



Informal Learning In Prospective Music Teachers. A Case Study

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Contribution

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Since the introduction of the changes in the Spanish University motivated by the EHEA, that led to a general change of the former University study plans, the training of prospect music teachers has changed substantially over the previous curriculum. Overall, it has shifted from a three-year training specifically oriented to music education, to a four-year bachelor degree in Primary Education, in which only the last course is a specialization in music education. If we add that in general no specific prior music knowledge is required to attend this expertise, it is clear that the conditions under which these future music teachers are prepared are more complex than a few years ago. For this reason, it is necessary to develop new strategies in order to get the maximum performance of the students. One of these strategies is the appeal to their formal and non-formal prior learning.

The concept of formal, non-formal and informal learning, as defined by Rogers (1996), assumes that formal learning would be normally associated with the academic environment, where learning that takes place in a classroom, while non-formal learning takes place in different forms, such as music schools and private lessons. Besides, it has no previous design, and usually does not end with a certificate or final assessment. Finally, informal learnings would be those build up from the subject's experiences, beyond any academic setting. From the early years of this century we are witnessing a simplification of these three areas into two, the formal and informal learning (Jaffurs, 2004, p. 190).

Wright and Kanellopoulos (2010, pp. 72-73) define formal learning "as that which occurs in a traditional pedagogic environment where clarity of goals and procedures are clearly defined in advance and where learning results in certification or assessment. Non-formal learning occurs outside traditional learning environments, is not the result of deliberation and

does not normally result in certification". Wright and Kanellopoulos (2010, p. 73) conclude that informal learning may be understood as a deliberate attempt to immerse in situations of non-formal learning, and results in the creation of non-traditional learning environments, combining interactive and self-regulatory processes. Folkstead (2006, p. 141), in turn, defines a formal learning situation as one in which the activity is preplanned. The one who performs this planning does not need to be a teacher in the strict sense, but can also be an organizer or group member, as the director of a musical group. The results of informal learning are not planned in advance, and the process is developed through the interaction of the participants. In both situations the, attention should be paid to four variables: location, style of learning, responsibility for decisions, and intentionality.

The use of teaching strategies derived from informal learning in the music classroom has had an important relevance since the studies of Lucy Green (2002, 2009), and a considerable number of researchers investigate since then the possibilities of application at different education levels. Through these works, a series of methodological strategies derived from informal learning has been given shape, so it can be applied in academic teaching environments (Green, 2009).

The aim of our study is to determine the experience in informal learning environments of the students at the Bachelor Degree in Primary Education from the University of Seville. In addition, through the incorporation of methodological strategies derived from informal learning in the classroom teaching, we seek to investigate how these students perceive and develop those strategies, and their attitude toward them.

Method

The current paper is a case study based on a qualitative methodology.

Firstly, a questionnaire was applied to students of 4th course of Primary Education Bachelor Degree from the University of Sevilla (n = 22), within the specialty of Musical Education. The objective was to determine the experience of students in formal and informal learning environments, through closed questions and an open question where students had to write a musical autobiography.

Through this questionnaire three main profiles were determined: Students coming from formal learning, informal learning, and mixed environments.

Within each profile two students were selected, who were monitored through an specific classroom observation, and took part in the research as study cases. For two months in the Instrumental Practice lessons, they experienced a series of methodological approaches, including teaching strategies resulting from the application of informal learning in music.

Through this direct observation it was determined to what extent their profile affected the success in the tasks to be done in the classroom. The methodological strategies developed responded to the guidelines put forward by Green (2009):

-Musicians choose the music they want to play. It is music they already know and understand, and to what they feel connected.

-The main resource is playing the music they know by ear.

-Learning takes place alone or in a group of friends. It is a peer learning, in which they are self-directed and manage themselves. Knowledge is acquired consciously or unconsciously through listening, observation, imitation and dialogue. No supervision and guidance of an adult is required.

-Knowledge is acquired by chance, in a holistic way.

-There is a deep integration of listening, performance, improvisation and composition.

Finally, a final questionnaire was applied to all subjects, and a semi-structured interview to the six study cases was performed. The objective was to determine the degree of general achievement in the tasks related to the introduction of methodological strategies derived from informal learning, and to analyze, in the six cases under study, the results thereof. Data were analyzed using specific qualitative analysis software (Atlas-ti 7).

Expected Outcomes

Initially, the expected result of the study was that students would be distributed more or less equally between those coming from formal and informal learning environments. Finally, there appeared a third profile that included students who had received their previous training in academic environments, but who demonstrated skills belonging to informal learning environments. This third group was the one that showed most disparity throughout the study in its acceptance of the methodological proposals developed in the classroom, since they had to accept that both learning environments were not really so far away.

The group of students coming from informal learning environments was the one who most helped the formal learning students to integrate and develop new learning skills. Their participation, in this sense, responded to the statements of co-learning, self-making and holistic learning, which had been enunciated by Green (2009).

Finally, in the group of students coming from formal learning environments, the results were mixed. Of the two cases under study within this profile, one responded very well to the methodological proposals developed, taking advantage of his previous education and incorporating the new learning skills. The second case, however, was unable to accept the informal learning proposals, and her assimilation degree of the skills developed through them was irrelevant.

The results of this study show, on one hand, the real dimension of different learning environments among the students entering the Primary Education with major in Music Education in the Spanish University. Moreover, it also shows the attitudes of students towards methodological proposals far from the usual academic ones, and their predisposition toward developing skills related to creativity, decision making or co-learning. Results should guide the implementation of these informal learning strategies in the near future in the university music classroom, and their capacity to improve prospect music teachers training.

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