

“BebéPlimPlim”: A contribution to shared listening experiences

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Abstract

“BebéPlimPlim” is currently a part of the project “GermlnArte – Artistic Transformation for Social and Human Development since Infancy”, supported by Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. Along with three other works from the project (“Colos de Música”, “Raps&Rimas” and “Super-Sonics”), it is designed as a transformative transitive training in the field of arts for infants for early childhood professionals, musicians and other artists. Transformative because it is built upon individual needs and motivations, shaping the capacity to express the art within each one and transitive because it is always in process. Its main idea evolves around singing and movement as being born in the mother's lap, the cradle of the first communicative interactions of a human being. “BebéPlimPlim” is therefore grounded in the concept of communicative musicality developed by Stephen Malloch and Colwyn Trevarthen, highlighting that Music is part of our communication matrix and it can also be present in musical artistic creations. The repertoire from “BebéPlimPlim” is inspired by different sound landscapes, from Johann Sebastian Bach, Meredith Monk, Kurt Schwitters and Hugo Balla to Portuguese folk music and Javanese gamelan. Its wide-ranging influences intend to contribute to the enrichment of listening experiences since infancy.

The main goals of this training are to explore communicative resources using the body and the voice, to be able to use the repertoire in different educational settings, to share meaningful moments of musical interaction, and to contact with professionals who work in different early childhood contexts.

The demonstration aims to share one possible experience built upon this specific musical repertoire. The activities are centred in listening, movement, vocal landscapes and human interaction.

The implications for this work are to offer complementary educational and artistic perspectives not yet provided in our higher education training programmes for teachers and artists, and to develop processes of autonomy, initiative and reflection within the context of musical creation for children.

This work emphasises listening as a different possibility of connecting to music, and draws attention to sharing listening experiences as the basis of being human.

Keywords

Communicative musicality, listening, movement, vocal landscape, human interaction.

Introduction

Colwyn Trevarthen, the mentor of the GermlnArte project wrote (cited in CMT, 2016a):

Since *BebéBabá*, the work of the Companhia de Música Teatral (Theatrical Music Company) has celebrated the pleasure of musical communication between parents and children, promoting a philosophy of education in which families play a fundamental role in encouraging children's creativity and learning. Its work has been a source of inspiration for my research into communicative musicality and its educational application. Now, GermlnArte also presents a training ground for young artists, educators, musicians and researchers in psychology and education (...).

The project *GermlnArte – Artistic Transformation for Human and Social Development since Childhood* is an artistic and educational project, whose goals consist of conceiving quality training practices, as well as qualifying professionals within the scope of social and human development since early childhood (CMT, 2016b).

From the beginning, this project's title aims to transmit its distinctive philosophy. Therefore, the concept "GermlnArte" leads us to each person's unique interaction and communicative capacity in an artistic context. On the other hand, the concept "Transformation" is a paraphrase for this same idea: the need for a training that is built upon individual characteristics and motivations. Furthermore, this qualification will be shaped in a rather personal way, avoiding an impersonal training, and becoming a unique and singular qualification.

The prefix "Trans" intends to call upon a transversal and a cross-curricular qualification: an authentic plural one. It also conveys an idea of a transitory and evolutionary training, a continuous process: training instead of formatting. The concept of "artistic transformation" aims to transmit the idea that art can be used as a human and social development tool, applied in positive social changes. Therefore, the artists should reflect upon art's role and their own existential mission. Finally, "since childhood" is used to highlight the fact that early childhood's care is an important and long-term factor towards the building of a healthy society, with high quality of life enrichment. This way, the project is in the forefront of educational and social agents who share the idea that the artistic process fosters a transformative capacity. This capacity will later reflect on social and human development. The designation "social and educational agents" embodies a systemic perspective, encompassing/involving parents,

carers, families, professionals, older children or any other social member, whose action may reverberate directly or indirectly, over childhood. In other words, qualifying early childhood professionals (who work with children aged between zero and three years old) will be developed together with the idea that education and childhood's care ought to be shared by caring communities. This project is not merely about acting with those involved directly with children, but also to offer them searching and reflection paths, valuable references and ideals.

The book *Manual Para a Construção de Jardins Interiores* (Handbook for the construction of inner gardens) rises from this context. It consists of a set of publications – “BebéPlimPlim”, “Colos de Música”, “Raps&Rimas”, “Super-Sonics” - and presents a diversified set of materials. These materials were designed to inspire and develop activities with babies and children. It is an educational puzzle that aims to offer some complementary educational views, which support artistic intervention during childhood, drawing attention to different approaches towards music (Rodrigues, Rodrigues, & Rodrigues, 2016a). The philosophy underlying the compilation of these new and different materials is precisely the waterfall effect mentioned previously: it is necessary to reach different intervenients (professional system or family members, acting directly within early childhood). It is, therefore, necessary to promote the inner dialogue and reflection of each agent. The set of publications within the *Manual Para a Construção de Jardins Interiores* offers diversified vocabulary, which can be used later in order to access and build one's own “inner garden”.

This set of materials is one of the outputs of the preceding project *Opus Tutti*, reflecting the view adopted within its scope: the creation of good practices of intervention in the community directed to childhood and early childhood (Rodrigues, Rodrigues, & Rodrigues, 2016b). Thus, it is characterized by a systemic approach: intervening in early childhood implies reaching several related elements. Therefore, it also aims to offer some clues about how to work with different artistic approaches (mainly through music issues) with diversified groups of people. “Bebé PlimPlim” is a musical “gramelot” – a kind of new language build on baby's sounds and other elements that express some vocal communication. It is an attempt to establish contact through a universal repertoire, basis for the entire communication process. It is a work inspired by several sound universes – from Johann Sebastian Bach, Meredith Monk, Kurt Schwitters, Hugo Balla, as well as the traditional Javanese gamelan. It is built upon musical experiences across generations and it aims to rouse babies', children and adults' interest on “sharing listening” moments. On the other hand, the musical content within this CD may inspire singing, movement and playing activities (Rodrigues, 2016). It also offers some material and allows

carers to create educational activities, just like any other artistic work of art.

Unlike “Colos de Música” or “Super-Sonics”, that present concrete strategies about how to do, the idea of including the CD “Bebé PlimPlim” offers the possibility to “listen”. It also highlights the specific artistic creations for infants, promoting an extended reflection and debate on its ground principles.

Listening as vehicle for musical expression

Listening as an active process is a way to express ourselves as innate musical beings. This statement may sound somewhat odd, because we usually relate “being a musician” to composition, instrument playing or reading scores activities. In our opinion, it is something more extended: it is, mainly, the capacity to respond to sound. Therefore, it is important to promote listening as a path to connect with music throughout our lives.

Children enjoy and need routines and rituals, whether in a family context or in a pre-school environment. These routines help establishing the comfort of the child's daily life. They can even acquire a special meaning, when integrating some known child's games. For example, using a lullaby or a simple musical activity when washing their hands, may turn into a magical moment, that the child will wait for enthusiastically. On the other hand, special events – like attending an artistic presentation or getting involved with a group of parents that create music with their children – bring a new brightness to everyday life. These are special moments that bring joy and union to a certain community.

This is our perspective on aesthetic experiences: powerful rituals that can be enjoyed with our beloved ones. And it is not mandatory that these experiences come from the outside. They can happen at home, in the nursery or pre-school, when creating special days for a collective listening, eventually by closing their eyes, holding their hands, skin with skin. The musical listening experience, shared with other babies and adults, offers a kind of silent dialogue: thus, we may not know what the other is feeling, but we do know that, as ourselves, he/she is feeling something. It is the ultimate characteristic of human kind: being unique, as well as sharing each other's company.

Aims

“BebéPlimPlim” is a training based on the publication *Manual para a Construção de Jardins Interiores – BebéPlimPlim* (book and CD). Its main principle is built on communicative musicality. It aims to enrich the listening experiences, offering a suitable musical repertoire for childhood. It also promotes listening through a set of sound references, developed as early as birth, thus enriching a child's musical experiences throughout infancy.

The main goals of this training are to explore communicative resources using the body and the voice; to be able to use the repertoire in different educational settings; to share meaningful musical interaction moments and to contact with professionals, who work in different early childhood contexts.

Description of the activities

The demonstration aims to share one possible experience built upon this specific musical repertoire. The activities are centred in listening, movement, vocal landscapes and human interaction.

The selected piece for this presentation is called “Knong”. The participants will experience straight and curved movements, by moving and going around paper sheets lying on the ground. These movements will be alternated by freezing positions. The participants will carry these paper sheets on their hands, thus exploring personal and shared space. The paper sheets will also be carried by other body parts, such as back, shoulders and forearms. When passing them over, the human sculptures will arise. Firstly, without physical contact and slowly developing into movements with physical contact. This sculpture will be built using different perspectives and searching for variety. This exercise will carry on until all the participants join the sculpture.

Afterwards, the participants will slowly unfreeze from their positions and will listen to the track (this time, without movement). They will conclude that the melody in the bass was developed according to a certain rule. After explaining that rule, the participants will move around again to the sound of the musical sequence.

Implications

Even though we experience a growing interest in this artistic area in early childhood, there are still no suitable answers in the higher education system for educators and artists. A training with these specific characteristics implies an entire set of reflection activities and experiences that the Portuguese high education is still not ready to promote and develop. Furthermore, this area of teacher training is quite recent, thus requiring serious organizational processes and a deep reflection. It will take some time before we can observe a solid establishment in teaching training institutions.

We believe that offering meaningful reflection experiences is the best contribution for the development of this teaching context. Knowing about the topic is not enough, because it does not necessarily imply acting. That is the reason why we have been using the expression immersive training, that combines artistic, educational and relationship skills acquisition. This process will be built within real work settings and through different challenges. The training is thus experiential, offering different sensations, emotions and learning opportunities (in a sense of an embodied cognition or embodied feeling).

We also believe in an artistic training that values different experiences related to voice, movement, listening, creation and emotions. These factors are combined towards a specific artistic goal – for example developing and presenting a performance together with families and their babies – shared with artists. This idea is related to an isomorphic training, which tends to reproduce mainly the learning environments and models experienced during the teacher training, instead of theoretical learning achievements.

Early childhood crosses multiple acting settings (social and educational care, health, law, culture, family). It is therefore necessary, to prepare the professionals with a certain versatility that can able them to dialogue in all these different settings. This training goes beyond a specialized knowledge. The professionals will be able to use artistic activities, in order to reach a final goal, which is promoting the general well-being of the baby or the child, through a shared dialogue with other carers.

Specific value and meaning

This work emphasizes listening as an alternative path to connect with music, drawing attention to shared listening activities as the basis of being human. *GemInArte* offers a professional training practice that tries to qualify not only pre-school teachers, but also other professionals, within different settings, related to early childhood. Like a training puzzle, this project aims to prepare educational agents and foster the sharing of experiences among different carers.

We believe that it is very important to establish strong relationships between children and carers. We also believe that playing, thus exploring the senses and the body, is the foundation for all future learning achievements. We are also aware that becoming a good “player” requires from the professional, a skilled training along with a set of positive experiences within this scope. But, it is not enough. It is also necessary to foster inner availability. A good training practice should guide the trainees through that same searching process – finding their generosity and inner harmony, meaning and personal fulfillment. These feelings ought to be transmitted over to the children, characterizing everyone that works with childhood. In conclusion, training childhood professionals implies appreciating and valuing human emotions and relationships: we do not need technicians, but people who are truly dedicated to infancy and are willing to improve and enrich their “presence”.

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