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# LEARNING CORNERS IN UNIVERSITY MUSIC EDUCATION: A PROPOSAL FOR IMPLEMENTATION AND ASSESSMENT

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**ABSTRACT:** For teacher training, it is necessary to use innovative methodologies that allow students to experiment with them, as well as to obtain tools for their future work as teachers. This is true in the case of the methodology called "Learning corners", which we implemented and assessed in this research. A learning corners strategy was designed for 54 students studying for a Master's degree in Primary Education, within the music didactics module. The methodology included individual and collaborative activities in work teams. The results of the assessment revealed that this methodology promotes autonomy, motivation and learning, resulting in a useful resource for future teachers.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The current scenario proposed by the European Convergence towards the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) includes changes in teaching methodologies. These are designed to promote the training of future competent professionals who must acquire the necessary tools to deal with the new global reality. In particular, the characteristics of this new globalized reality make it necessary for teachers at any stage of education to foster an entrepreneurial culture (Panos, 2017) through the development of this competence. The entrepreneurial competence must be developed through active methodologies that promote self-leadership and autonomy. To that end, Ravitz *et al.* (2012) proposed several skills necessary for the development of students in the 21st Century: critical thinking, collaboration, communication, creativity and innovation, self-direction, global connections, local connections and use of technologies and tools for learning. Higher education should be the culmination of the entire academic process and, therefore, to ensure the acquisition of these skills to prepare them for access to the world of work. The novelty of this paper is that it tests the application of an active methodology; Learning Corners (LC) at university.

Learning corners is based on the educational model focusing on learning, which emphasises student learning; knowledge is understood to be constructive and the teacher is responsible for designing the curriculum, but students must cooperate with curricular development. The student is encouraged to design their learning routes and to engage in the process (Machemer and Crawford, 2007).

LC combines the approaches of problem solving and other investigative approaches (Lopez and Alsina, 2015). It is a structured learning environment and invites students to participate and, thus, to achieve learning, with a great diversity of contents and types of activities, focused on action, exploring and experimenting (Coloma *et al.*, 2008). Moreover, it is a methodology that has been frequently used with the students of Early Childhood and Primary Education. It has been proven to be extremely effective in these stages. Teachers can use this methodology in several ways: for example, children can perform these activities as a complement to the activity that takes place in the classroom, after homework, or specific content related to the topic they are working on. Furthermore, this is an activity that is as important as any other type of activity, since the students have a fixed time during school hours to carry out the different activities (Gervilla, 2006).

We believe that LC, in addition to promoting the acquisition of curricular content, allows the development of a wide variety of skills necessary for students. We would like to highlight the role of certain skills such as collaboration and self-direction, although others are also developed, such as

creativity and the use of technology. Self-direction is defined as the ability to take responsibility for their own learning by identifying the topics to be followed and the processes of their own learning, and also being able to review their own work. On the other hand, ability to collaborate consists of being able to work together to solve problems or answer questions in a respectful and effective way, achieving a common goal (Ravitz *et al.*, 2012).

Despite having evidence for all these advantages, this method has hardly been implemented in the universities, despite being efficient for doing collaborative work and for the ability to self-direct, skills which are so important today.

LC respects the students' pace of learning. Since they approach the activities autonomously, students acquire the confidence to execute tasks and solve for themselves the problems as they arise. In addition, this methodology helps them to learn from their own mistakes and demands greater responsibility in their learning process (Coloma *et al.*, 2008).

LC involves a methodological change that has, in summary, the following features (Valle and Díez, 2002): distinct organization of the classroom space; the use of various materials to carry out different activities, both individually and as a group; and teachers who are not mere transmitters of knowledge, but act as a guide in the teaching-learning process.

The teacher must plan and collect the materials to design stimulating individual and team activities and organize the classroom space. Thus, it will enhance the autonomous learning of the students. The activities must be described in a clear and detailed way to promote their autonomy (even if they can rely on the occasional help of the teacher). It is therefore recommended that a work guide be prepared to be delivered to the students (where the corners, the activities to be carried out, the documents to be delivered and the form of assessment are clearly specified). Lastly, it is advised that the activities are playful and creative or encourage student motivation.

It is important that the teacher design employs a variety of activities so that the student may acquire different skills and the activity be more dynamic. For example, the inclusion of ICT means that skills and competences, rather than only closed knowledge and programmed techniques, are promoted. (Pozo and Monereo, 1999). One should bear in mind here that our current society is characterized by complexity and constant change, so that the role of the teacher as the person responsible for a trans missive process and the student as a receiver-reproducer of this information must be overcome by a new educational model focused on promoting the capacity to learn (Diaz, 2000).

One aspect that promotes the development of this methodology is the continuous supervision of the teacher. They will observe the students in the different corners, assessing their progress and helping them with their difficulties.

The students, on the other hand, have to become a kind of tourist who are visiting with curiosity the different corners they discover. First, they must decide the corner where they want to start. They also have to choose and discard at every moment the activities that they consider convenient. The teacher can design this methodology with a different degree of freedom to the students. In some cases, the teacher will agree to choose different activities and the students might select and perform only a few, giving a greater possibility of choice. In other cases, the teacher will require some compulsory activities, letting the student chose the planning, order, place and time spent. In this way, it is important that the teacher plans how many sessions they will be able to spend on this methodology and inform their students, so that they can self-regulate and assess whether they need to carry out activities more quickly or devote extra time outside the established timetable.

Once the activities have been carried out, it is important that the teacher receives feedback on the methodology used, to adjust it and improve it in future projects. For this reason, it is worth asking the students for an assessment of the LC project, which will be carried out by the teacher along with the documents required for their assessment.

## 2. DEVELOPMENT OF LEARNING CORNERS. A PROPOSAL FOR UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

The students volunteered to take part in the LC study. All the participants belonged to the first year of the Degree in Teaching, specializing in Primary Education. The subject in which this method was carried out is called "Music didactics in primary education". There were a total of 54 students, 74.1% were women and 25.9% were men. The average age was 19.35 years, in a range of 18 to 29 years. 53.7% were 18 years old, and for all students, this is the first university degree they had studied.

The teacher planned 7 corners with different activities, and two specific corners more related to feedback, consultation and supervision; they were the assembly corner and the teacher consultation

corner. The students were divided into 6 groups of 9 people, respecting their freedom of choice when setting up work teams. The teacher designed a dossier where the activities had to be described, the space where they would be carried out and the documentation that the students had to submit for their subsequent assessment. The time dedicated to the project was eight classes of two hours. The first two classes were spent on introducing the methodology, the delivery of the dossier and the explanation of the contents and skills necessary to carry out the activities. The following 6 sessions were devoted to carrying out the LC activities. The different activities proposed had to be carried out in a group or individually, according to the indications for each activity. Each group chose the corner in which they wanted to start and the teacher organized these starting preferences, so that everyone could start doing the work at the same time. They were asked to anonymously assess the project through a series of items on satisfaction with this methodology in the assessment corner. The reserved spaces to carry out the different activities were the ordinary classroom, the faculty library and the computer rooms, psychomotricity and the room of musical instruments.

The students were free to choose the order and carry out the activities, except for the last corner, which was designed for assessment, in which they should assess the methodology of corners. The transfer to the computer, instrument and psychomotricity rooms did not pose any obstacle, since they are very close to the music classroom.

The assembly corner was labeled as the space for the beginning and end of each session, in which all students met with the teacher (and therefore a place to report the progression of their work, raise questions and coordinate for the distribution of spaces). Furthermore, in this place the teacher was available to solve any query that might arise.

In addition to this classroom, there were two more clearly-differentiated corners: the musical literacy workshop and the experimentation and manipulation workshop with objects and instruments. The first one consisted of a series of solfeggio cards and "Musi-Mates" exercises that had to be done individually. "Musi-Mates" is a game to perform calculations in which numbers are replaced by musical figures. Moreover, in the instrument experimentation workshop, the students had to design their own musical instrument with any type of material: plastic or glass bottles, pulses, bottle caps, cardboard tubes, adhesive tape, pieces of cardboard, cans, among others. The instruments were then exchanged, and they handled and experienced them with their senses, testing their texture, smelling them, and rehearsing the sound possibilities of each. Finally, a musical improvisation was carried out that had to be recorded in MP3 and delivered to the teacher for further assessment. Both activities were individual; although in the second one, the whole group had to work together to perform the improvisation.

The literacy corner aimed to reinforce musical language, and, therefore, the acquisition of academic concepts. In this way, the object and instrument experimentation and handling workshop fostered creativity and motivation, as well as enhancing socialization. Furthermore, both workshops were playful, but they did not neglect the formative and educational sense.

In the technology corner, the teacher designed three activities. The first one consisted of choosing through their respective links one of the following auditions: "In a Persian market" by Albert Ketelbey, "Rhapsody in Blue" by George Gershwin, "Peer Gynt" by Eduard Grieg and "Peter and the Wolf "by Sergei Prokofiev. All these pieces are musical stories, except for "Rhapsody in Blue". It is, therefore, music with a clearly descriptive functionality that alludes to natural phenomena, and suggestive situations, among other things. They are, therefore, suitable pieces for working with this methodology since they are easy to understand.

The activity concluded with a file in which each student answered a series of questions and wrote a small comment about the piece of music heard. In the second activity, each student made a musicgram from a piece of music previously selected by the teacher.

In this case, using "The Typewriter" by Leroy Anderson (a very funny piece for schoolchildren that simulates the dialogue between a typewriter and an orchestra) a musicgram was developed. This is a drawing or a graphic that helps to understand the meaning of music using visual elements of any kind and, in addition, facilitates the perception of the musical structure. The last activity developed in the computer classroom consisted of a group composition of a simple song. For this purpose, the "Finale 2012" program was used, which allows students to edit their own scores. In addition, you can listen to the music at the same time as you write it. The activity concluded with the delivery of the score that they had composed in PDF format (music and lyrics). Therefore, in this corner, in addition to ICT, the creative capacity was fostered through the composition and exercise of the musicgram, while critical thinking was fostered through musical listening.

The instrumental and vocal corner was developed in the classroom of musical instruments. For this, the teacher prepared three well-differentiated musical scores: "Hotaru Koi", a popular Japanese song,

"Ode to Joy" by Beethoven and "My Heart Will Go On", a song from the soundtrack of the movie "Titanic."

They were fun, motivating pieces chosen to be rehearsed in a group. The interpretation was carried out by singing and using the recorders and percussion instruments that the classroom had. After carrying out the tests that each group considered pertinent, the recordings of the pieces (that were delivered to the teacher in video MP4 format) were performed. The instrumental corner fostered collaborative work, since the students had to work effectively and respectfully as a team to achieve a final goal. The improvement of the interpretation of the piece thanks to the individual and collective effort, the overcoming of the problems and the technical difficulties as they appeared, together with the commitment to attend the rehearsals, caused a positive feeling that strengthened the sense of belonging to a group and, therefore, socialization.

The research corner was carried out in the faculty library. The students had to consult music pedagogy journals and choose an article containing useful information for them in the exercise of their teaching from the journals. Moreover, they had to share the ideas, resources and different points of view that the article had given them as a group. Finally, the questions related to the dossier were answered individually in a written document. At the same time as students learned from the teaching experience of the researchers in music didactics, they gained rudimentary knowledge of the broad field of specialist bibliographical sources in research.

The dance corner was held in the psychomotor classroom. Before the class, the students searched the website https://danzasdelmundo.wordpress.com, where popular dances from different countries of the world could be watched. Furthermore, a data sheet was provided on said website that explained in detail the different steps that constituted each dance. The teacher had to select four dances that fit into groups of eight people. The dances were titled: "Anne Marie Reel" from Canada, "Troika" from Russia, "Star Polka" from Germany and "Cumberland Reel" from Scotland. All the dances were easy to perform and easy to stage. Likewise, they were highly playful, which was fostered by the continuous exchanges of couples, the steps required and, the interaction with all the members of the group. The students chose one of them, they rehearsed it as a group and, finally, they delivered a recording of it on the day the teacher had indicated.

Finally, in the assessment corner, they were asked to assess the methodology, through an online survey. This survey of satisfaction with the methodology used was developed *ad hoc* for this work. The survey was composed of 10 items with a 7-point Likert-like response format (1 totally disagree - 7 totally agree). In addition, they answered two open questions about the advantages and disadvantages of this methodology. The survey was anonymous, so they were informed that their answers would not affect the assessment of the course.

## 3. RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

The application of LC at university proved to be a satisfactory methodology, both for the teacher and for the students.

The results of the survey are shown below in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Mean, standard deviation and summary of scores obtained by the students in the satisfaction scale with the LC methodology

| | Item | Mean | SD | Scores totally disagree - totally agree | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 1 | This methodology has awakened my interest in learning | 6.03 | 0.93 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 11 | 20 | 19 |
| 2 | I think that this methodology is effective to achieve effective learning | 6.29 | 0.74 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 7 | 26 | 20 |
| 3 | I think that this methodology is useful for me to apply in the future when I am a teacher | 6.53 | 0.81 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 5 | 18 | 29 |
| 4 | I felt motivated while doing the "LC" | 6.29 | 0.80 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 11 | 13 | 30 |
| 5 | I believe that the learning I have obtained through this methodology will last | 5.66 | 0.97 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 19 | 16 | 13 |
| 6 | I prefer this methodology to a | 6.71 | 0.82 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 8 | 43 |

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | lecture | | | | | | | | | | |
| 7 | I think that this methodology is versatile and can be applied in many courses and for many ages | 6.37 | 1.03 | | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 6 | 14 | 28 |
| 8 | I think that this methodology is practical for the teacher | 5.61 | 1.33 | | 1 | 2 | 0 | 3 | 14 | 18 | 16 |
| 9 | I believe that this methodology involves great effort in its design and implementation | 6.00 | 1.05 | | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 11 | 18 | 21 |
| 10 | I am satisfied with this methodology overall | 6.24 | 0.78 | | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 11 | 19 | 24 |

**Source:** Source of own elaboration

From the analysis of these results, we may point out that the students, in general, defined this methodology as effective and useful and that it promoted motivation. Even though all the scores are quite high, item 8 is the one with the lowest score ("I believe that this methodology is practical for the teacher"), with a higher dispersion of the scores obtained. We believe that students already understand that this type of methodology can be costly in all its process: from the design, execution with demands of time and space management and its assessment, setting out these responses (with the item "I think this methodology involves great effort in its design and implementation", also obtaining high scores). This indicates that the teacher, with this type of methodology focused on learning, does not seek to avoid the teacher role, but rather invests effort in the design and implementation of the methodology. It should be noted that the item with the highest score is 6 ("I prefer this methodology to lectures"), with a score close to the total score of 7, clearly indicating the students' preferences, in which only one student in 54 expressed disagreement. Finally, the overall satisfaction of the students with the methodology is very high, as shown in item 10.

On the other hand, Table 2 depicts a classification based on the answers to the open question that was formulated with the survey. The specific question was: "I consider that this methodology offers advantages because: ...". The answers were grouped together due to their covering similar material.

**Table 2.** Qualitative analysis of the open answers to the question "Advantages of the LC methodology"

| Answers | Count |
|---|---|
| I have learned to collaborate in a group | 7 |
| It is an entertaining, fun, and playful activity | 6 |
| Encourages students' autonomy | 5 |
| You can work on different aspects of music | 5 |
| It allows you to work freely | 4 |
| It is a practical methodology | 3 |
| It is learned in a didactic way (easy comprehension and easy learning) | 3 |
| It encompasses several mixed activities | 2 |
| This methodology is effective | 2 |
| It is a different, new methodology | 2 |
| You learn that music is not just a course | 2 |
| It breaks the routine | 2 |
| It promotes creativity and imagination | 2 |
| The learning obtained is not only cognitive, but also sensory | 1 |
| It awakens curiosity, and the desire to have knowledge | 1 |
| We learn to alternate individual and group work | 1 |
| We enjoyed ourselves though learning | 1 |
| It promotes corporal and musical expression | 1 |
| It is helpful for the future | 1 |
| The classes are fruitful | 1 |
| You work according to objectives and students manage time | 1 |
| Students discover things by themselves | 1 |
| Students can apply what they learned in class | 1 |
| It helps with socialisation | 1 |
| It promotes research | 1 |
| A good point is that you can ask the teacher any question without any problems, and he/she will solve it. | 1 |

**Source:** Source of own elaboration

One may highlight, by way of summary, one participant's answer, which summarises his satisfaction with the methodology: "With the completion of this LC work, I have learned to listen more internally to music, in a way that has allowed me to analyse it; I have improved my ability to create musicgrams; and I have discovered a new and fun relationship between mathematics and music, as well as learning the temporal value of musical notes more clearly through the musi-mates activity. On the other hand, with reading and analysing the article explained previously, I have expanded my knowledge, which will be useful if and when I find myself in a similar situation in which I have to act as a teacher. Finally, I have developed my imagination to be creative in making musical instruments".

Regarding the drawbacks of the methodology, they were asked to continue the following item: "I consider that this methodology may have the following disadvantages: ...". Table 3 depicts the answers grouped into similar concepts.

**Table 3.** Qualitative analysis of the open answers to the question "I consider that this methodology may have the following disadvantages…":

| Answers | Count |
|---|---|
| I think there is no disadvantage or improvement to make to this methodology | 10 |
| Some activities were a bit complicated for non-musicians | 4 |
| I wish we had had to do the task slowly, as long as it was possible to finish it on time. | 4 |
| Lack of resources at the school where LC work takes place (material, available classes, etc.) | 2 |
| The disadvantages of this methodology are that the students do not take what needs to be done seriously, and the hours to do the work are taken from their free time. | 2 |
| It would be appropriate to do the corners that are worked on individually in the scheduled class hours; however, this is sometimes not the case. | 1 |
| I found the individual ones more difficult because you have to think more. | 1 |
| Perhaps, what I found most difficult was making the copy of a score in Finale: although the teacher explained it, it was more difficult than I thought | 1 |
| It's four weeks and it's a bit long | 1 |
| Some group activities have been difficult to organise and plan because there were a lot of us, and some had already finished some of the individual ones and others hadn't | 1 |
| It is very expensive to do it and there are no resources | 1 |
| It may be that, when working in a group without teacher supervision, a student does not participate adequately, harming the rest of the group. | 1 |
| The difficulty of time and organization | 1 |
| It is more difficult to increase knowledge | 1 |
| You do the topic faster, which is not always a good thing. There are students who need to deepen their knowledge of this | 1 |
| Lack of involvement of some people, not knowing how to organize time | 1 |
| The student relaxes, it is not done in the allotted time or the student does it as just another job to get it over and done with. | 1 |
| I think that this methodology is a very good one to follow in a classroom, but it is a lot of work for the teacher to do both the assembly and the assessment. | 1 |
| Within group work there may be people who work less and have the same grade and the work and effort of some group members is not reflected in it | 1 |
| Students might be somewhat lost without a teacher | 1 |
| Students relaxing and leaving everything to the last minute. | 1 |
| I think groups contain a lot of people and this can negatively affect the whole group in some aspects. | 1 |
| Too many instruments and little dance or few songs | 1 |
| Lack of seriousness and commitment on the part of some group members | 1 |

**Source:** Source of own elaboration

The answers that did not directly answer the question, but which reflect other aspects, are not shown; for example, recommendations for the use of the methodology (e.g., "We would also apply this methodology to the older students. It would be advisable, but with simpler workshops"). It should be noted that some of the answers are specific feedback to this particular piece of work (e.g., *"I would have liked to have had more time",* or *"the groups were too big"*). Other drawbacks are related to the attitude of some students, especially in terms of group work, because if they do not get involved enough, it affects

the atmosphere and the performance of the whole team. This is a disadvantage that the students usually mentioned in collaborative works (Blasco-Magraner and Bernabe-Valero, 2016).

On the other hand, the teachers' assessment of the effectiveness and development of LCs has been very positive. In this way, the assessments of the different activities showed that the students were able to learn the basic competences of the subject. In addition, it also established that, from the design of the activities, creative products could be obtained (musical instruments, compositions ... etc.) that would not have been obtained from other types of methodology more focused on teaching.

In summary, we can conclude that this methodology was effective in its application in a university. The participants are being trained to be future teachers, so this methodology has given them the curricular contents of the subject of music didactics. Moreover, they were able to verify the different aspects of LC at an experiential level: its effectiveness, its possibilities, among others. They have developed cooperative and self-leadership skills, as well as time management. These results were also satisfactory for the vast majority of the participants. We also believe that the teacher has to request feedback from the students to improve the design of this type of educational strategy. For future lines of research, it is proposed that this technique be implemented at different educational levels to develop responsibility, self-leadership and creativity in learning at younger ages.

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