

## Curricular reform in orchestra teaching: A qualitative study of the pedagogical approach of music conservatories

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**Abstract.** The changes occurring at a political, economic and social level in recent years and their impact on the educational field have led to a rethinking of educational processes, particularly the methods and resources used in the classroom setting. Music education, especially, that provided by music conservatories (regardless of whether teaching relates to elementary, professional or advanced levels), requires profound pedagogical and curricular changes. This allows teachers to critically analyse their professional performance by developing and implementing didactic strategies which enhance the teaching-learning processes pertaining to their subject. In this context of curricular and didactic renewal, the present research focuses on music conservatories and aims to identify specific elements of the experience of orchestra classes and other musical groups formed there. An analysis was conducted of documents and semi-structured interviews were performed. This enabled better understanding of the value held by this subject both in terms of the future developments of conservatories and the musical development of their students. The present work highlights the need to reorient the current pedagogical model towards a teaching-learning process that is more focused on group work. This will ensure that individual study extends into different group settings and that such settings will provide the necessary personal motivation to enhance mastery of musical instrument techniques.

**Keywords:** Music education; orchestra; conservatoire; musicians; interviews.

### [en] La reforma curricular en la asignatura de orquesta: un estudio cualitativo del enfoque pedagógico de las agrupaciones musicales en conservatorio.

**Resumen.** Los cambios que a nivel político, económico y social se vienen produciendo en los últimos años y su repercusión en el ámbito educativo, han provocado un replanteamiento de los procesos educativos, muy particularmente de los métodos y los recursos utilizados hasta el momento en las aulas. La educación musical, y en concreto la que se ofrece en los conservatorios de música (indistintamente de que estos impartan enseñanzas elementales, profesionales o superiores), exige profundos cambios pedagógicos y curriculares que permitan a los profesores convertirse en profesionales capaces de analizar de forma crítica su desempeño como docentes, para poder así desarrollar e implementar las estrategias didácticas que más favorezcan los procesos de enseñanza-aprendizaje de su materia. En este contexto de renovación curricular y didáctica, presentamos una investigación centrada en los conservatorios de música, y cuyo objetivo no ha sido otro que conocer la realidad de las clases de orquesta y otras agrupaciones musicales que se configuran en estos centros. A través del análisis de documentos y la entrevista semiestructurada como herramientas de investigación, hemos podido comprender el valor que estas materias colectivas cobran, tanto en el devenir de la institución, como en la formación musical de los estudiantes. Con este trabajo salen a la luz conclusiones tan importantes como la necesidad de reorientar el modelo pedagógico actual hacia un proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje más centrado en el trabajo en grupo, para que el estudio individual encuentre su proyección y continuación lógica en las diferentes agrupaciones, y estas se conviertan en la motivación necesaria para afrontar el trabajo más personal de estudio técnico del instrumento.

**Palabras clave:** Educación musical; orquesta; conservatorio; músicos; entrevistas.

**Summary.** 1. Introduction. 2. Research development: Methodological considerations. 3. Main outcomes: Orchestra teaching experiences in music conservatories. 4. Conclusions. 5. References.

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## 1. Introduction

The serious health crisis currently being experienced worldwide and its inevitable repercussions on all social contexts (economic, political, cultural...) has led to the introduction of a “new normal”. This affects, not only, individual behaviour, affected by social distancing to keep infection levels low and avoid contagion now and over the coming years but, also, and above all, the way in which institutions are tasked with tackling these new challenges. In the educational field, this “new normal” implies a reconsideration of teaching-learning processes and, particularly, of the methods and resources employed in classrooms up until the time of writing (Díaz, 2016).

Music conservatories, like other educational institutions are being forced to reconsider their operating methods in order to adapt to the demands of the pandemic. Demands on these teaching centres during the months of enforced confinement were particularly brusque given their highly specific and individualised training nature. The profound change in processes already experienced by these institutions in recent years must also be considered (Bennet & Stanberg, 2006; Carey & Grant, 2015; Milleret al., 2021). In this sense, the more traditional “romantic” profile of the virtuoso-soloist musician who stuck to their music studies has opened up to a broader multi-disciplinary approach, which seeks to respond to and cover the wide array of music career options demanded by contemporary society (Ponce de León & Lago, 2012).

Furthermore, there has been a proliferation of orchestras and professional groups in recent years at a national and international level (Roche, 2010). Subsequently, orchestra musicians have attained a consolidated competency-based profile (Higuera, 2015). Against this backdrop, conservatories have been forced to update their curricula and approach. This has led to the implementation of an increasing number of subjects which prepare students to pass entrance exams and successfully perform the professional tasks required within these groups. Nonetheless, incorporation of these subjects into the curriculum is still relatively recent. Upon review of the legislation regulating artistic teaching, starting with the Moyano Law laid out in 1857, right up until the recently passed Celaá Law in 2020, an enormous gap is found in the introduction of legislation over a period of more than 150 years. During this period, subjects focusing on music groups replaced subjects focused on instrument technique or composition (Vicente, 2008). This point was highlighted by Professor D. Luis Izquierdo in their inaugural lecture of the 1992-1993 academic year at the Madrid Royal Music Conservatory:

Whilst we lack choirs and orchestras, we will not be training authentic professionals who will nurture our symphonic-choir groups and the vast number of other relevant positions on the pedagogic landscape. I do not believe that all of this will be so terribly difficult and that through the same means or even, with much less, systems will be designed so that our recently created orchestras make up their rosters with musicians who will have mostly graduated from our centres (p. 128).

It would not be until during this same academic year, with the enactment of the Order of the 28th of August 1992 establishing beginner and intermediate music courses on the curriculum and regulating their access, that orchestra actually appeared as a standalone subject in conservatory study plans. Thus, the development of group work in music was promoted. This led to a reduction in the solo and individual aspects of instrumental studies, providing students with a musical training that was more focused on other professional options away from a career as a soloist (Ponce de León, 2017). Calleya (2011) also referred to this aspect when highlighting the importance of orchestras when it comes to the basic training of musicians.

Specifically the requirement to introduce these subjects [sic] pursues the main objective of a conservatory, band or [sic] choir. I am not sure that even the teacher of an instrument with a lot of experience always bares in mind that students will rarely manage to be soloists. However this is the first logical step for students to pay serious attention to the future musical groups in whose ranks they are likely to be, potentially, for many years (p. 51).

Since Orchestra first emerged as an academic subject, as a consequence of the educational reform promoted by LOGSE, later reforms (Martínez, 2015) have tried to ensure, to varying degrees, that students undertake symphonic specialities over a period of twelve years, consisting of participation in a variety of musical groups/ensembles. An example of this includes the Music Ensemble subject imparted during the 3rd and 4th year of basic introductory levels. Another example comes from the Orchestra/Band subject, which is undertaken throughout the professional stage, and the Music Ensemble and Large orchestral groups subjects which are imparted at the advanced stage.

Table. 1. Structure of subjects and the instrumental grouping.

	BASIC LEVEL	PROFESSIONAL LEVEL	ADVANCED TEACHING LEVEL
Subject	Music groups	Orchestra/Band	Ensemble music/Large groups
Course level/year of study	3 <sup>rd</sup> and 4 <sup>th</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup> to 6 <sup>th</sup> .	1 <sup>st</sup> to 4 <sup>th</sup>
Weekly teaching hours	1 h.	1.5 h. from 1 <sup>st</sup> to 4 <sup>th</sup> year 2 h. in years 5 and 6	3 h.

Source: Own elaboration

It is still eye catching that music specialisation and/or subjects have their own methodologies. These methodologies are founded on the development of some clearly defined competencies which are supported through specifically organised content. On the other hand, group classes offer a highly “motivating and social” opportunity to students (Muñoz, 2016), however, they lack methodological rigour and those responsible for overseeing the subject (managers and teachers) often lack the required qualifications to organise and teach instrument specialisation. This can also give rise to situations in which the teaching staff in charge of musical group content are not specialists or belong to another area. Indeed, centre management is responsible for assigning subjects to teachers in a way that fills teaching hours. On other occasions, teaching staff may not hold the required qualification or may have completed their studies in a now obsolete educational landscape, in which the aforementioned group/ensemble specialisation was not an option and they were, therefore, later trained to carry out these functions. Moreover, the conception of youth orchestras, with varying degrees of talent and resources, along with the emergence of different types of institutions/organisations for music education, provides students with the chance to participate in groups. These groups have highly different aims and objectives towards the study and practice of orchestra-related skills. Indeed, as indicated by Pliego de Andrés (2008), such skills are relegated to the background:

Today, there are places with enough new orchestras to offer aspiring musicians the luxury of choosing what they like, what is good for them or what most interests them [...]. This success is producing excellent outcomes; however, it also implies certain risks and dangers. When working with students, artistic criteria cannot be based exclusively on the search for an audience and a spectacular outcome. At the same time, teachers must attend to the training needs of their component parts. The line between professionals and non-professionals is muddled when the issue of financial rewards is approached [...]. When taking on the professional world in this way, many young people learn shortcuts and the tricks of the trade long before they have acquired the necessary technical mastery and discipline required by an orchestra group [...]. Conservatories and professional musicians’ representatives will have to intervene in this process sooner or later. Practice in an orchestra is an essential part of a musician’s training and conservatories cannot continue to distance themselves from this demand (p. 107).

In contrast to this picture, models developed in other countries close to Spain stand out, such as is Germany, Austria and Switzerland. In these models, plans for music education focusing on orchestra and group work (choir, band, ensemble, etc) (Jackish, 2019) have been included for a number of years. Indeed, it is important to mention that the subjects pertaining to musical groups provided by institutions referred to as *Musisches Gymnasium* in these European countries constitute more than one third of the overall teaching load resulting from their music education curriculum (Zubeldia, 2017).

Thus, given the absence of specific research on this topic in Spain, there is a clear need to develop research with the aim of generating pedagogical knowledge in order to understand and interpret the lived experience of musical group/ensemble classes linked to teaching staff specialising in orchestra teaching at music conservatories.

## 2. Research design: Methodological considerations

The research methodology employed in music education includes both quantitative and qualitative techniques, although quantitative designs for studies of practical experiences such as performing are difficult to implement (Verrastro & Leglar, cit. in Yourn, 2000). As a result of this and in light of the fact that the present work aims to describe and interpret the lived experience of orchestra teachers, a qualitative approach is the most appropriate to tap into the experiences and perceptions of interest.

The research questions underlying the present work are as follows:

- What are the perceptions held by teachers and other experts about orchestra teaching within the framework of the current music education curriculum?
- What methodologies and resources are being applied to improve the training of students in this aspect?
- What is the actual value given to playing in an orchestra at educational institutions?

In this regard, the present research considered all basic, professional and advanced level publicly-owned music conservatories in a province of Andalusia. The selection of this type of institution enabled access to a heterogenous sample. This enriched the findings, given that opinions may be affected by the type of educational institution at which participants worked as teachers (institution size and/or location, educational stage taught, instrument specialisations provided, degree of musical tradition at the site, etc.). Data gathered at these centres are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2. Data of participating centres.

CENTRE	MUNICIPAL POPULATION	NUMBER OF TEACHERS	ENROLLED STUDENTS
Conservatory A	12,000 inhabitants	9	108
Conservatory B	18,000 inhabitants	52	475
Conservatory C	15,000 inhabitants	38	286
Conservatory D	25,000 inhabitants	46	505
Conservatory E	300,000 inhabitants	155	1378
Conservatory F	300,000 inhabitants	96	450

Source: Own elaboration

All participants took part voluntarily in the present research. The sample comprised 6 teachers who were actively teaching Orchestra, along with the directors and heads of studies at each centre.

In order to respond to the proposed research questions, two main tools were employed. Firstly, main teaching manuals at the examined centres were analysed including legislation, curriculum, educational proposals, teaching programs and teaching guides. These were accessed via participating conservatory webpages and through request to centre management. The second tool was a semi-structured interview.

With regards to the interview, it is important to highlight that this tool provided the most information about the present topic from the perspective of the main participants/implementors. As stated by Rapley (2007) and Ruiz (2012), this instrument enables in-depth examination of the specific subjective viewpoints of informants, whilst also obtaining more authentic and better structured accounts. This technique requires social interaction between all participants, with the interviewer and interviewee collaborating in order to produce retrospective and prospective accounts of the interviewee's version of their past and future actions, experiences, feelings and thoughts. Likewise, it must be considered that an interview permits a conversation in which views on the same topic are both challenged and complemented, with discussion being influenced by both the interviewer and their specific characteristics, and the interviewee and the context.

In line with the aim of the present research and the instruments used to gather the data provided by teachers, resulting data was comprised of words, statements, texts, etc. In summary, outcomes referred to narrative data which required a specific type of analytical approach. Thus, content analysis was used in order to later be able to propose theoretical standpoints or generalisations regarding the role played by orchestras in the musical and basic training of students.

Data obtained through the present research were analysed according to a coding system consisting of emerging categories, subcategories and codes. The program NVivo 12 was used to conduct this analysis. The resulting categorisation is summarised in table 3:

Table 3. Examined categories pertaining to interview data.

<b>Category 1. GROUPS FORMED AT THE CENTRE (GROUPCE)</b>	
<b>Subcategories</b>	<b>Questions</b>
Organisation of group subjects	How are subjects relating to musical groups organised?
	What challenges arise when organising subjects relating to musical groups?
	What advantages do subjects supporting musical groups offer?
Transversality	Is the transversal connection between different subjects in the basic music curriculum effectively made?
	Do you believe that there is a productive exchange between teaching staff on non-instrumental subjects and Orchestra/Band teaching staff?
	Do you believe that there is a productive exchange between Orchestral/Repertoire teaching staff and Orchestra/Band teaching staff?
Identification and participation	How important do you think the different musical groups at the centre are?
	What type of repertoire would you like to see being worked on in musical groups at the centre?
	How would you rate student participation in musical group activities at the centre?

<b>Category 2. TEACHING PROGRAM (TEAPRO)</b>	
<b>Subcategories</b>	<b>Questions</b>
Educational purpose	What do you consider to be the future professional options your students should be trained for?
	How important are groups within the pedagogical aims of your subject?
Content	What contents related with group performance do you include in your program?
	How do you integrate learning about related instruments in your program?
Repertoire	Which group repertoires do you use as didactic resources to explain, illustrate or provide examples of subject content?
	What type of repertoire do you work on in subjects regarding musical groups/ ensemble/ chamber music?
	Do you collaborate in the study or practice of the ensemble repertoire of students in your class?
Methodology	What type of auditions do you conduct with your students?
	How many auditions do your students take part in as soloists and how many as members of any type of group?
Evaluation	What characteristics of your students do you evaluate in relation to aspects of group performance?
	What student characteristics do you evaluate in relation to aspects of individual performance through participation in musical groups?
<b>Category 3. DIDACTIC RESOURCES (DIRE)</b>	
<b>Subcategories</b>	<b>Questions</b>
Classroom characteristics	What elements would improve classroom characteristics?
Sheet music and references	How do you choose the repertoire to work on?
	What materials do you use other than sheet music?
	How do you access the sheet music you work on?
Instrumental	Do you have access to the appropriate instruments to conduct the class?
Stage settings	Where do you conduct group auditions?

Source: Own elaboration

### 3. Main outcomes: The lived experience of Orchestra teaching at music conservatories

In light of the information gathered in interview transcripts and using the proposed research questions as a reference, emerging themes will also be discussed. All participants were given the opportunity beforehand to review the findings included in the final research report and those presented below.

#### 3.1. Musical groups at the centre

One of the most notable aspects to emerge at the beginning of the present research was the absence of an idiosyncratic profile of each educational centre, with the exception of one conservatory which did provide some personal contributions. In this sense, all other participating centres reproduced, virtually literally, a perfect copy of established guidelines regulated by the pertinent administration in their educational proposal. In this sense, the absence of a personalised organisational model, which is authorised within the framework of pedagogical autonomy laid out by the regulation, indicates (in practically all of the analysed conservatories) a lack of information which would enable more in-depth understanding of the operational guidelines of musical groups at each conservatory.

From the interview data obtained, it was revealed that, at practically all examined conservatories, orchestra classes had become a highly motivating and important time of the school day for students. However, this showed little transfer from a curricular point of view since, according to interviewed teachers, the role attributed to musical groups by centres and management teams is none other than to advertise the institution at a local, regional and national level. In fact, auditions for these subjects are normally conducted publicly in order to give merit to the centre. To this end, many conservatories make use of external stage settings so that their activities achieve greater reach, whilst also scheduling them to coincide with the end of the school term or special celebrations in the school year (Christmas, Saint Cecilia, end of year, etc.).

The groups provide a reference of the level of the centre to the public (E. n° 2)<sup>4</sup>.

For this centre it is vital. I think that it is why the centre does what it does. We promote them [concerts] a lot. They are the backbone (E. n° 5).

<sup>4</sup> Nomenclature used to refer to each interviewee comprises the letter E followed by the number of the interview to which they correspond, ordered chronologically.

We have put on some additional events, for example, the meeting with the (...) Conservatory Orchestra. Concerts have been held in outside venues and there have also been concerts in the hall... (E. nº 8).

Three concerts have been held, one with each group in each term. We run rehearsals at the centre and the concerts were held at (...), which is really close to the boardwalk (E. nº 7).

One each term, during which all of the students play. The concerts are held at (...) due to us not having our own main hall at the centre (E. nº 12).

Paradoxically, it is interesting that, despite the fact that conservatory groups most often constitute the “corporate image” of centres, such activities are not included in the investment plans outlined by their management approaches. Regardless of this, it is true that, generally speaking, teachers have the feeling that students prefer to perform group activities instead of individual auditions. Indeed, many teachers report that students are much more motivated to attend group auditions.

They turn up more relaxed than when they work alone (E. nº 12).

They like playing in a group more because in some way they feel that all of the responsibility is not on them (E. nº 4).

Playing in a group is an incentive. I think that individual auditions are a pure formality, above all because they feel a bit more embarrassment and have a slightly worse time. In groups they lean on each other, they get to all go together to the theatre and it is like a party day (E. nº 3).

### 3.2. Considerations with regards to teaching programming

In addition to the lack of rigour detected in the information contained in the documents provided by the centre with regards to the working of musical groupings and the role attributed to them within the conservatory, there were also pitfalls in the subject’s didactic programming. Specifically, programs basically restated the same aims, content and evaluation criteria established according to curricular regulation, without attempting to align this with the specific characteristics of the context or student group to which it was to be applied. Furthermore, clear and ordered details of the way in which the process was to be carried out in the classroom were also lacking, whilst the precise way in which different teaching-learning activities were to be described was not laid out (Chacón, 2013). For this reason, during the interviews there arose a need to delve deeper into these aspects to uncover further details about the approach of teaching and management staff at the centres regarding curricular design and the way in which the subject was carried out in the classroom. In this sense, one of the most meaningful outcomes of the present research and, indeed, one of the most alarming, is that many interviewed teachers believed it to be highly unlikely that their students would manage to secure a job as a professional performer. Instead, they were convinced that the vast majority of students would ultimately drop out of musical studies and opt for other university studies. In the case in which students would end up completing their studies and find a relevant position in the world of work, those interviewed felt they would likely end up teaching. A very small number of teachers considered the possibility that their students would become professional orchestra musicians.

I think the professional future is really complicated. There will always be soloists who stand out and go out in a shower of expectation to other countries. But that is really difficult. In fact, most students who finish their professional diploma here, are also studying university degrees (E. nº 7).

Professional, almost none. I would love for them to go on to become professionals but I don’t think they are motivated to keep going. Very few, maybe at best 10% of students who study here will be able to continue (E. nº 13).

Wow, what a question! The truth is that in this area, orchestra and band musicians, well band musicians there probably are, because there are more bands, of course. In orchestra it’s complicated, and teachers yeah, some might end up being teachers (E. nº 9).

Another hugely important aspect relates to the challenge faced by teachers to obtain adequate materials adapted to the content being worked on in the different groups with which they work. This, perhaps, explains the notably high heterogeneity seen to exist in the repertoires proposed for conducting classes. In this sense, repertoires ranged from the most challenging excerpts from the orchestral library (although worked on individually) to soloist repertoires with an orchestra, jazz songs, popular traditional music, soundtracks, etc. One of the interviewed teachers even discussed their interest in mixing flamenco and classical music due to their centre being engaged in a program directed towards flamenco development at the time of study.

We are one of the centres engaged in a flamenco program, so I also try to mix classical music with flamenco. It’s crazy but, at the moment, in class, we have percussion and if we add orchestra pieces, the kids listen to it and we crank up the percussion. In this regard and even with the castanets, it’s been interesting... The same project also

includes, topics on equality, because the castanets are an instrument usually played by a woman and, in this case, the boys use them and you realise that they like them a lot more than the girls do (E. nº 6).

Arrangements. Sometimes I do them, other times I search for them and I find them complete and already edited, like Stars Wars. Last term we were using the Finisterre suite. We did Pirates of the Caribbean, Game of Thrones, ... They are really basic adaptations (E. nº 14).

Popular songs. Well, any type of repertoire that can motivate them, that's more familiar. But we never forget about the important repertoire that we can do (E. nº 8).

Not least important, it highlights the challenge reportedly faced by orchestra teaching staff when applying the appropriate evaluation process. They indicated that it was difficult for them to specify the proportion of the overall grade that corresponded, on the one hand, to student group work and, on the other, to individual development. Furthermore, some teachers are interested in including evaluation criteria that is difficult to evaluate objectively, such as engagement, interest or autonomous learning.

Let's see, I'd say, if they work well individually, then in the group they also work, then what I do is more see how they work in the group, how well do they study..., and then their attitude, their motivation (E. nº 3).

Performance within a group according to certain established general norms: That they perform the pieces worked on properly, with control and confidence; that they participate in timetabled auditions; and that they have an appropriate attitude when they play within a group (E. nº 12).

Generally speaking I understand that, in orchestra or group subjects, regular attendance is key, it's vital. There is an ongoing evaluation process, but this doesn't stop the fact that there are often people who, for example, consider not coming for the whole term... (E. nº 9).

I evaluate everything a little bit: First attendance and punctuality. I evaluate that a lot and I really take it into account. A student who always comes to class and is on time has already almost passed (E. nº 2).

Following musical norms and those in relation to sharing the space in the group; individual immersion in the content and their impact on the group's development as a unit; the performance capacity of students in front of an audience; the attitude of students in the group towards making it work; and regularly attending rehearsals and concerts (E. nº 12).

### 3.3. Didactic resources for orchestra teaching

The scarcity of resources, alongside the need to improve the conditions that influence the running of classes (groupings, spaces, etc...), was another notable element to emerge from the present research. However, there is a remarkable disparity found in the different opinions given according to whether those responding to questions were centre managers or teachers. Whilst the former consider that the provision of appropriate resources and certain performance requisite was sufficient, orchestra specialists called for, amongst other things, larger air-conditioned and sound-proofed classrooms, adequate instruments, greater library and technological resources, Wi-Fi network, etc. In fact, many teachers recognised that they themselves provided personal resources for use at the centre.

I brought the repertoire. Everything came from my own personal archive (E. nº 7).

The material resources are mine. I painted my classroom, I put up my posters, I bring my own computer, the musical equipment I bought and I bring everything because I really like my work. That's just how life is, ... If I had to rely on what the centre gives me, we would do very little (E. nº 11).

I bring all of the materials because almost everything I buy is published abroad. They mentioned to me, at the administrative level, that there are problems with certain places, Spanish companies, to buy, so I have bought everything with my own money. I see it as an investment in the future and in the students (E. nº 15).

They are all my arrangements. It is a lot of work but that's how it is. I'll tell you one thing, in 2 years I've now got like 40 or 50 arrangements... (E. nº 10).

Some agreement was found between teaching and management staff in the organisation of group subjects. Both teams managed to put together functional groups, which also worked well together academically. Thanks to this, interdisciplinary projects could sometimes be proposed, which led to technical group aspects worked on in stand-alone instrument classes being integrated into orchestra classes. Another outcome was that activities based on sheet music reading comprehension and its translation to performance were reinforced from a historical, aesthetic, formal and creative point of view.

Yes, we always try to make a little time to see the repertoire in the groupings. We try to coordinate between ourselves. As we are only a few, we meet up every Friday (E. nº 13).

Yes. For the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year professional students I always put aside ten or fifteen minutes for them to play in groups (E. n° 3).

At a technical instrumental level, it's true that I exchange ideas with colleagues. With string instruments, the fingering gets away from me a bit, I have to ask. Or if, sometimes, there are two versions and I don't know which is the most comfortable ... With the musical language groups it isn't like that, not because my colleague isn't interested but because, in the end, I work on it as a group ... In terms of harmony and at an analytical level, I like to discuss it in class... (E. n° 15).

In light of the above, despite the challenges discussed regarding quality orchestra classes, there is no doubt that, as shown in the data obtained in the present research, subjects pertaining to instrument sets and musical groupings are considered to be hugely important for the running of conservatories, in general, and for overall student musical development. Whether due to it being motivating, the effects of positive peer pressure or, simply, because of the fond memories students have of their experiences, the majority of those interviewed considered that forming part of an orchestra, or any other musical group, provides an experience that cannot be compared to that of any other musical education experience. This converts musical groupings into the main pillar upon which all music education should be built.

It is the emblem of the conservatory. People enrol here because of the orchestra (E. n° 8).

From a training point of view, I find it essential. On the one hand, it is the place where they, in an autonomous way, have to start to operate in a professional way based on what they learn individually. Whatever happens, they have to put it into practice (E. n° 11).

I think that ultimately it is one of the most important subjects, because it gives students the chance to play and demonstrate what they have learnt in class. At the same time, it lets them interact with their colleagues and teamwork is performed, joining together all the specialities ... It concerns work as a group in which we all collaborate. These outcomes have to be demonstrated in a public concert and must have a social outcome (E. n° 7).

It is a way of incentivising students to keep going. A kid gets hooked when they are in a group. This group makes them want to continue, because they work with other kids, more kids come with the same uncertainties, ultimately, they support each other (E. n° 14).

#### 4. Discussion and conclusions

Increasingly widespread convictions to establish innovative teaching paradigms in the classroom that are essentially disconnected from traditional teaching methods, are leading educational institutions to opt for alternative curricular and organisational models. At the same time, such models make possible the transformation of functions traditionally overseen by other hundred-year old organisations, such as symphonic orchestras. The present research has demonstrated that pertinent administrations, through the latest reforms to the educational curriculum, have promoted a broadening of content provision around musical groupings (Music Groups, Orchestra, Orchestral Repertoire, Ensemble Music and Large Groups). The benefits afforded to students belonging to a conservatory and participating in these group subjects strengthens the idea of using music groups as the backbone of the teaching-learning process (Mawang et al., 2019). This is not only because of the development of technical-instrumental skills at a personal level but, also, and above all, the motivation and excitement these subjects generate towards performing and music in general (McPherson & McCormick, 2006; Mansour et al., 2018). Subjects concerning music groups are ideal for developing skills and teaching content, which would be difficult to achieve through individual instrument practice. Thus, the importance and need to value these subjects emerges. However, it is the view of the present authors that these subjects are still not adequately managed, despite the leading role that they should play in the teaching-learning process of all future musicians (Mills, 2004).

As indicated by Tamayo (2017), Alarcón (2021) and Zhou (2021), amongst others, the dynamism and interpersonal communication resulting from rehearsal, which helps to construct a message through musical ensemble, improves the intellectual, spiritual, social and professional development of orchestra students. It is within this learning context in which the teacher must take on the responsibility of ensuring that their students appreciate, experience and enjoy music, whilst also improving their personal mastery of the instrument. Thus, it is necessary for teaching staff to set goals and establish well-defined methodological processes that optimise student skills. During the basic and professional stages, this will help students to acquire the training they need to successfully tackle advanced studies and, at this final stage, reach a level of mastery that will enable them to become a future professional instrumentalist.

This would convert conservatories into first order educational centres capable of delivering robust training. Further, such training would be clearly oriented towards a specific future professional career. This is especially important, as commented by Vicente (2003), during the difficult time at which students make the transition into the professional world. In addition, management teams at the centres must continue to strive to lead a "living organism"



with a clearly defined pedagogical approach. The social and cultural setting where the conservatory is located should be considered in order to take advantage of the peculiarities of the musical groups it provides. This pedagogical identity, of which musical groups also form a part, should be well-specified and be perfectly outlined in the centre's documentation (educational projects, didactic programs and teaching guides). It is understandable that it is difficult to identify all of the aspects relevant to the way in which different orchestra-related subjects are run. However, it is important to remember that these documents do not only act as a guide for those teaching these subjects but, also inspire reflection from the entire educational community. In this sense, the concept of music education transmitted in these documents will be openly recognised and accepted by students.

The impact of group activities on music and music education at both a cognitive and emotional level leads us to propose a change in approach regarding the pedagogical model currently used with students. In line with this, the focus of the teaching-learning process should emphasize groupwork from the beginning. This would enable individual study to filter into and find a logical continuation within the different groups, providing the motivation needed to tackle the technical and mechanical aspects of studying the instrument. Studies such as those conducted by Oriola, Gustems and Fidella (2018) and Martínez (2021), have strengthened this idea by demonstrating that musical groups tend to generate a highly favourable social climate. Student development is supported in both musical aspects and aesthetic enjoyment but, also, in personal development, interpersonal relationships and a sense of belonging. In this way, a more transversal vision of student training is provided.

The change in mentality towards a model that encourages group work does not have to imply a reduction in commitment to technical aspects. Music, just as with any other aspect vital to shielding students in the increasingly globalised world is dedicated to replacing individual ideas and processes in favour of group success, since no one of us is as important as the rest of us. Indeed, leaning towards group development as the main pillar of musical educational processes is nothing new. On the contrary, the setup of musical chapels and the first conservatories in Italy very much promoted group work.

All of the above, leads us to redefine the concept of an orchestra, understanding it as a body that leads its members to interact with each member through musical experiences. Each individual makes a contribution and receives the musical and social benefits of group work in return. In this regard, Verhagen et al. (2016) stated:

...the strength of a community comprised of a multitude of performers provides an educational tool that gives children and young people the opportunity to discover the aesthetic qualities of music. Playing or singing in a group leads to technical development at an individual and group level, whilst individuals also explore the structure of works of art to overcome the challenge posed by them (p.41)

Orchestras bring together both musical and social components, placing group experiences at the heart of all of their activities and turning them into effective tools for motivating students to technically and artistically better themselves in all aspects.

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