

## 404 - Instrumental Group Teaching: An Agenda for Democracy in Portuguese Music Education

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**Abstract:** The Portuguese system of music education has long been characterized by the existence of educational subsystems (generic, specialized and professional) that stem from different philosophical foundations, develop different pedagogical strategies and aim at different artistic goals. The fact is that students in the generic subsystem seldom learn how to play an instrument or read notation, rarely have their musical aptitudes tested and almost never receive appropriate training and music vocational counseling. This article focuses on theoretical and research foundations for the proposal of instrumental group teaching as an agenda for democracy in Portuguese music education. The concept of music as a sort of “external body of knowledge” than can be understood and appreciated by everyone without actually learning how to play, sing, read or compose music is rejected on the premises of philosophical incongruence. Promoting aesthetic appreciation of music without its practice perpetuates the failure of generic music education.

**Keywords:** Music Education; Democracy; Musical Instruments; Group Teaching

### INTRODUCTION

The existence of three subsystems of music education in Portugal (generic, specialized and professional) represents a particular educational case within the national curriculum. No other subject or area of knowledge exhibits such curricular complexity in the Portuguese educational system. For that reason, no other subject presents itself to citizens in such a variety of possible paths: students can study music in the general school, in a conservatory or academy or also in a professional school. However, these multiple options are offered at different age levels, and do not result from an integrated or intentional perspective of music education policy, but rather from a quite casual collection of historical decisions concerning different educational institutions that coexist today (Vieira, 2006). The desired articulation between the subsystems (which is actually announced in several legislative documents that regulate them) is not efficient, thus frustrating any reasonable expectation for good musical aptitude detection and vocational counseling (Vieira, 2009).

### MUSIC EDUCATION FOR ALL: BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The generic branch of music education, as we understand it today, is rooted in the establishment of the public system of education itself. After the introduction of music in the curriculum of the University of Coimbra in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the opening of Jesuit schools in the 16<sup>th</sup> century was another important moment for the democratization of schooling in general, and of arts in particular. During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and under the influence of French Illuminists, the Marquis of Pombal (1699-1782) expelled the religious orders from Portugal. New schools emerged, in which women could also study. Luís António Verney, a “*estrangeirado*” (literally a “*foreigner*”) who studied in France contributed to the opening of “low schools”, which were open to everyone. The curriculum in these schools included music (Verney, n/d, 123-149). During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which was an era of political instability and confrontation with the new liberal ideas, several attempts of school reform were made, but only a few had music teaching in consideration. On the other hand, the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw the creation of the first music conservatory in Portugal (the Lisbon conservatory in 1835, which was followed by the creation of Porto conservatory in 1917 and other conservatories in the 1960’s). These schools became the only schools that provided a consistent music education curriculum, a situation that is still valid today.

The change from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century was a period of strong nationalistic movements all over Europe. The majority of national anthems was composed during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and Choral Singing emerged as an important means to stimulate national feelings and cohesion. In 1906, music (which

was presented in schools as “*Choral Singing*”) was introduced in the curriculum of the recently created *Liceu Feminino Maria Pia* – the first high school for women in Lisbon. This subject was seen as a “feminine subject” that, unlike other subjects, had only qualitative grades and evaluation (and not quantitative), such as “bad, mediocre, sufficient, good and very good” (Artiaga, 1999, 58). Choral Singing was introduced in all the other high schools in the country in 1918 and the school programs produced by the government underlined its importance for aspects such as “voice education”, “aesthetic education”, “development of nationalistic feelings”, “contribution for moral and civic education” and “for the development of solidarity” (p. 58). The “coup d’etat” of 1926 inaugurated a period of dictatorship that lasted for more than forty years. During this period, the abovementioned goals for the Choral Singing subject were reinforced. Although some aspects showed improvement (evaluation, for instance, started to be qualitative) the contents of Choral Singing remained highly “non-musical”. On the contrary, the main goals were more related to social and political messages that the Government wished to pass through the texts, than to music itself. Choral Singing was, therefore, used as a means of governmental propaganda – a way to glorify Portugal and foster patriotic feelings. At this point, in terms of music education, the country was, therefore, divided into schools that taught music, and schools that taught music as a means to learn something else.

Although the generic branch of music education has deep historical roots, the idea of music as an autonomous subject, with its own intrinsic value, and accessible to all students in public school is very recent. Palheiros (1993) dates it to the introduction of the “*Educação Musical*” course in the curriculum of 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> graders in 1968. For this course the government created the first official programs with specific music goals, instead of placing it at the service of politics or ideology. The 1960’s and the 1970’s were also very important for the development of music education, due to the visit of several foreign music pedagogues and composers who were invited by the Portuguese Association of Music Education (APEM). Methodologies such as the ones proposed by Orff, Willems and Dalcroze were presented in numerous workshops and started to have a strong impact in Portuguese music classrooms. Notable composers such as Murray Schafer and Egon Krauss were also invited with the specific purpose of fostering a “more musical pedagogy” in Portuguese music classrooms. The workshops were attended by many teachers, as Macedo (1978, p.20) testifies, for example, in her report about the workshop “Sound environment and music creativity” led by Murray Schafer. This workshop was attended by 80 teachers and students, from Porto, Matosinhos, Vila Real, Chaves, Amarante, Lisboa and Braga, among other regions.

The 1970’s were, indeed, a period when Music Education as a school discipline started to focus on specific aspects of the musical language and on the development of creativity and aural discrimination, and no longer functioned as a mere vehicle for the transmission of other ideas, concepts or propaganda. This was, undeniably, a great step towards the democratization of music knowledge and of the musical education of the common citizen who did not attend a conservatory.

However, the lack of preparation of the conservatory-trained music teachers to teach big classes in the generic schools was a sign of the big difference between the music education offered in the specialized and generic systems of music education. In fact, the music curriculum in the conservatory was and is mostly focused on individual (musical instrument) instruction, whereas the generic school was and is trying to “educate the masses”. On the other hand, the new music education pedagogies made known to Portuguese teachers in the 1970’s were directed to group teaching and served as pedagogical training for specialized musicians who started to teach in general schools. The impact of those pedagogies (such as Orff, Kodaly and Willems) was, therefore, clearly greater in general schools than in the conservatories, where they were restricted to the “*Music Education*” or “*Music Initiation*” class subjects. “*Instrument*” individual classes, “*Music History*” classes or “*Composition*” classes in the conservatory remained obviously untouched by this “group pedagogy revolution”.

While the public school was gaining access to music education, the contrast between the pedagogical practices being adopted there and the conservatory pedagogical models became more and more evident. However, no psychological, pedagogical or social reasons could be given for such pedagogical differences (Vieira, 2006). Egon Krauss alerted for this fact in a 1974 conference in Portugal, entitled “*The teaching of music as a compulsory subject in primary schools*” (Author’s transl.). His observation was so clairvoyant that it can still be seen as meaningful today:

*The dangerous process that converts the subject of “music” from a compulsory subject in all schools into a subject that is only available to a few more musically apt students becomes a serious basic educational problem. In general, the so-called “talented students” are students that were musically advised at the appropriate time, but not by the general school system of music education. For these so-called talented some countries created special institutions: schools or educational branches of*

*music education, secondary music schools, specialized higher music education schools, special music schools for young people, a.s.o. All these institutions aim at compensating the lack of music education in general primary schools, in order to ensure a new generation of music teachers for the next generation. Music Education for all and professional music education are, however, two completely different problems. The efforts made by some countries to ensure specialized music teaching for children with a music vocation or talent were already a consequence of the abandonment of music teaching in the primary schools and its transference for specialized schools. A music pedagogy concept of unilateral promotion of talent and capacity accelerates the fall of general education and promotes musical analphabetism (pp.1-2), (Author's Transl.).*

It is important to underline that Krauss was not opposed to the existence of specialized schools and conservatoires that could “go beyond the music education administered in primary schools” for “students with a special inclination for music” (p.2). What the composer and pedagogue defended was that “more important than the promotion of talents was each child’s right to music education” (p.3). In fact, the author defended that “human beings who have had access to systematic music learning experiences at a young age are almost always ‘talented’” (p.2). The curricular irony pointed out by Krauss, and that should also be questioned today in Portugal, is that conservatories and academies, as vocational music schools for the talented, may actually not be attended by the most talented students. Therefore, the promotion of talents should start with the principle of equal opportunities.

Two strategies were developed in Portugal since the 1980’s in order to make the access to formal music education more democratic: the “articulated system of education” (Portuguese: “*Regime Articulado*”) and the “cultural enrichment activities program” (Portuguese: *Actividades de Enriquecimento Curricular*). The “articulated system of education” was first promoted in 1983 (Law-Decree 310/83, Art. 6, nr.1) in order to reinforce the connections between the general and the specialized schools, particularly in what the students attendance was concerned. The “articulated system” allows the student to study in both schools (regular subjects in the general school and music subjects in the conservatory or academy), and it represented a great increase in the number of students in conservatories and academies up to today. It also represented a clear improvement in terms of expansion of specialized music teaching towards the sphere of the general schools. This desirable approximation between the generic and the specialized branches of music education (pointed out as a research result by Vieira, 2006) has been thoroughly studied by Pacheco (2008) in the case study Masters’ research project “Music Education in Articulated Attendance at the Vale do Sousa Conservatory: Vocational or Generic Function?” (*Author’s transl.*). *Articulated attendance* of both the general and the specialized schools is seen in this case study as an optimal way to foster democratization of music education under the present circumstances in the country. The “cultural enrichment activities program”, as a music education democratization strategy, emerged tentatively in the Basic Law of the Educational System (Law-Decree 46/86), (Portuguese: *Lei de Bases do Sistema Educativo*”), and evolved through the years, under different legislative improvements, up to its effective creation with *Despacho 12591/2006* (Ferreira, 2009). The concept underlying these “cultural enrichment activities” was the offer of extra artistic education, sports or foreign languages to the students in the general schools. The legislation instructed, for instance, that the students must continue to attend music in their regular generalist classes with the general and/or the specialized teacher, but also have access to optional music classes in the context of the “cultural enrichment activities”, usually after school hours. Ferreira (2009) has concluded that the optional and leisure nature of these activities, alongside the fact that they tended to replace the regular compulsory music instruction in the general schools has actually led to a decrease in the presence of music activities and music education in the schools, thus constituting a step back in the democratization process. In a word, the 1980’s and the 1990’s have witnessed both improvements and failures in the process of democratizing music education, of making a consistent and systematic music education curriculum more open to all students in the country.

## **INSTRUMENTAL GROUP TEACHING: A STEP FURTHER IN THE DEMOCRATIZATION OF MUSIC EDUCATION**

Despite the ever-increasing number of students enrolling in conservatories and academies under the “articulated system”, particularly after *Despacho 12591/2006*, the fact is that the vast majority of students only has access to the music education offered in the general schools. Despite the dilution of differences between music education in the general schools and specialized schools due to the increasing similarities in teacher training degrees for the different branches of music education, the fact is that teachers still tend to conform to the generic or the specialized branches and adjust their teaching strategies and pedagogical goals according to different ideals of education and different social purposes (Vieira, 2006). Despite the issuing of



laws that encompass all branches of artistic education and try to promote the aesthetic education of all citizens, aptitude detection, and the democratization of artistic performance practices (such as Law-Decree 310/83, Law-Decree 344/90 and Law-Decree 6/2001), the fact is that the pedagogical practices in music education classes in the general schools remain quite different from the pedagogical practices in music classes in conservatories and academies. This is awkwardly so also at the elementary school level: general schools provide “general music education” and specialized schools provide “specialized music education”, even at an early age. This fact contradicts the traditional concept of “specialization” itself: in other school subjects specialization is the natural consequence of a few years of study and vocational pondering and counseling (Vieira, 2008). In music, children can officially choose specialization (or have someone choose for them) as early as 6 years old, when they can enroll in a conservatory or official academy. This, of course, bears no relation with children’s music aptitudes and their detection. However, it shows that the specialized system of music education is built upon an innate perspective of talent, a perspective that justifies the attempt to minister a specialized training as soon as possible to the supposedly talented children.

The major difference between music education in general schools and in specialized schools can be found in instrumental learning. General schools rely on the paradigm of aesthetic education (Reimer, 1989); specialized schools are focused on performance (Elliott, 1995). General schools promote aesthetic contemplation of the work of art, aesthetic understanding of an outside object; specialized schools promote the production of the work of art itself, aesthetic creativity and embodiment of the art piece. The concept of music as a sort of “external body of knowledge” than can be understood and appreciated by everyone without actually learning how to play, sing, read or compose music should be rejected on the premises of philosophical incongruence. In fact, music education in the general schools might be centuries behind compared to foreign language learning. Separating an education system that promotes aesthetic contemplation (and the consequent ambiguity of an integrated perspective of arts learning at an early age) from an education system that fosters music literacy might be as social unjust as training a group to play for the other group to listen. Babel *versus* understanding; chaos *versus* cosmos. History shows that this sort of curriculum structure dates back to the early pre-Christian Jewish communities, and could be found in ancient Greece (when the slaves were the ones who knew how to play music for the masters - who couldn’t play a note, but were very happy to listen and appreciate.).

Small (1996, 184) underlines that this notion of schooling as transmission of an abstract body of knowledge pervades the entire system of education, in many school subjects (from science to visual arts, from geography to music). The author points out that in music education, as in general education, “the concept of the product is dominant” (p.193). However, general music education looks at music as the product to be known, as the work of art to be appreciated; specialized music education, on the other hand, looks at music as the product to be made, to be produced, to be interpreted or composed.

Instrumental performance and instrumental learning, however, pose a number of difficulties for the public school system. They suppose the existence of musical instruments for all students and the support of specialized instrumental teachers whose training is long and strenuous. The general schools have relied mostly on the Orff *instrumentarium* (with the support of the corresponding teaching methodologies) and more recently on the guitar; instruments such as the piano, violin, cello, double-bass, trumpet, clarinet and many other orchestral instruments, being much more expensive, have remained a study privilege of the conservatory and music academy students.

Instrumental group learning, therefore, emerges as the next step further in the process of democratization of music education in Portugal, especially in the early stages of development and schooling. Financial reasons may support the promotion of music instrument learning in a group context; in fact, the possibility of hiring one single teacher to teach a musical instrument to many students at the same time makes it highly predictable that group methodologies of instrumental teaching will increasingly be adopted for not-so-scientific reasons. Luckily, however, a few studies are emerging, particularly in the United States and Brasil, that show that instrumental group learning can be highly effective, if not more effective, for particular ages and under special circumstances (Fisher, 2010, Coats, 2006, Cruvinel, 2005, among others).

*Portaria 691/2009* was the first Portuguese government decision in that direction. This legislative document introduced the obligation of instrumental group teaching in the specialized schools, suggesting that the instrumental group teacher should now replace one of the two weekly individual lessons by a group lesson for at least two students. Despite the professionals first alarm response, the specialized schools have been implementing the new directions systematically and under the supervision of some universities pedagogical practice directors.

A few academic studies are now emerging in the country trying to investigate and describe the individual, pedagogical, artistic, social and political potentialities and disadvantages of instrumental group teaching and

collective learning in different pedagogical contexts and age level groups. A research team of the Institute of Education of the University of Minho, in Braga, is developing a research project that intends to question the political and curricular branching of music education in Portugal at the elementary school level, and foresees instrumental group teaching as a possible solution for the improvement of music education and the citizens music literacy and musical aptitude detection. The musical instrument is seen as a possible means, and not an end of music education itself. Considering that there are no such things as “generic music” or “specialized music”, and that it is not possible to divide students into “generic” and “vocational”, at least at an early age (Vieira, 2009), the research project aims at the construction of a strong theoretical frame (in the areas of pedagogy, specific didactics and curricular policies) that might sustain instrumental group music practices in the generic and specialized public schools. Different case studies and action-research projects are being developed in specialized and generic schools, at the 1<sup>st</sup> Cycle (6-9 year olds) and 2<sup>nd</sup> Cycle (10-11 year olds), involving group teaching of guitar, piano, flute, strings, orchestral groups and voice. Although these projects are not yet finished, it is already possible to affirm that instrumental group teaching will be an important part of the future of music education and music literacy in Portugal.

## CONCLUSION

The real power of music lies, not in contemplation, but in its practice; not in listening only, but in playing, singing and composing. Music is a language that needs to be spoken and not only heard. One hears better when one can play, just as one understands better when one can speak. The Portuguese system of music education has perpetuated an artificial division between branched subsystems that overemphasize listening on the one hand, and performing on the other hand. Instrumental group teaching and learning as a pedagogical practice might foster a performance approach in generic schools and promote collaborative strategies and aesthetic contemplation in specialized schools, thus bringing them closer together in nature than any “articulated” system might have done before. It might also contribute to a more realistic process of music aptitude detection and vocational counseling, by allowing students to experiment more closely an effective musical practice for a few years, before deciding whether or not to enroll in a specialized school. From the individual standpoint, instrumental group teaching and learning might provide a special music environment where multiple feed-back can be offered, and where peer-learning can stimulate decision-making and increase motivation.

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