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ARTICLE

Opera in primary education for the development of social and emotional skills: a case study from Mexico City

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Abstract

The study examines the impacts of a project-based learning (PBL) methodology on the development of emotional skills involved in the learner's individual and social well-being. This paper summarises the preliminary results of the case study in which the project 'Opera as a Vehicle for Learning' (LOVA) was implemented with a key stage 2 group in Mexico City. This project fostered the development of the students' intra- and interpersonal skills, group decision-making, critical reasoning, active listening, oral and written expression and emotion sharing. Findings suggest that LOVA has proved to be a powerful methodological resource for the development of collaborative learning, emotional education and social interaction in groups. Findings also suggest that music learning can be used as a highly effective device for the development of social skills.

Keywords: Music education; opera; primary education emotional intelligence; social development

Introduction

Interest in the development of social-emotional skills in educational contexts has increased significantly in recent years, according to various studies (Gardner, 1983; Eisner, 2002; Hallam, 2002; Allsup, 2003; Jacobi, 2012; Edgar, 2019). This increased interest is due, among other reasons, to the need to separate the emotional system from the cognitive system in educational research (Izard, 1992). The first attempts to unite intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligence into a single, emotional intelligence were made by Salovey & Mayer (1990), Sternberg (1997) and Mayer, Salovey & Carusso (2004). In the document 'Key Learnings for Integral Education, 2017' ('*Aprendizajes clave para la educación integral*') issued by the Mexican Secretariat of Public Education (SEP), special emphasis is placed on emotional learning and on the development of interpersonal skills through art.

This article presents the results obtained from a qualitative study on the acquisition of intra- and interpersonal skills through the development of social relationships in a case study group. The purpose of this study was to observe, analyse, document and interpret behavioural changes at both individual and group levels in a class of 19 primary school students (11 girls and 8 boys, key stage 2) at the Luis Vives Institute, A.C. (ILV) in Mexico City. The group formed the children's opera company '*La hoja del árbol*' (The Tree Leaf). This article seeks to describe and understand the social and emotional learning of students generated through the implementation of LOVA. The research questions were as follows: can positive social and emotional learning be developed

through LOVA? What behavioural changes, at individual and group levels, can take place in the group with the implementation of LOVA?

The LOVA project was implemented during the 2017–2018 school year at the ILV. This school was founded in 1939 by refugees who had fled the Spanish Civil War and managed to transfer the institutionalist educational model established in the Second Spanish Republic to this first Spanish school in exile which, 80 years later, is still active today (Morán, 2001; Valero, 2010). ILV maintains its original mission of forming ethical human beings through holistic education (ILV, 2019). In this sense, the ILV aims to produce graduates that would be distinguished, above all, by their human quality and ability to understand and respect the position of the other.

The reference framework for this research includes several topics, although the theoretical framework chosen for this article focuses on the development and acquisition of interpersonal skills through the improvement in social relations within the key stage 2 group in which LOVA was implemented.

Literature review

The social construct of opera has historically defined most of its audience within the sociocultural elite (Grout & Williams, 2003). However, some educational projects carried out in recent decades have demonstrated that opera can also become an important learning resource, accessible to all. There lies the importance of bringing opera closer to school communities (Wignall, 1988; Tambling, 1999; White, Dixon & Smerdon, 2004; Burrack & Maltas, 2006).

One of these projects is LOVA, a project that was developed in Spain by Mary Ruth McGinn, who had trained in the programme *Creating Original Opera (COO)*, the forerunner of LOVA. LOVA's main objective is to integrate the creation of an original opera into the school curriculum, so that the implementation of the programme takes place throughout a school year (Sarmiento, 2012). LOVA has its origins in the project created by Bruce Taylor and JoAnn Forman for the Seattle Opera House, United States, in the 1970s. Some years later, COO by the Metropolitan Opera Guild of New York joined this project, as did other programmes that promote the creation of an original opera integrated into the classroom curriculum, such as *Write an Opera* in the United Kingdom, promoted by the Royal Opera House, *Opera by Children* by Utah Opera and *Create and Produce* for Ópera América (Giráldez-Hayes, Carbó & Otárola, 2019).

Since opera is a multidisciplinary fusion of subjects such as music, theatre, playwriting, visual arts and stage design, opera creation can be a practical experience for all students, whether consciously or unconsciously, thanks to its emotional power (Faust, 2010). Research on the introduction of dramatic music-making into the school environment concluded that encouraging children to participate in opera programmes contributes to their involvement in the performing arts and music beyond the school environment (Dullea, 2017). In addition, 'the arts provide experiences in divergent thinking, innovative thought, and multiple perspectives. Arts education can teach students about form, symbolic thought, and application of imagination while offering alternative ways of knowing' (Joy, 2002 p. 216).

The entire implementation of the LÓVA project at the 'Instituto Luis Vives' school in Mexico City focused transversally on the development of intra- and interpersonal skills. The project followed a structure of stages and substages regarding the formation and consolidation of the opera company. Knowledge of each of the professions required in the performance of any opera was presented by artists who collaborated with the project (Cheung, 2004; Ben-Horin, Chappell, Halstead, & Espeland, 2017; Merisio, Góis de Araújo & Da Cruz, 2019; Kenny, 2020). After the company was successfully formed and the collaborative learning process had taken place, the project continued with the writing of the opera's libretto. The profession of each member was then decided through a process that included three interviews. Once every member was assigned to a team, these smaller teams held workshops to continue their work. At the end of
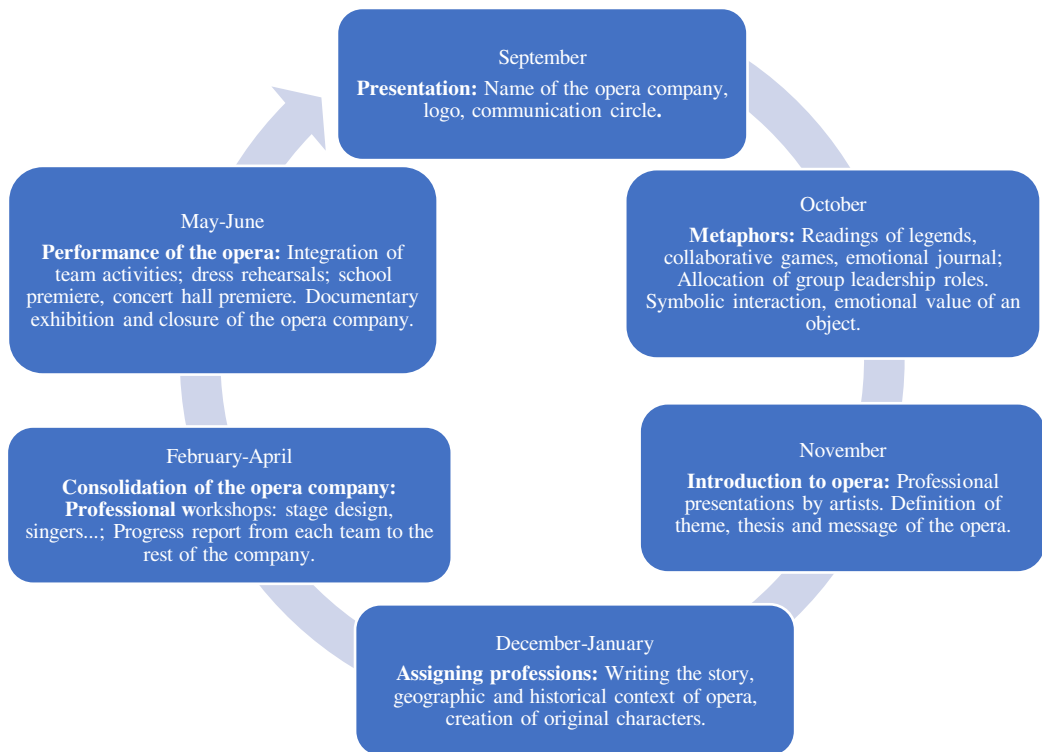
Figure 1. The structure of the LÓVA Project implemented at the 'Instituto Luis Vives' school in Mexico City. Source: Author's creation

the school year, all the activities conducted by the teams were integrated into the rehearsals and the premiere of the original opera. Figure 1 describes the implementation of the LÓVA project at the 'Instituto Luis Vives' school, in Mexico City, throughout the school year.

It is necessary to remember that the objective of the LÓVA project is to go through the process of creating an opera company and to achieve the transversal learning that comes from collaborative work. Although the final result is the premiere of an opera, the project's aim is not to create a product of high artistic merit. Rather, the emphasis of LÓVA lies precisely in the process of creation and consolidation of the company as a group. As Hallam (2016) comments, there is evidence that group music projects have an impact on children's behaviour. Collective music-making promotes cooperation, solidarity, a sense of belonging, and develops interpersonal relationships, collaborative learning and group identity. In addition, creative partnerships offer children and their teachers the opportunity to explore their creativity by working with professional artists (Hall, Thomson & Russell, 2007). In this case study, the interdisciplinary approach – achieved through the intervention of artists – allowed students to have an experience in various artistic disciplines as well as in many aspects of the production of an opera: lighting, scenery, costume and make-up design, playwriting, production and public relations (Abeles, Hafeli, Horowitz & Burton, 2002; Cheung, 2004; Rabkin, 2012).

The relation between music and emotions has been studied extensively. Goldstein (2011) and Lamont (2012) established the relation between music and the development of emotional skills such as empathy, emotional regulation and personal well-being (Croom, 2012). The arts and artistic training are responsible for promoting emotional intelligence and psychological development in students (Eisner, 2002). Many authors argue that learners who study music perform better in

emotional intelligence tests. As Schellenberg (2011) explains, the association between musical practice and emotional intelligence is self-evident to musicians who regularly play in ensembles. Regarding this point, we must refer to existing scientific debates on art education in general and music education in particular as instruments for the development of cognitive and emotional functions. Overy & Molnar-Szakacs (2009) and Hallam (2010) highlight the impact of music on the social, personal and intellectual development of students, underscoring creative development and improvement in academic performance. Similarly, several authors (Juslin & Sloboda 2001; Bennett 2004; Croom 2012) argue that music education in primary school has a positive influence and an effect on emotions, the preservation of comradeship between students, and the acquisition of basic social skills for the future development of the learner. For example, Jacobi (2012) states that 'music has a natural potential for building social skills, and the elementary music class, in particular, lends itself to building socioemotional skills in children' (p. 68).

The use of opera creation programmes in school settings (Dullea, 2019) promotes tolerance, understanding and the emergence of divergent thoughts in learners. Hower (1999) and Joy (2002) conclude that the COO programme produces independent thinkers and students who are able to successfully carry out their creative ideas and who work collaboratively with those who think differently (Dullea, 2019). COO, as a multidisciplinary arts programme, achieves effective communication and multiple benefits both for teachers seeking innovative programmes and for highly motivated students. According to Laird (2015), music is capable of creating emotionally stimulating environments in which relationships and communication emerge effortlessly between listeners, performers and composers. Some aspects of music education tend to promote a culture of empathy (Rabinowitch, Cross & Burnard, 2013; Greenberg, Rentfrow & Baron-Cohen, 2015). Imitation as an intrinsic part of the learning process, synchrony with others in ensembles and collaborative work in the realisation of collective creation result in group learning beyond individual growth.

The methodologies used in arts-based research and arts-based educational research, due to their possibilities of data collection and interpretation, placed artistic practices and creative processes at the centre of the study of social sciences, arts and education (Pereira & Portugal, 2019; Jokela, 2019). In this type of research, artistic practice plays a transversal role in the choice of theme, methodology, context and communication of results in order to constitute itself as the centre of knowledge production (Borgdorff, 2011). Some research on programs similar to LOVA concluded that opera has served as the main vehicle for active learning and collaborative work, becoming a real experience of the principles of collaboration and active learning (Sherwood, Gregoire, Iverson, 1994). In Write a Science Opera (WASO), implemented in primary education, students developed their identity as a group in addition to addressing the complex task of creating and producing an opera about their own ideas (Ben-Horin, Halstead & Espelan, 2017)

LOVA also contemplates the collaboration between classroom teachers and artists in a practical way. The artists are in charge of presenting the different professions to the members of the company. This collaboration produces benefits for children, teachers and artists (Kenny, 2020). Generally, these collaborations take place in a context of respect and recognition between teacher and artist, although the latter is recognised as an expert with skills that the classroom teacher does not possess (Christophersen & Kenny, 2018). The artists coached the different professional teams during the project, solving specific questions and problems that the task groups were facing. In addition, there was additional guidance from the teacher in charge of the group, who facilitated communication between the children and the artists. It is worth mentioning that this LOVA project promoted closer relations between well-known artists and the school community (Rodríguez-Sánchez, Odena & Cabedo-Mas, 2018).

From an educational point of view, LOVA has proved to be an effective resource methodology for the development of collaborative learning, emotional education and social interaction in groups. Programmes that preceded LOVA in other countries (COO and WO) and studies by Hower (1999), Tambling (1999), Joy (2002) and Berman (2003) demonstrate that this type of

project provides the student with resources for developing human connection skills and teaches students to work collaboratively and to think independently. With LOVA, social and civic skills are also reinforced in participating students. These include personal and interpersonal skills that include all the behavioural patterns that will prepare students to participate effectively and constructively in social life, especially in increasingly diverse societies (Giráldez-Hayes, Carbó & Otárola, 2019. p. 23) (Table 1.).

Methodology

This study is framed within the interpretative paradigm, since its intention is to increase the understanding of the value of education (Nussbaum, 2001). It is a qualitative research project, since it understands and observes an ongoing process in its environment and emphasises the subjective behaviour traits of the observed educational phenomena (Flick, 2004; 2018). Its empirical design is framed within the case study methodology proposed by Stake (1995), which seeks a deep understanding of a given phenomenon. In this case, the position of the researcher is assumed by the teacher (Flick, 2018). As for the design of the case study itself, instrumental research was selected as the preferred methodology, so as to get clear answers to the questions that arose throughout the implementation of the programme, in order to better understand the whole subject, as determined by the general objective itself (Stake, 2005; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008).

The most important data collection technique used in this project was participant observation that was recorded in the researcher's logbook, which describes in depth each session held with the opera company, as well as the day-by-day progress and milestones. In our case study, the observation was conducted continuously throughout the 2017–2018 school year. In this project, the researcher combined the roles of teacher, facilitator and observer, which implies a position of participant observation. This type of observation is the most used in qualitative naturalistic research. In our case, a research logbook was used to record all the information on the events that took place in each of the sessions of the opera company. In this logbook, the researcher recorded both the development of the project and her own reflections about it, which allows us to examine the change of discourse and thinking that took place in the observer. The use of this strategy requires the researcher to become involved and to participate in the community life of the group being studied, in order to more easily obtain certain information that would otherwise be much more difficult to access. The daily events were recorded with the greatest possible detail in the research logbook, so that they could later be described and interpreted (Willig, Rogers, & Curt, 2008).

In addition, two teachers, the teacher in charge of tutoring the group for that school year and the literature teacher, carried out evaluations of the group's status and of each student's social development. These assessments took into account the status of the group at the beginning of the school year and its transformation throughout the implementation of the project. Special consideration was given to the students' own writings, created throughout the project. These texts included written accounts of the emotions caused by overcoming the project's challenges, videos and photos in which the students expressed what the project meant for them and statements of satisfaction with the collaborative work. Finally, at the end of the school year, a group interview was conducted that was open to the students' families, since this is the most flexible method for obtaining data outside the classroom (Bohnsack, 2004; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Hennink *et al.*, 2020). In this way, the families' perspective on the learning process and the evolution of the project was also obtained (Dullea, 2019). These interviews provided narrative insights into the social and individual development of each member of the opera company (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

Regarding data analysis, the research mostly focused on first impressions and especially on final reports (Stake, 2005). Thus, for the final report, after data selection and triangulation, a series of categories and subcategories were established so as to classify the information and to expedite its analysis. The categories used for the triangulation of data regarding the development of emotional

intelligence and interpersonal ability within the group that implemented LOVA were the following: self-confidence and individual social development, self-confidence and group social development and collaborative work.

During the research, rigorous scientific and ethical criteria were applied in order to ensure the quality and veracity of the results obtained. Stake (2005) proposes to base the ethical criteria on the questions to be examined and to discuss them beforehand with all stakeholders in the research. In our specific case, they were discussed with collaborating teachers, the school management team and the children's families. In this regard, before the implementation of the LOVA project, informed consent was obtained from all parties involved in order to establish the means and the limits of access to information. The same was also done, from the beginning, with the participating students, who were the subjects of the present study, so as to respect their autonomy and freedom of expression and so that they could also participate in the equitable distribution of the benefits resulting from this research. In addition, all parties were informed about the anonymity and confidentiality procedures that would be applied to the data obtained from them and gave their authorisation for the entire process to be documented through photography and video recording for educational research purposes (Simons, 2009).

Elliott (1991) also proposes complying with *internal validity* criteria, through which we could verify that the changes that took place in the group produced an improvement in the development of intra- and interpersonal, social and cognitive skills; and *external validity*, through which the results obtained can be linked to other research projects on project-based learning (PBL) and LOVA. For the analysis and discussion of the results obtained on the emotional development and interpersonal skills of the members of the group under study, the following data coding system was devised (Table 1).

Table 1. Data coding system. Source: author's creation

Document type	Code	Example
Researcher Logbook	Document type, page number and paragraph.	DI. 54. 3(Field journal, page number, paragraph 3).
Investigation Reports	Document type, Report number, page and paragraph.	I3.4.2 (Report No. 3, page 2) 4, second paragraph).
Student Writings	Document type, date, list number.	P.16/02/18.17. (Student writing. 16 February 2018. Number 17 on the student list.)
Tutor and Library Master Evaluations	Document type, paragraph.	AT. 6. (Group Tutor Analysis, paragraph 6).
Interviews	Document type; interviewee number, question number.	E.6. 8. (Interview, interviewee number 6, question 8).
Pictures	Document type, quarter, image number.	F.I. 7 (photograph, first quarter, number 7).
Videos	Document type, quarter, video number, minute of recording.	V.III.5.1'33". (video, quarter III, number 5, minute 1, second 33).

Results and discussion

During the implementation of LOVA in this group of primary school students, a remarkable improvement was observed in the development of personal skills as well as in academic performance. Especially noteworthy was the improvement of some students who had previously demonstrated disruptive behaviour, and that, through the project, managed to integrate successfully into the group. During the analysis and discussion on the improvement of intra- and interpersonal skills in students, the instruments for data collection were taken into account.

The following techniques were used: participant observation, video and photographic recording, research logbook, evaluation of student status and social development, student productions and family interviews at the end of the project. All this information was analysed through the atlas.ti software.

The teacher in charge of the group reported considerable improvement in cognitive development, in addition to the social and emotional development reported in the results. 'Academically, I must highlight the case of a student . . . she went from getting very low grades to obtaining 8s and 9s. She participates orally in class and has started playing with her classmates during recess. Her self-esteem has improved considerably, and she laughs out loud at moments of distension with her classmates. In another case, a student performed very well in his profession as a make-up artist despite having problems with his fine motor skills. Finally, it should be noted that the parents have made very positive comments regarding the changes observed in their children, especially regarding responsibility and problem-solving'. (AT. 2-3. 6, 1 and 2). As explained by Goleman (1995) and Bradberry & Graves (2009), emotional intelligence is the ability to feel, understand, control and even modify one's own and others' moods. As one student wrote, 'we have learned more from our classmates, and now we understand each other better' (P.11/12/17.14).

The key stage 2 group at ILV was chosen for the case study because of its heterogeneous population, both in terms of their academic level and their diversity of personalities and ages. One of the factors taken into account is that the group had previously displayed some cases of disruptive behaviour. A couple of students exhibited acute shyness and insecurity in front of the group, while others had previously been diagnosed with selective mutism, Asperger's and diabetes. This was a class that had not been able to consolidate into a cohesive group, and that only rarely exhibited displays of companionship. To address this point, we refer to Rose's (2009) assertion of the importance of including theatre and its context into the primary education curriculum to develop emotional and social skills, and to the benefits of bringing opera closer to school communities (Wignall, 1988; Tambling, 1999; White, Dixon & Smerdon, 2004; Burrack & Maltas, 2006).

Self-confidence and individual social development

As mentioned above, the group in which LOVA was implemented included a student who had been diagnosed with selective mutism from ages 4 to 7 years. This student was lagging academically and struggled to communicate with his classmates. After 3 months of working on the development of emotional intelligence, this student surprised the group by proposing that the first aria of the opera be a rap. This proposal, which was immediately accepted, allowed the student to finally be recognised and valued within the group, generating sufficient self-confidence to enable him to express ideas in front of his classmates as well as their families and even the school administration (DI.18.9). According to Eisner's theory (1997) on the development of interpersonal connections, this project was a success for this student. Findeisen (2007) reminds us that music is a means of communication and, in this particular case, 'functions as a means of nonverbal communication and encourages the development of interpersonal skills' (p. 375). For this student, a fusion of music and theatre has resulted in a practical and emotionally powerful experience. (Faust, 2010).

Interpersonal intelligence refers to the ability to establish relationships with others and recognise their intentions and motivations (Gardner, 2006). In this regard, another improvement worth mentioning is that of the student who was unable to speak in public due to her insecurity and shyness. Her position in the group changed when her proposal won the logo competition and her work was chosen to represent the opera company. This student discovered that the group had chosen her design because it synthesised the interests and expectations of the opera company 'La hoja del árbol'. The dialogue that took place within the music classroom, based on the

relationship between the meaning of the project for the group and its identifying image, led this student to interact with the group and to feel secure in it (Metis Associates and The Metropolitan Opera Guild, 2014; DI.10.8). This project reinforces Hallam's (2002) arguments that students who participate in musical activities improve their self-esteem and confidence. Music class becomes a favourable space for the promotion of social skills and for the improvement of the classroom environment. In addition, arts education can teach students about alternative ways of knowing, as well as about symbolic and imaginative thought (Joy, 2002).

The student diagnosed with Asperger's and diabetes began to gain self-confidence and presence in the group from the moment when she was offered the space to explain to the rest of the company why her blood sugar levels needed to be measured several times a day. It should be noted that in the last stages of the project, shortly before the opera's premiere, this student's progress was remarkable, and she began to engage decisively with the company and with her own work as a composer (V.III.134.1'05). As Hillier *et al.* (2011) describe, the experience of working successfully with classmates, in order to create an original opera in our case, increases positive changes in all types of students. According to Sternberg (1997), it is crucial to remember the importance of social interaction in the development of the human mind. In this case, rapid progress took place with respect to the degree of this student's inclusion into the group, as she always demonstrated interest in the group's activities and took part in collective decision-making.

As the implementation of LOVA progressed, all students grew in self-confidence and emotional awareness. This could be clearly seen in the activities in which students were encouraged to write about their emotions and share their writings with the rest of the group. The number of students who wanted to read their emotions aloud gradually increased throughout the school year, and strong bonds began to develop within this group (DI.13.3). In this regard, the writings created during the very last project activity, in which the students had to write about the emotions they felt after having achieved the challenge of writing and performing an original opera, confirm their improvement in emotional awareness and management, as well as the meaning that LOVA had for each one of them: 'happy to have accomplished it . . . , excited . . . , surprised . . . , nostalgic because everything happened too fast . . . frustrated because I would like there to be more performances, tired because of everything we have done, close to the others for having done everything together . . . , cheerful . . . , relieved . . . , sure of myself . . . , confused by all these feelings'. This is an excerpt of a text written by the student that appears in the following photograph. Several authors (Juslin & Sloboda 2001; Bennett 2004; Croom 2012) argue that music education in primary school has a positive influence and effect on emotions, the preservation of comradeship between students, and the acquisition of basic social skills for the future development of the learner.

The families who were interviewed at the end of the school year celebrated the significant improvement in their children's self-esteem and self-confidence:

> His self-esteem definitely improved, as did his grades. His fears of being incompetent or not living up to his peers were put to rest; he was even able to identify some emotional issues and fears that had previously caused him anxiety. (E.14.5).

Indeed, LOVA contributed to the development of the four basic skills of emotional intelligence: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and relationship management (Helm 2006; Bradberry & Greaves, 2009; Kocoglu, 2011).

> LOVA made my son feel more confident in the group, which translated into confidence in other areas of his life that helped him accept and define certain areas of his personality. His attitude to solving conflicts at home, for instance, has improved (E. 3.5).

Picture 1. 'The premiere'. (V.III.232.1'13). Source: Author's creation.

Self-confidence and group social development. Collaborative work

The present study extends the concept of collaborative work to any task that requires the participation and commitment of at least two students. Similarly, this study defines social development as an improvement in the set of skills that influence group behaviour and interactions with others (Baker & Harvey, 2014).

The present research examines the relationship between music and the development of emotional skills such as empathy, emotional regulation and personal well-being (Goldstein, 2011; Lamont, 2012). In this regard, it could be observed that in the stage leading up to the opera's premiere, there was a significant increase in group self-confidence within the opera company: 'More conviviality, sheer joy at sharing new things with classmates, group integration, team membership, empathy towards their peers' (E.1.6.13.21.1). These were some of the observations made by the children's families when describing the students' learning experience with LOVA. The use of opera creation programmes in school settings promotes tolerance, understanding, and the emergence of divergent thoughts in learners. This type of project produces independent thinkers who have the ability to carry out their creative ideas and are competent in working collaboratively with those who think differently (Hower, 1999; Joy; 2002; Dullea, 2019).

One of the texts written and shared by a student during an activity reveals this student's remarkable self-awareness and self-confidence and underscores the importance of collaborative work and learning: 'it taught me that all of us are important . . . if there is no teamwork there is no opera company . . . LOVA gives us the opportunity to realise how great we can be in what we do' (P. 20/03/18. 18). Some aspects of music education tend to promote a culture of empathy (Rabinowitch, Cross & Burnard, 2013; Greenberg, Rentfrow & Baron-Cohen, 2015).

The creation of an original opera in a primary school context implies a particular way of learning. Through music, we are able to understand, express and share thoughts and feelings that we would hardly be able to understand through other means (Berman, 2003). Two teachers evaluated the group's emotional skills before and after the implementation of LOVA. The first teacher, the

full-time tutor of the group, stated that 'at the beginning of the course the group was divided into highly competitive subgroups, which struggled to accept losing in any activity or competition' (AT.7). After the implementation of the project, her analysis concluded that 'the socioemotional progress of the group can be seen in the improvement of their sense of responsibility, commitment and, above all, in the resolution of conflicts through empathy' (AT.11). The second teacher, who was in charge of the library, details the process through which the group had progressed from shyness to being 'expressive and self-confident' as a whole. 'n addition, the natural leaders of the group learned to be patient and tolerant with their classmates' (AB.4). With LOVA, social and civic skills are also reinforced in participating students. These include personal and interpersonal skills that include all the behavioural patterns that will prepare students to participate effectively and constructively in social life, especially in increasingly diverse societies (Giráldez-Hayes, Carbó & Otárola, 2019)

According to Green (2011), students use musical expressions to build relationships and position themselves in the group to which they belong. Throughout the implementation of LOVA, these musical expressions were the weekly group singing to say goodbye before the weekend and the creation of arias and interludes, in addition to other vocal activities. Regarding these relationships and their learning, the students stated the following: 'through LOVA we have learned values such as empathy, respect, equity' (V.III.180.1' 20"). 'We call the project LOVU, which for us means "Opera as a Vehicle for Union"' (V.III.177.0'54). If schools are spaces destined for learning how to coexist in harmony, as Nussbaum (2007) has proposed, then coexistence must not only imply tolerance, but also social commitment and reflection. The classroom environment during company meetings was reliably calm and cordial. As Piñón (2018) states in the article published in the newspaper *El Universal* on March 30 to publicise the opera's premiere: 'The children walk confidently, smile, joke around and embrace each other at the drop of a hat. The friendship, camaraderie and respect they have for each other is readily perceived' (p.1). Ultimately, opera is an art form that can be practiced by all students because of its emotional strength and its power to speak to anyone who wants to learn (Faust, 2010).

Regarding the students' social development, the families expressed themselves as follows once the project was over: 'it made it possible for him to socialise with more classmates and instilled group spirit in him"' (E.21.1). 'His experience with LOVA has been the best thing that could have happened to him, it has provided him with the best gift of integral learning that he could have had' (E.16.1).

These photographs 'Receiving their T-shirts' (F.II.128) & 'Premiere of Look and Remember' (F.III.405) were taken at advanced stages of the project: The first image was taken the day they received the T-shirts with the logo they had designed themselves. The second image was taken at the opera's premiere. There was a noticeable increase in motivation amongst the students from the day they received the T-shirts with their name and profession. They seemed happy and motivated and expressed their pleasure at participating in LOVA and their desire to reach the final objective, the first performance of the opera. (Giráldez-Hayes, Carbó & Otárola, 2019) (Pictures 1, 2 & 3).

Social development based on self-knowledge and the possibility of appropriating the situations in which the students find themselves are results that have ripple effects far beyond the classroom. As Kincheloe & McLaren (2012) assert, students can and must create a social conscience that is capable of transforming reality. 'Education, then, does not equip people to execute specific tasks. It empowers to transform tasks where necessary, to judge when or whether such interventions are appropriate, and even to question or reject things denied incontrovertible in previous instruction' (Bowman, 2002, p. 70). Cooperating for learning implies striving beyond individual learning to achieve collective learning and recognising that a group working together can accomplish tasks that would be impossible for each individual member to achieve by themselves (Cangro, 2015). In the children's opera company 'La hoja del árbol' social relationships were established and developed, group and individual self-confidence was improved and progress was made in the acquisition of interpersonal skills.

Picture 2. 'Receiving their T-shirts' (F.II.128). Source: Author's creation.

Picture 3. 'Premiere of Look and Remember' (F.III.405). Source: Author's creation.

Preliminary conclusions

The emotional training project carried out through LOVA followed the guidelines set by the National School Coexistence programme (PNCE, SEP, Mexico, 2015). Students were able to develop emotional skills that contribute to personal and social well-being (Coperrider & Whitney, 2005). Learners developed sufficient autonomy in most tasks, took group decisions

making use of voting and critical reasoning, learned to listen to their fellow classmates and to be listened to by them, to express opinions without fearing judgement, to speak in public, to research and to write, to respect other people's turn to speak and to express their emotions in writing and verbally, by sharing them with the group (Nussbaum, 2007; Goldstein, 2011).

The present research observed how the students participating in LOVA developed the four emotional skills required for social and interpersonal development, showing remarkable improvement in their self-confidence and self-esteem. The members of the children's opera company became empowered and self-confident. The greatest achievement in their interpersonal development was that they coalesced as a unified group with a strong sense of institutional belonging. The opera company was able to consolidate itself as a single group with the same objective: the premiere of the opera.

This project enabled the students to approach the genre of opera on their own terms. The integral artistic creation experience that involved stage design, the conception of a story, the writing of a libretto, the composition of musical interludes, arias and choirs, performance on stage, the promotion and the documentation of the whole process made the music class extend far beyond its curricular limits.

Another result of the project was that the discussion of emotions and values included in the opera's theme and libretto had their origin in the perceived lack of emotional attention received by the students in relation to adults. Some of the original songs composed for the opera account for this lack of attention and assertively demand that the school community deepen its commitment to attend socioemotional education. For the educational community at large, understanding and acknowledging this lack of attention implies placing special emphasis on the development of interpersonal and intrapersonal skills. In the final chorus of the opera '*Mira y recuerda*', whose plot is about a dream in which adults have become children and vice versa, the members of the company sang about the effort, the work, the companionship and the happiness they felt in being all together on stage.

Music learning can be used as a device for the development of social skills (Baker & Harvey, 2014). We consider that this research has contributed to demonstrating that another type of education is possible, and that the implementation of active methodologies promotes transversal learning that enables participation in multidisciplinary projects. The preliminary results of this research conclude that LOVA as a PBL project helps students to engage in leading their own learning and to considerably improve their social skills.

Among the limitations of this investigation, we found that the earthquake of 19 September 2017 interrupted the routine meetings of the opera company at an early point in the implementation of the LÓVA project. When school activities resumed, this project became a space for personal and group reflection on the experience of the earthquake and its aftermath. The company wanted to define in a single word what each member experienced individually at that time. A mural was made and hung in the classroom until the children decided that all the fears and emotions expressed in it had been overcome. The external circumstances that destabilised the students ended up becoming an opportunity for learning and for the coming together of the group (Freire, 2008). During data analysis and triangulation, categories and subcategories also emerged regarding the impact of LÓVA on the construction of a global citizenship as proposed by Westheimer (2020) in his three models of the good citizen 'a) The Personally Responsible Citizen, b) The Participatory Citizen and c) The Social Justice-Oriented Citizen' (Soliveres, Parejo & Giráldez-Hayes, 2020).

One of the possible future lines of research contemplates the use of psychometric analysis for evaluating emotional and social skills of the students participating in LÓVA. This analysis should be carried out before and after the implementation of the project by applying scientifically validated psychometric tests. Another inexhaustible source of information lies in the possibility of applying LÓVA with the same group that participated in this case study, but after 5 years have elapsed as well as implementing this project in other educational stages.

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