

Music Education and Didactic Materials

International
EDM
Symposium

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International Symposium of Music Education and Didactic Materials
24th – 25th January 2019, Santiago de Compostela, Spain

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Logo: CADABULLOS Diseño Web & Rosi Vicente
Language review: Anthony J. Vázquez
Cover page: Luis Miguel Crespo Caride
Publication: Grupo STELLAE/IARTEM
ISBN: 978-84-122480-2-9



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To cite this work:

Vicente Álvarez, R.M., Gillanders, C., Rodríguez Rodríguez, J., Romanelli, G. & Pitt, J.
(2020) (eds.) *Music education and didactic materials*.
Santiago de Compostela: Grupo STELLAE/IARTEM

Making music to investigate our neighbourhood: the Musiquem program

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Abstract. This paper presents an educational program based on community music activity within the classroom to develop a service-learning project. The project was carried out in a primary school with students of the 3rd, 4th and 5th grade. It was designed and developed in collaboration with primary teachers, professional musicians and researchers in the field of education. During three months, the students developed musical skills in relation to rhythm, musical and body expression and undertook a project to research about their neighbourhood, in order to explore and disseminate knowledge and social and cultural possibilities of the area to the community. The text explores potentialities and challenges of educational projects that include features such as being inherently interdisciplinary, designed to be inter-level and which bring different actors (teachers, professionals, researchers) into the same educational space.

Keywords. Music education, service-learning, educational program, collaboration, primary school.

1. Introduction

This paper explores the implementation of an educational experience using music education and service-learning in a Spanish primary school. The study is part of a wider research in the context of the research project “Multidimensional analysis of the socioeducational impact of community music and service-learning initiatives at school: the *Musiquem* program” (Ref. EDU2017-86311-P), funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities. Using community music ensembles within the classroom, this interdisciplinary project organises service-learning experiences within the community.

The overall program aims to connect educational experiences using community music activities with real concerns in relation to service-learning proposals developed within the context of the school. The program connects researchers from University Jaume I of Castellón with a primary school, CEIP Mestre Canós Sanmartín, in the city of Castellón de la Plana. The purpose of this experience is to make use of the possibilities of music making as an element of communication, positive coexistence and intercultural understanding. It offers resources to primary school children to contribute to the development of social, communicative and relational skills, while learning and practicing music. It links musical and corporal expression with values education, fostering the connection between the school and the community that surrounds it. At the same time, the program aims to support the primary teachers, in direct collaboration with music instrumental teachers, resident artists in music and art and researchers in education, with the purpose to share positive musical and artistic experiences in formal and informal educational spaces by promoting values education.

Through the formation of instrumental ensembles in schools we encourage the democratization of artistic and musical practice in settings where not all people can acquire this knowledge and experience. The possibilities of active participation of the centre, with the community, with members of other diverse realities are promoted, as well as the visibility of the collective potentialities and the community work in spaces of shared musical practice.

The program is carried out in the school and within the school hours, allowing the participation of all the students. Thus, the choice of service-learning emerges in the *Musiquem* program as an educational proposal that clearly implies the cooperation between the students and the members of the community near the school. Its application will allow students to be involved in service activities to society and provide a motivating learning experience for their personal and academic development. To this end, performances will be carried out in which the students develop their musical and expressive skills by providing dynamic and revitalization services for adult centres, day centres, health centres and/or neighbourhood associations near the school.

In this paper we report the experience undertaken in the first three months of implementation of the program, in which we conducted a service-learning project, specifically assembled as a research service (Furco & Billing, 2002). This category of projects involve, among others, collecting information or detecting relevant needs for the life of the community. They research the actual state and situation of the community and share this knowledge with the society.

At the same time, we designed a set of activities of musical and body expression to work concepts such as rhythm, active and respectful listening, coordination, musical appreciation, together with the aim of working on group cohesion and positive attitude towards diversity. The design of teaching materials to develop an interdisciplinary project in music education is discussed.

2. Description of the project

The project is shaped as an educational proposal that will be implemented with students of the 3rd, 4th and 5th year of primary school. Each class have two sessions per week in which the music teacher and a resident musician work together in a series of activities, both musical and other disciplines. The project is entitled "*El nostre barri [Our neighbourhood]*" and, as a research service project, aims to collect information about cultural, institutional and recreational possibilities of the neighbourhood, to discuss about the school life and the life of the students without the community, and to detect specific problems or needs that occur within the community.

The project includes learning objectives and objectives towards the service. The learning objectives are those aimed to be developed throughout the different activities proposed in the project; the objectives towards the services are those derived from the implementation of the service-learning project undertaken. The project includes the following objectives:

Learning objectives:

- To promote actively and respectfully listening, experiencing sounds and creating and performing music with the own body, voice and instruments.
- To create scripts and oral presentations in front of classmates or the general public.
- To know the different elements that shape the geographic space close to the student, with special relevance to the concepts of city and neighbourhood, valuing the importance of the development of society, history, heritage, culture and traditions.

- To develop expressive activities that encourage creativity and confidence in oneself through body expression, respecting the expressive and communicative resources of others.
- To use digital tools for searching, editing and creating presentations as well as selection and responsible use of information from varied sources and diverse media (oral, written, digital).
- To show interest and open attitude when carrying out the different proposed activities.
- To work on group cohesion through different activities.

Objectives towards the service:

- To investigate the sociocultural possibilities available within the neighbourhood and the school using musical and educational practices in the community.

3. Methodology

The methodological proposal follows general principles such as starting from the level of development of each particular student, from the level of previous knowledge, using an active methodology with the student as a protagonist, encouraging the use of the game as a teaching and learning strategy, starting concepts and practices from the intuitive, sensitive and direct knowledge to the most symbolic and abstract, in order to contribute to the development of the ability of learning how to learn by providing tools to build the own learning. All the activities are designed to generate meaningful learning that has a direct transfer to students' daily life, and to opt for global and comprehensive learning: physical, cognitive and socio-affective. Finally, the project aims to encourage the development of socialization and affectivity from cooperative work.

Therefore, the project is based on pedagogical principles focused on inclusive education, from which a series of methodological proposals and strategies are derived, such as service-learning (Chiva y Martí, 2016), cooperative learning (Díaz-Aguado, 2003) and community-based educational practices in music (Cabedo-Mas, 2014).

Some of the activities included in the project are the following:

Musical expression and creation

They include activities of musical expression, body percussion, rhythmical games, activities aimed at developing coordination, singing and dancing. Experimentation and creation are an important focus of these activities. Therefore sharing leadership is a common practice in the classroom.

Preparation for the instrumental practice

Prior to perform in ensembles, a series of activities are developed to, among others, detecting different motivations towards the instruments, promoting group cohesion and teamwork, acquiring knowledge about instruments and developing coordination, concentration and independence between hands.

Research

The research about the neighbourhood are organised in activities that include direct research – by interviewing families, teachers and people in the street – and indirect research – by searching through the internet. Through musical exercises, knowledge on the neighbourhood is shared, discussed and remembered. Other activities together with the community include: incoming visits and interviews to neighbours (from the social centre for the elderly), visits to different associations and social centres (music school, centre for people with special needs, etc.), a gymkhana in which students have to collect clues and information from different locations and premises in the neighbourhood, etc.

Construction of a mock-up

Based on the research and using different techniques and learning on maths and geography the students build a 3D mock-up of the neighbourhood, identifying the different locations researched and characterizing different institutions (cultural locations, social and civic locations, educational centres, green areas, etc.).



Figure 1. Map of the neighbourhood

Recording of sound landscapes

The students record sounds of different locations of the neighbourhood. This sonic material is listened, discussed and serves as bases for musical

compositions and experimentations inspired on the community. The sonic landscape materials are attached to the mock-up.

Preparation of performances

The final performance includes a guided visit opened to the community, in which the students will present and provide with information about certain locations throughout the neighbourhood. The students create posters with information about each location that has been studied, and the poster will remain in each specific place. The visit ends up in the school, where the mock-up is presented and a performance takes place. The performance includes a concert with pieces of music created and studied during the project.

4. Reflections

The implementation of the program led to important reflections about how to design and put into practice educational projects that combines both music education and service-learning, and brings together teachers, artists and researchers into the same educational realm.

The joint work between teachers and professional musicians has significant potentialities in music education. In our opinion, this collaboration reinforces the strengths a primary teacher has in teaching music. The musician brings to the classroom new skills, a different view about the art as a concept and the way people participate and share artistic experiences. On the other hand, the teaching abilities the teacher has, the way he/she connects and communicates with students and his/her commitment with education influences the way the artist and the children relate and interact and how the artistic experience is created and shared. This collaboration nourishes therefore both, the teacher and the professional musician. However, this collaboration has important challenges that need to be considered. The coordination between both figures is fundamental to enable the good development of the activities. To achieve this coordination, it is important to have previous meetings to shape together the project. It is important to design the activities in a collaborative way. Furthermore, a shared leadership within the classroom – or alternate leadership in different activities – is an important challenge that could benefit the engagement of every actor and the effectiveness of the educational actions. As Díaz-Gómez has several times indicated (2002, 2010), collaborations between different actors in music education has been a major concern in Spanish music education realm. Despite music educators has often reflected their willingness to collaborate, joint projects designed and undertaken by diverse actors in different fields of music and music education are still scarce.

One of the challenges that a teaching program which is inherently interdisciplinary, which is designed to be inter-level and that brings different actors (teachers, professionals, researchers) into a dialogue face is the lack of teaching materials available. Authors such as Marable and Raimondi (2007) or Billingsley and Cross (1991) have highlighted the importance of teaching materials across different educational levels. The lack of these type of resources may influence teachers' motivation when teaching in different contexts. Although it seems that each specific project would need its own teaching materials, creation of this sort of teaching materials may help teachers to undertake similar initiatives (Yanez, Khalil and Walsh, 2010). Some of the questions that these materials arise include: *How to guarantee the project addresses concepts and skills outlined in the curricula? How the objectives of study will be adapted to the different competences level of the students? How to assess the project? How to offer guidelines so that both actors (teacher and professional) in the same classroom may be able to manage the activities?*

The educational materials created in the project are inherently interdisciplinary. The project connects music education with other fields, such as visual education, corporal expression, mathematics, knowledge of the social and cultural environment, language, etc. Some of the materials were previously created by the facilitators (musician, researchers, teachers), and included written documents, songs, choreographies. As Lane (2012) indicates, it is important to create this kind of materials in a cooperative way, so that all involved agents feel the materials as their own resources. In order to design the most appropriate materials for the students a significant research was previously conducted about the neighbourhood, its social, historical and cultural background, and the social, civic, recreational and educational services it offers. But most of the materials have been created by doing, authored mainly by the students. They include musical compositions and research about the neighbourhood, brought by interviews, maps, analysis of information, and objectified through the mock-up. The final purpose is to reflect on possible issues, problems or difficulties the community may face, in order the materials of one project lead to design and develop the next project. In this regards, all the research undertaken may be developed in a prospective service-learning project that could include denounce, indirect or direct intervention services (Furc3 & Billing, 2002).

In conclusion, the experience reinforces the value of undertaking community music activities within the classroom. This exploratory project leads to interesting debates about how to implement an educational program that, beyond the learning of musical concepts, intends to promote global education through music making. The idea of promoting participatory artistic experiences (Turino, 2008) in the music classroom can be a useful vehicle to promote a model of learning committed to the integral development of the students and to enhance

the connection between the school and the community, transferring the educational space in but also beyond the classroom.

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