

## Engaging children from 3- to 15-years-old in musical creation at Conservatório de Música de Sintra

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### Overview

An independent musician should have the ability to create and improvise music (Azzara, 2006; Burton & Snell II, 2018). This ability to express musical ideas is not restricted to a group of gifted people, instead, it emerges from early musical interaction with others (Barret, 2006). Research has shown that encouraging children to act as improvisers and composers, and to reflect on the processes will contribute to enhancing their learning (Burnard, 2010).

Precisely, one of the main goals at Conservatório de Música de Sintra (CMS) has been to engage children in democratic practices in the educational process. Although this is a natural process in regular education, it poses different challenges in music education considering the teaching legacy and tradition at official music schools in Portugal.

Nevertheless, the music curriculum designed for “Iniciação Musical” classes at CMS, attended by children aged 6 to 9 years old and implemented for decades, has always involved them in creative processes. Improvising with their voices, body percussion, and playing with Orff instruments assume a central role in children’s classes and performances. Throughout the years, performative happiness and self-confidence have been shown by children in these processes.

Taking this anecdotal evidence into account and the need to avoid singing groups and choirs with the pandemic’s arrival, the pedagogical team decided to introduce changes in the curriculum. Thus, a specific subject called “Music Creation and Improvisation” was introduced in 2020. Its aim was to contribute to a deeper understanding of music language, allowing children to express their musical ideas through singing and playing in the same way they speak and write in their native language, in a playful environment. The successful results of this subject reinforced the school’s view and boosted the introduction of new practical music classes in the official curriculum for children aged 10 to 15 years old, such as “Body percussion” and “Improvisation” in 2021. Currently, the pedagogical team is conducting a reflexive discussion about these new subjects involving the education community. Data collection includes a survey among students, teachers’ points of view, as well as parents’ opinions, concerning the impact of these classes on students’ global development.

On the other hand, CMS – established as a nonprofit association and music school in 1974, and later as an official music school in 1982 - has extended its educational offer to kindergarten in 2019, and to primary school in 2021. The musical approach at these educational levels is child-center-based, naturally reinforcing creation processes in strict articulation with multiple curriculum subjects.

Our presentation proposal is a commented concert involving teachers and students of the subjects referred above, including practical examples with video support and live music performance. We would like to share music projects that include children with ages ranging from 3- to 15-year-old, concerning the kindergarten and primary school music education classes, and the Improvisation and Body Percussion classes from the official music courses.

## **References**

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