Article

The Effect of Group Work on Expressive-Artistic Activities for the Emotional Regulation of University Students

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Abstract: The purpose of higher education is the development of basic and professional skills to prepare students for the following stages of life. Social abilities and emotional regulation are considered to be part of these skills and could be improved through a group-work method. The aim of this study is to describe the emotional regulation process perceived by university students after group work is realised in expressive-artistic activities. The 69 participants (28 women and 41 men) aged between 19 and 26 (mean age 20.5, *SD* 2.1) were all second-year students of a Physical Activity and Sport Science degree. The data were collected through the questionnaire AIRE (Adaptative Instrument for Regulation of Emotions) applied by online form. The results revealed that the main goal of the students was to enjoy and have fun during the group work and gain new ideas from their peers. The biggest struggle was the schedule because some of them presented other personal or family commitments that limited their availability to practice. Overall, most of the participants affirmed that there are completely satisfied with the group project. In conclusion, group work within expressive-artistic activities improves social interaction and social skills but could be influenced by external factors (family, work, and other social commitments).

Keywords: competencies; collaborative learning; physical activity; body expression

1. Introduction

In order to respond to learning competencies established by the European Higher Education Area, teachers should be in a permanent search for innovative methodological strategies that prioritize the development of basic and professional skills of students [1,2]. In the design and planning stage of a subject, the methodological procedures that will be carried out become highly relevant since they are meant to achieve the objectives and purposes of the different subjects [3]. In this context, competence is a complex cognitive activity that refers to the student's ability to apply and integrate their knowledge, solve future problems, present conclusions, and transfer information to other settings [4,5].

From this new perspective, learning must be functional and applicable while incorporating new pedagogical methods [6]. These methods, at the same time, seek to teach students the civic-political aspect of social life [7]. To ensure the proper development of students' skills, the methodological approach needs to create teaching-learning scenarios close to reality, where procedures, concepts, and attitudes appear in an integrated manner and according to their needs and abilities [6]. These pedagogical methods use several teaching strategies, defined as the set of decisions made by the teacher to guide teaching with the aim of promoting student learning [8].

For the purpose of developing essential learning skills, active strategies (project-based learning, problem-solving, situated learning, and GW, among others) are used in the educational area. Through them, one could achieve more autonomous and reflective learning. This way the student can acquire in an elaborate, organized, and meaningful way

the skills provided by the curricular contents, to solve possible situations in the professional and personal field [9].

Therefore, learning through GW seeks to work both individually and cooperatively in search of information; discuss it, analyse it, criticize it, and rework it, promoting problem-solving, negotiation, and time management, among other skills [10]. In a more specific way, according to Johnson, Johnson, and Holubec [11], cooperative GW must comply with an essential structure:

(a) Positive interdependence, the members of the group depend on each other to achieve the objective;

(b) Interaction promoter, the members of the group must be in direct contact to help each other during the work;

(c) Individual responsibility, each member of the group must be individually responsible for a part of the global work;

(d) Group processing, the whole group must speak and discuss the information available together;

(e) Social skills, they will develop interpersonal communication skills such as encouragement and active listening, management skills such as sharing and mediation, and leadership skills such as explaining and directing, among others.

The ability to work in a team stands out as one of the most valued characteristics both in the workplace and in the educational field [12]. For this reason, GW has become a pedagogical model and is used more and more every day [13]. GW includes a heterogeneous set of semi-structured didactical methods in which students work together and help each other with their academic tasks [14]; thus, students can learn from and with their peers through a teaching-learning approach that is based on positive interdependence and in which the teacher and the students act as co-learners [15].

Emotions overall could be seen as a base for affective occurrences that are usually triggered by internal or external stimuli [16]. The temperamental disposition of each subject is influenced by the biological or genetic component and at the same time by the environment and the experiences shared with others [17]. Emotions such as enjoyment, boredom, and anger could influence student performance on tasks as they affect the motivation to engage in the activity [18,19]. At the same time, there are integrated response systems whose fundamental characteristic is to be emergent in the interpersonal relationships [20] that develop from the GW and social encounters.

Several studies have indicated that GW implemented over time can be a successful method to develop personality traits as it boosts students' motivation [4,7,13,21] and promotes emotional regulation [19]. Thus, the emotional content of the GW takes on a vital role in motivation and could even be helpful for the self-regulation behaviour demanded by different situations [22].

Emotional regulation skills are circumscribed to the evolutionary context of the individual and they adapt to the specific needs of the period they are going through [23]. In emerging adulthood (between 18 and 29 years old), changes are experienced in personal and interpersonal relationships and are influenced by socio-emotional, academic, work, and sexual status [23]. Therefore, university preparation is also known as a stage that encourages the emotional adaptation of the students.

Expressive-artistic activities performed within physical education curricula turned out to be an idyllic setting to promote beneficial aspects for personal development such as creativity [24], self-knowledge, and cooperative work within the group [25]. This could translate to cognitive health improvement [26] thanks to awareness, acceptance of the body, and the release of tensions while working in a group where the relationships with others are increasing in listening and tolerance [27]. This aspect had recently begun to gain more interest, yet it was noted that practitioners of body expression have obtained higher values in aspects of creativity such as fluency, flexibility, and expressiveness. Researchers had found that these types of activities could impact the mood in a positive way [28] and they showed optimal experiences with a higher frequency in the student's motivation.

At the same time, GW is directly related to the content of the subject, since communication within the group is encouraged through the motor actions that are carried out [29]. The methodology establishes multiple interactions between the participants, with a high degree of affective, cognitive, and social involvement [25] and offers the possibility of acquiring attitudes and concepts transferable to daily activities [30].

The aim of this study is to describe the emotional regulation processes perceived by students after GW activities are realised in expressive-artistic activities.

The expressive-artistic activities favour the good functioning of the cooperative group work that students develop.

2. Materials and Methods

The research had an exploratory approach, with a quantitative, descriptive methodology, basing its design on educational action research, which is defined as the way teachers investigate within their activities in order to understand and propose actions to solve problems [31].

2.1. Participants

The sample consisted of all the students enrolled in the subject of body expression. The initial sample was made of 72 students and after applying the exclusion criteria remained: 69 second-year students with a mean age of 20.5, *SD* 2.1; 28 women 40.6% aged 19–26 (M 21.35, *SD* 1.7); 41 men 59.4% aged 19–26 (M 20.9, *SD* 2.4).

The exclusion criteria were:

- Lack of attendance at the classes with GW content;
- Not performing the final group work evaluation;
- Not filling in the online form.

Participants were gathered in three practical classes and were all registered in the Body Expression subject of a Physical Activity and Sports Sciences degree at a Spanish University in the 2020/2021 academic year. The students were informed that the data collected were used for research purposes. In this way, informed consent was obtained, following the data protection guidelines and the approval of the Ethics Committee UA-2020-11-22.

2.2. Instrument

The instrument used was the questionnaire AIRE (Adaptative Instrument for Regulation of Emotions) in Spanish [32], which assesses the adaptive nature of emotional regulation in learning situations. This questionnaire contains four sections: the first part deals with aspects of personal motivation, the second part refers to socio-emotional aspects, the third part refers to factors of self-regulation in learning, and the fourth part to the individual and social metacognitive experience.

The AIRE instrument aims to detect the conflicts and tensions that arise within the work group and the ways in which each individual processes and resolves the emotions that arise in the interaction [32]. It was translated and adapted from a cognitive-style group from the National Pedagogic University of Colombia [33]. Section one of AIRE has twelve items that are intended to obtain students' personal goals for their current group learning activity. Section two has twelve items that investigate the challenges and difficulties encountered by students in GW. Section three has twelve Likert scale items that analyse the emotional regulation used by students to solve problems. The instrument separates them into three types: individual regulation mechanisms (IN); co-regulation mechanisms (CO); mechanisms of social regulation (SR). Finally, the fourth section has ten items that gather information on the perceptions of the goal, achievement, and role of the group in the learning process. The four sections are rated on a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (totally agree). Table 1 shows the internal reliability of the instrument in its different sections.

Table 1. Internal reliability of the instrument.

Section	Cronbach's Alfa	McDonald's Omega	Number of Items
I	0.720	0.680	13
II	0.855	0.850	12
III	0.889	0.876	12
IV	0.898	8.78	10

2.3. Study Procedure

The first step was to design a study that approaches the topic of research regarding the emotional behaviour of students in a situation of cooperative GW. The collective result learning technique [34] was used in order to obtain a "group" achievement instead of as individuals, couples, or small groups, with each person contributing their effort to the global result. At the same time, it mentions that it is important to give a second chance to try to improve the first result, sharing ideas to achieve this [7,35]. Following this, a meeting was held with the students to inform them about the purpose of the research and what the procedure would be. Participation was voluntary and informed consent was obtained at the beginning of the research.

The interventions of this study involved three practical classes, composed of 24 students on the subject of corporal expression. They had the same teacher and were organized into 10 groups made of 6–7 students. The intervention lasted two and a half weeks. The groups had to develop a choreography with a free theme that had to include all the aspects worked previously on in the body expression classes.

In the first session, the students made decisions regarding the theme of the choreography to develop and the task organization. In the following sessions, the students worked on choreographic creation where they made decisions, solved problems, negotiated, and managed time. Once the intervention was over, the students had to present the task. Composition, coordination, technical execution, and creativity were evaluated.

Emotional perceptions were assessed after the final evaluation of the choreographic GWs of the expressive-artistic activities, at the end of the first semester. The AIRE was filled in individually in an online form sent through Google Drive Online Forms. It was available for three days.

2.4. Statistical Analysis

The analysis of the quantitative data was carried out through the statistical program SPSS® (v26.0; IBM®, Armonk, NY, USA). Descriptive statistics (frequencies, measures of central tendency, and measures of dispersion) were applied for all variables and internal consistency measures for the scales (Cronbach's Alpha and McDonald's Omega).

3. Results

We present the main results of the study divided into the four sections contemplated by the authors of the instrument, as follows.

3.1. Personal Motivation

Table 2 presents in a descending scale the personal goals of each student in terms of GW. Of the thirteen objectives proposed by the questionnaire, the students highlighted: firstly, to enjoy the GW experience as much as possible, secondly, to learn as much as they can from their peers, thirdly, to draw new ideas from the activities in the GW, and following, to make new friends and/or socialize with other students.

Table 2. Personal goals during the GW.

Code	Item	Mean	SD
H1	Enjoy the GW experience as much as I can.	3.83	0.38
C1	Learn as much as I can from my groupmates.	3.67	0.47
D1	Gain new ideas out of the activities in my working group.	3.65	0.53
I1	Make new friends and/or socialize with other students in my workgroup.	3.64	0.59
J1	Take responsibility for the work to be completed.	3.59	0.55
F1	Do not disappoint my working group.	3.32	0.71
B1	Do my best to ensure that my grade is not affected by the fault of the group.	3.32	0.86
E1	Do my best not to stress.	2.90	0.92
G1	Avoid appearing incompetent in front of the group.	2.70	0.97
L1	Make sure all my colleagues in the group contribute equally.	2.61	0.86
M1	Take advantage of the GW to develop my leadership skills.	2.25	0.89
A1	Gain the highest grade and stand out from the rest of my group mates.	2.10	0.80
	Dimension results	2.89	0.65

The questionnaire inquired about the objectives presented above and asked the students which of the items they considered first- and second-most important, and the least important (Table 3).

Table 3. Objective's level of importance.

Code *	The Most Important		Second Most Important		The Least Important	
	n	Percentage	*n*	Percentage	*n*	Percentage
A1	2	2.9%	1	1.4%	21	30.4%
B1	0	0	3	4.3%	6	8.7%
C1	14	20.3%	15	21.7%	1	1.4%
D1	4	5.8%	8	11.6%	1	1.5%
E1	2	2.9%	3	4.3%	3	4.3%
F1	4	5.8%	4	10.4%	3	4.3%
G1	2	2.9%	3	4.3%	3	4.3%
H1	32	46.4%	19	27.5%	1	1.4%
I1	6	8.7%	8	11.9%	1	1.4%
J1	2	2.9%	3	4.3%	4	5.8%
K1	0	0	0	0	9	13.0%
L1	0	0	2	2.9%	2	2.9%
M1	1	0	0	0	14	20.3%
Total	69	100%	69	100%	69	100%

* The codes in the first column represent the questions formulated in Table 1.

3.2. Challenges and Difficulties

The second part analysed twelve challenges or difficulties that students may encounter when developing collaborative work. Table 4 presents the results in descending order. In general, it is appreciated that students do not encounter great challenges or difficulties in GW. The greatest difficulty encountered by the students was that some people had or presented personal, family, or other circumstances and commitments.

From the entire list above, students had to point out two of the biggest challenges or difficulties. Reaffirming the previous results, they pointed out a major problem that some people had or presented personal, family, or other circumstances and commitments, (Table 5). As ranked second, the students highlighted not having encountered problems.

Table 4. Challenges and difficulties to develop the GW.

Code	Item	Mean	SD
L2	In our working group, some people had personal, family, or other circumstances and commitments.	2.32	1.26
C2	In our working group, everyone seemed to have very different ways or styles of doing things.	1.87	0.95
K2	In our working group, some people had very different knowledge and mastery of the subject.	1.78	0.93
D2	In our working group, everyone seemed to have different styles of interaction.	1.77	0.92
A2	In our working group, the objectives were different.	1.67	1.03
J2	In our working group, I perceived that everyone had different ideas about what should be completed.	1.61	0.80
B2	In our working group, we had different priorities.	1.61	0.91
I2	In our working group, some people were easily distracted.	1.58	0.86
F2	In our working group, some of the people were not entirely committed to the work.	1.54	0.81
H2	In our working group, some of the people were too competitive and individualistic.	1.33	0.79
G2	In our working group, some of the people had different priorities to complete the job.	1.28	0.59
E2	In our working group, some of the people did not get along.	1.25	0.55
Dimension results		**1.63**	**0.86**

Table 5. Challenge levels and importance.

Code *	Biggest Challenge		Second-Biggest Challenge	
	n	Percentage	*n*	Percentage
A2	4	5.8%	0	0
B2	2	2.9%	1	1.4%
C2	6	8.7%	5	7.2%
D2	3	4.3%	4	5.8%
E2	0	0	1	1.4%
F2	2	2.9%	1	1.4%
G2	0	0	3	4.3%
H2	4	5.8%	2	2.9%
I2	2	2.9%	4	5.8%
J2	3	4.3%	3	4.3%
K2	6	8.8%	6	8.7%
L2	26	37.7%	15	21.7%
None	11	15.9%	24	34.8%
Total	**69**	100%	**69**	100%

* The codes in the first column represent the questions formulated in Table 3.

3.3. Emotional Regulation

As for the emotional regulation used by students to solve problems, the instrument separates them into three types: individual regulation mechanisms (IN), co-regulation mechanisms (CO), and social regulation mechanisms (SR). Table 6 shows that the emotional regulation that students used to solve difficulties was associated with mechanisms of emotional regulation (the individual changes his way of perceiving and thinking about problematic circumstances) and mechanisms of social regulation (the entire group seeks a solution to a difficult situation).

3.4. Balance of Work

As for the overall balance of the GW process, the questionnaire asked to what extent were the first two objectives achieved. Table 7 shows the percentage of achievement of the objectives, as well as the percentage of the role that the group had in achieving the objective.

Table 6. Emotional regulations.

Code	Item	Mean	SD
SR	We resolved the situation by agreeing on which of the objectives to leave as a work goal.	3.54	1.23
SR	We understood that we had to reconcile our objectives to develop the work as a group.	3.39	1.39
SR	We accepted that everyone has different goals and developed GW	3.13	1.40
SR	We decided that we had to put our views aside and focus on the goal of the work.	3.09	1.40
	Social Regulation Total	**3.28**	**1.35**
IN	I convinced myself that the situation could be a good thing.	3.47	1.24
IN	I tried to be flexible with the differences presented in the group.	3.39	1.32
IN	I tried to accept and consider that some people are more prepared to work than others.	2.75	1.45
IN	I tried to understand that other people were not trying to make themselves difficult but had different goals.	2.19	1.24
	Individual Regulation Total	**2.95**	**1.31**
CO	I tried to explain to others that we needed to understand different goals.	2.45	1.33
CO	I tried to persuade the group to be more flexible so that we could find a solution to the conflict situation.	2.41	1.32
CO	I told the others that we needed to accept that some people were prepared to put in more work than others.	1.94	1.21
CO	I tried to convince someone that the others were not simply trying to be difficult and that we can solve the situation.	1.87	1.13
	Co-regulation Total	**2.16**	**1.24**

Table 7. Levels of achievements.

	Not Achieved		It Was Relatively Achieved		It Was Achieved	
	n	Percentage	*n*	Percentage	*n*	Percentage
The first objective	0	0%	22	31.9%	47	68.1%
The second objective	1	1.4%	19	27.6%	49	71%
Role of the group in fulfilling the first objective	0	0	16	23.2%	53	76.8%
Role of the group in fulfilling the second objective	1	1.4%	15	21.8%	53	76.8%

As for the level of satisfaction with the work they had completed, 65.2% of the students reported that they were satisfied with the results obtained.

4. Discussion

The aim of this study was to describe the emotional regulation process perceived by students after GW activities were realised in expressive-artistic activities. The results of this study are relevant as they give us a better understanding of the elements of social interaction and emotional regulation that occur during GW. This knowledge will be used to develop pedagogic strategies and resources that stimulate and foment cooperative learning. The hypothesis of this study was fulfilled considering that the expressive-artistic activities favoured the good functioning of the cooperative group work that the students developed.

Several studies have found a link between the participation of young students in physical activities and the development of their social skills such as respect, empathy, cooperation, and teamwork [36,37]. Learning through group tasks is also meant to develop the specific skills that prepare students for both professional and personal life. These abilities are communication, problem-solving, negotiation, the development of social relations, and creativity [38].

It is necessary to generate educational structures that are based on teamwork and GW yet build collective knowledge where each member of the group is responsible for their learning and of their peers [10].

GW in physical education is assumed to generate satisfaction, yet there is less research into students' opinions about being exposed to new situations within expressive-artistic activities.

In this study, we found that students generally perceived teamwork as an enriching and pleasant experience and the results showed that their main purpose was to do a good job while having a good time, data that agree with other authors [28,39,40].

A secondary goal was to learn from their peers, to enhance the learning experience and gain new ideas. It is suggested that GW activities benefit the students in terms of peer learning, transferable skills, as well as social bonding [41]. Moreover, Mittelmeier mentioned in his research that students perceive the social relationships that form inside cooperative work as necessary, as these present opportunities to get to know each other [42].

Most of the students thought that their group worked on equal terms when it came to their priorities, group interaction, compromise, and group cohesion. Other articles mention that GW activities that are present in Physical Education classes develop social skills such as individual responsibility, group cohesion, and conflict resolution, among others [39,43].

Inevitably, during GW activities, tensions and difficulties arise within the group, which could trigger different emotions. Some of the most common difficulties were related to the perception of one or more members of the group of inequality in the amount of work completed or the level of commitment shown by the members.

The students underlined that some of the other group members had personal and family commitments that hindered their meetings or made them leave earlier for practice. In this context, one author affirmed that external constraints represented the biggest social challenge in the GW [32]. This approach employs a comprehensive framework to explain physical activity, in which all levels (individual, social, environmental, and political) play a role in GW activity [43].

On the other hand, Meijer stated that the differences found in terms of domain-specific abilities represent limitations within GW, as well as work styles, and interaction preferences. In this case, these were considered the secondary challenges faced by the group [44].

The mechanisms of emotional regulation involve individual regulation, co-regulation, and social/shared regulation [19,32]. Our study showed that there is a certain social regulation within the group, stating that students agreed to search for and fulfil the objective proposed initially. It was noted that it improved the ability to manage tasks, organize, and establish group priorities, a fact observed by another author [45]. Another important part of social engagement was accepting the opinions of others and reconciling possible conflicts.

Individual regulations are also frequently mentioned by students. The most outstanding strategies for individual regulation were self-conviction of the benefit of understanding, reflection, and improvement of performance, data that coincides with another study [39]. They affirmed that they convinced themselves that the situation is favourable and that it is important to be flexible to face possible differences that might appear inside the group. It was observed that the co-regulation mechanisms had less impact on collaborative work according to the participants.

There are several ways to process and regulate the emotions that arise in these situations: through the construction of internal narratives and rationalities (self-regulation), through different persuasion attempts (co-regulation), or through the construction of group communicative situations that involve the group (social regulation); therefore, knowing the mechanisms used by students in their emotional regulation from the perspective of cooperative work provides us with valuable information about the possible difficulties that can interfere with the execution of the assigned task, such as tensions. These must be processed and resolved individually, so it does not affect social interaction.

After a thorough review, the participants affirmed that the first and second aims of the GW were fulfilled and the group had a fundamental role in the process. In addition, most of the participants affirmed that there were completely satisfied with the group project.

5. Limitations

One of the limitations was the use of only one instrument to analyse the emotional regulation of students. In the future, we propose a broader approach by analysing different dimensions such as academic motivation, basic psychological needs, or enjoyment supported by other instruments.

At the same time, it would be interesting to perform thorough research using an experimental design to provide different knowledge on the outcomes of the GW.

Lastly, the sample chosen was a specific one, in the area of expressive-artistic activities, from a single university. We consider that it would be interesting to address emotional regulation through other variations of GW in other areas of education.

6. Conclusions

In conclusion, this study allowed us to discover the perceptions of students and their emotional regulation within GW in expressive-artistic activities. It was noted that GW possesses great importance, hence it benefits the relationships between peers and the enjoyment of the practice of expressive activities. On another note, it is advised to prevent the influence of external factors that could intervene in the normal progress of the group.

This has provided us with information that might allow us to adapt new learning strategies that facilitate students to develop the necessary skills to face a professional and personal future.

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