

LEARNING THROUGH RESEARCH: THE IMPLEMENTATION OF LEARNING METHODOLOGY IN MUSIC TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAMME

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Abstract

In teacher training college, lectures are normally collective, teacher trainees are taught in groups, but can we say that they learn in groups? It is possible? The essence of the teaching/learning process is the relationship and the modification derived therefrom. Learning process can happen in different ways and in several situations. I would like to broaden this perspective, considering educational situations in which the interaction occurs between several behaviours – one lecturer and some students and particularly a group of students. In planning the educational situation, lecturers can use different methods according to their own point of view about the essence of the teaching/learning process. They can give more importance to transmission of information or to training, etc. But if they are convinced of the importance of promoting cooperation, solidarity, mutual help between individuals, I suggest research, particularly group research, as one of the most suitable methods. Research method represents scientific procedures involving cognitive processes that produce learning, which is a stable modification of behaviour. In this paper, I will discuss how research method can be utilized in (the case) the process of training pre-service music teacher in teacher training programme.

Key words: learning methodology, teacher training programme

Introduction

Learning is one of the most studied subjects and among several definitions, one of the most widely accepted is *acquired and relatively stable modifications of behaviour*. Learning is first of all a spontaneous, natural process related to either biological/psychological or cultural aspects, therefore it is normally considered an individual process. In fact, strictly speaking, it is the person in his/her own individuality that learns in the sense that the modifications occur in his/her behaviour. We can learn through different ways and in several situations. Here we are interested in dealing with the educational one that is when teaching and learning are reciprocally interacting in order to produce behavioural modifications.

The essence of the teaching/learning process is the relationship and the modifications derived therefrom. This relationship normally involves two persons, with regard to a particular content in a more or less planned situation. A methodology of the teaching/learning process should consider its basic components: i) the interaction between two behaviours; ii) the protagonists of this relationship – teachers and students, their identity, their needs and interests, the competence, their role in this process; iii) the context in which the relationship develops – the educational community and the disciplinary field; iv) the planning of the educational situation in which the interaction occurs between several behaviours – one teacher and some students and particularly a group of students.

In planning the educational situation, teachers can use different methods according to their own point of view about the essence of the teaching/learning process. They can give more importance to transmission of information or to training, ect. But if they are convinced of the importance of promoting cooperation, solidarity, mutual help between individuals, we suggest research, particularly group research, as one of the most suitable methods.

Research method represents scientific procedures involving cognitive processes that produce learning that is stable modifications of behaviour. Research can be synthetically defined as “a method of learning or producing something in an intentional and systematic way, in order to solve problems (De Bartolomeis, 1993:60). Here we find the fundamental components –the existence of a problem to which to give answer, the intentional aspect that emphasizes the presence of conscious behaviour, the systematic aspect that differentiates research from chance solutions and characterizes the means used. Normally, we use research in order to discover new knowledge, but here we would like to stress the possibility of using research also to learn what is already known, as can happen in the teachers training colleges.

If we look at the principal stages of research; i) the identification of a problem to solve; ii) the production of one or more hypotheses; iii) the examination of what has already been done; iv) the choice and preparation of instruments for collecting the data required by the specific problem and v) the interpretation of these, we can easily understand that the very use of these stages can in itself produce some general but important achievements. Using this method, students can look at reality in a questioning way and develop critical thinking. They acquire the ability to reach new knowledge based on previous experience and competence. They develop logical operations (memorization, classification, analysis, synthesis, etc.) as well as creativity. They learn to be coherent and systematic in their tasks, however short –to be aware that solutions are provisional. They acquire the ability to plan a cognitive route and thinking mainly of research carried out in groups, they confront themselves with others; respect their turn, pay attention to and comprehend the points of view of others; distribute the work; share the efforts and the joy of results produced together. They learn to work in groups and they really learn in groups.

Also, individual research is not self-centred because the starting point for solving a problem is the study of what has already been done, that is the confrontation with others, and a researcher’s results are not a private matter, but for the community. This last goal is very important, mainly in the field of scientific research, where the problems chosen by professional researchers should be useful for the human community.

The use of research in classroom activity is not then intended to produce little researchers but to orientate teacher trainee towards scientific ways of thinking, to guide them to acquire more stable competences and to develop social behaviours sharing a learning process. There are important differences between scientific research and research activity carried out by students, but the principal stages listed above of research method in itself can be very profitable for children in the learning process.

What can be learnt through research method in music education in teachers training institution? The general aims of music education should be identified on the basis of the most fundamental needs, for teachers and students, in the field of music, for example to develop oneself as a musical person enjoying music, to express oneself and to communicate with others through music. Techniques only come later.

In other words, music education can be considered a discipline in the broadest sense which gives the competence to become an autonomous and critical ‘enjoyer’ and producer of musical culture (Tafari, 1995). The term “competence” is used here, as in the field of linguistics, to refer to knowing, knowing how to do, knowing how to communicate. Applied to music, musical competence is “the ability to produce sense through music, meaning music in the broadest sense, as every social practice or individual experience concerning sounds which we generally group under this name” (Stefani, 1982:9). From this perspective the general aims can be the ability to understand, to produce, and to perceive music. In the music learning process many factors are involved, factors that constitute the musical identity of each individual such as melodic/rhythmic/harmonic preferences and abilities, appropriation of different musical patterns and cultures, affective responses, tastes, choices, etc.

In order to avoid research becoming mere exploration, lecturers have to transform a teaching/learning situation into a research activity, if the subject to be taught/learnt can be approached through this method. Teachers prepare the context in which problems can be most easily be identified, help teacher trainees to find significant ones (they should collect the questions that people so often ask), and to identify the most suitable way to solve them. They must also help students to comprehend other points of view.

“Why is this music moving and the other one frightening?” Such questions can be the starting point for a research activity to solve the problem of meaning in music. Children start from their own experience. They were moved or frightened when listening to certain pieces of music, so they can discuss what they felt while listening they start to construct some hypothesis – “because everyone feels as he likes”, because he likes or doesn’t like this type of music”, because the sounds were harsh, that is certain features of music can produce certain kind of emotion”. They can read other opinion on this matter until they decide which hypothesis is the most suitable. At this point they can prepare an experiment that might include a number of steps; collecting responses from different ages groups, analyzing the music by identifying the features that could be responsible for a particular meaning, asking musicians to perform a fragment of various pieces of music changing these features (slow, fast, major/minor mode, legato/pizzicato, ect), trying out the result on themselves and on the other people questioned. Changing some features (a melody played by violins in a high register, changed into a melody played by contrabasses) will give impressive reactions, but at the same time not everyone will

have the same one. There is normally a majority oriented in the same direction. This kind of result helps children to understand that musical structure is determinant, but in interaction with the listener, who is the real producer of meaning acting at his or her three levels; a human nature in common with all human beings, a culture is common with all those belonging to his/her cultural group; his/her own individual experience. Therefore, meaning are produced by the listener interacting (at the same levels) with the music-object. As nature and culture are in common with others, these two levels are the most influential and produce general meanings common to many people. The awareness of musical significance mechanisms is a very big learning which leads towards an autonomous and critical enjoyment of music.

Another example might be. Research into the jingles in TV advertisements. Children can relate each jingle to the goods advertised and then compare the different choices, relating the hidden meanings communicated by the goods, to the meanings of music. A happy family walk in uncontaminated and drink spring water;