proposed that those students who began studying at the regular age of 8 should start the instrumental ensemble class from the 7th semester (and not the 5th as it appears in the syllabus) after having been playing the instrument for several years. In the same way, and in view of the irregularities that exist in entry, those who enter at an older age should take the subject after at least two years of practising their instrument, or when the teacher of the particular instrument considers them suitable, and they also have complementary classes such as solfège and children's choral practice. This may lead them, without detriment to their development, not to take ensembles until the basic level, after the age of 12.

Ensemble practice should not be compulsory if the instrumental teacher considers that the pupil is not yet ready for it, however, the pupil should continue consecutively, once it has been started, regardless of the level at which he/she is at present.

It is suggested that in no case in these children's ensembles should pupils be assessed in a particular way, nor should they receive failing grades, as this initial practice should foster positive values in all aspects of artistic development and human growth.

The composition of the groups should be age-appropriate and take into account the years of studies completed, so the ensembles should be small orchestras or ensembles of the same instrument or family for the children, it is recommended to form several groups that correspond to the characteristics and developmental needs of the students.

If the minimum age of entry allowed at the children's level at UAA-UAZ is 8 years old, it should be considered that, by the 7th semester, the age will be around 11 years old, which is an acceptable time for the beginning of the ensembles. Therefore, and considering that the enrolment may be small at these levels, it is suggested that the groups be made, according to the instruments studied at this level, as follows:

- Flute ensembles; or flute and clarinet ensembles; saxophone ensemble; or woodwind ensembles.
- Trumpet ensembles; or brass ensembles.
- Four-hand piano ensembles (the piano may also be present in all ensembles as a harmonic instrument).
- Violin ensembles; cello ensembles, or string ensembles (rarely do any students appear with a viola at this level, since, methodologically, the children here who could be future violists must be playing the violin in order to lay the technical foundations of their development properly).

As the semesters progress, the groups may be mixed, within a congruent methodological order, and may be larger in number.

The groups can be made up of students from different semesters as long as the levels of skill achieved with the instrument itself, age empathy and cultural preferences are valued, so that the ensemble teachers should be in direct contact with the teachers who teach the instrument class when creating them so that there is homogeneity in the collaborative work.

Although the teacher assumes full responsibility for the selection of a methodologically appropriate repertoire for the group at the corresponding level, he or she can investigate and get to know the characteristics of the students, their preferences and musical tastes, without losing sight of the fact that the aim is to educate and form an artistic and aesthetic culture in accordance with age and cognitive development, as well as to prepare the pupil to grow gradually in his or her social and cultural development. The foundations of culture and education are also acquired from the beginning of the schooling process.

Another aspect to consider is that the selected works should be of short duration and sufficiently attractive to stimulate joint performance. All the voices in the work should have equal significance in terms of learning, so that the selection of repertoire will be rigorous in meeting the objectives.

The teacher will be aware that the repertoire should be a motivational source for the student, as well as a bridge to be crossed in order to achieve learning, never the product itself; on occasions it will be necessary for the teacher to adapt, transcribe and instrument some of the music. The practice of repetition in class should respond to the search for artistic quality and the development of creativity.

Conclusions

Music education in general education differs from music teaching at the children's level in a school of the arts fundamentally in terms of objectives, aims and methodology.

The contradictions in the pedagogical process of instrumental ensemble classes, found in practice or inferred from the articles analysed, indicate the need to perfect aspects of a curricular and methodological nature for the infant level.

The methodological proposals offered for instrumental ensemble classes at this level are aimed at improving the organisation of the process and the methodological design of the classes.

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