

## **Inquiry into an unknown musical practice: an example of learning through project and investigation**

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### **Abstract**

*The music pedagogy department at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique et de Danse de Lyon has built a training programme based on project and inquiry, inspired by the theories of John Dewey and Louis Legrand. The students are asked to investigate a musical practice that they are not familiar with before. They meet musicians, perform with them, they conduct interviews, prepare pedagogical workshops, read documentation, and animate a seminar. The idea is that they through this process become able to raise new questions derived from action experiences.*

*The following article unfolds the theoretical foundations of this project, and describes how it is implemented by showing an example of students who have investigated *bèlè*, which is a music and dance form from Martinique.*

*This ‘inquiry’ and project constitutes a challenge for the students that changes their understanding of what music and what learning music are. Conducting an investigation allows students to take a global view of the musical issues – an approach that differ from how most of them usually focus mostly on ‘musical material’. They identify the multiplicity of conditions for the emergence of a musical practice, which is essential since they have to encourage and accompany new practices as pedagogues in the futures.*

## Introduction

Historically, higher music education in France has been built on a strong instrumental specialisation, rooted in the context of Western classical music. This specialisation refers to the performance practice of the orchestra musician and the soloist on the one hand, and to a very strong separation between performance and theory on the other. In particular, the analysis and the discourse on music have been developed in the academic field of musicology, which in France is exclusively assigned to the universities, whilst the performance practice is left to the conservatoires with very few bridges between these two areas. Today, even though a growing number of institutions offer curricula that allow students to combine music performance practice and research, the separation between performance and theory still remains strong, as the idea is that there would be just one right way of learning how to perform music.

In the music pedagogy department of the Conservatoire National de Musique et de Danse de Lyon (CNSMDL) students are instructed to reflect on musical practices by drawing on disciplinary fields. Firstly, if one wants to go beyond the simple logic of imitation and reproduction in a setting that is intended to trigger instructed learning, a teacher needs to describe in depth the different musical practices he or she is teaching. Secondly, it is essential to be able to support the students' artistic ideas and projects (which might differ from those of the teachers) and to remain flexible in a musical world that is undergoing constant change. Finally, if the artist-teacher wants to pro-actively contribute to the well-being of the society and the community in which he or she is embedded, he or she should be able to take a more specific look at his or her own role as an artist but also to understand the social and cultural logic of the area.

Therefore, the educational concept of 'learning through projects and by inquiry' developed in this paper stands at the junction of different academic disciplinary fields usually present in higher music education in the subjects of musicology; educational sciences; sociology and anthropology.

Students and teachers in the department gather theoretical input from each of these fields which is in turn reinforced by the pragmatic anchoring of these approaches.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> There are few reference works that propose a conceptual development of this multidisciplinary approach to musical practices; the teaching teams therefore draw on literature in different fields of research. However, mention can be made of the Cahiers de la Recherche 'Enseigner la Musique [Teaching Music]', published by Cefedem Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, Lyon, which feature articles written by researchers from a variety of disciplinary fields in which they write their experiences and reflections as actors in the specialised teaching of music (artists-teachers, directors, politicians).

The logic of projects corresponds particularly to this multidisciplinary anchoring because this enables the persons involved to combine various elements and to make them interact with each other, as will be demonstrated later on.

The CNSMDL students in the music pedagogy department were asked to investigate a musical practice which they were not familiar with before. The idea was that they had no clue about the musical structure the musicians were referring to when performing their music. In other words: they did not have any knowledge of the construct of ideas these musicians were re-constructing through the act of performing. Such an unknown musical practice could for example be if a classical musician were to focus on the *bèlè*, which is a musical genre from Martinique – an example we will describe further below. In this case the students met the musicians, tried to perform with them, conducted interviews and read documentation related to the music they were scrutinising. Next, during a three-day workshop they offered other musicians an initiation to this music before finally discussing the results of their investigation at a seminar.

We believe that such investigations allow students to develop essential musical, didactic and pedagogical skills and that they help students think about the role of the music teacher in modern-day conservatoires. And we believe that giving the students space to experiment will help them develop their creativity. Why is this? Firstly, because students are exposed to a situation which is at first glance not easy to solve. Secondly, because they will meet groups that have come up with different answers when facing similar or even the same problems. This helps them to develop ‘divergent thought’, to imagine new possibilities, to become ‘open-ended’ (Guilford, 1950; Hameline, 1996).

We are convinced that in the current context of global warming, migration and the urgency of finding solutions for sustainable development, new generations will have to invent new ways of living together, and thus creativity has become an essential and indispensable skill.

Education and training have an essential role to play in relation to these issues. That is why the isomorphism between the values that new music teachers are asked to develop in their music schools and the ones the music instructors should implement in the training of future teachers is crucial.

This paper will address both the idea of the music teachers’ new tasks and roles as well as the objectives of the workshop. Starting with a brief overview of the context,

I will go on to describe the survey methods and tools and present an example before critically analysing this work.

## Background

The department of music pedagogy at the CNSMDL

The Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique et de Danse de Lyon (CNSMDL) is one of the two higher music education institutions in France that are exclusively focusing on higher education and run under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture. Its department of music pedagogy has existed since 1994. The CNSMDL operates under the auspices of both the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Higher Education and Research. The music pedagogy department offers a two-year programme which awards a master in pedagogy.

The student cohort of this programme is about 20 students per year, most of them having graduated with a master's degree in performance or in theory from one of the two CNSMDs in France. With a master's degree in music pedagogy they are given permission to teach instrumental, vocal or theory lessons in music schools and conservatoires. After a regional civil service competition the newly qualified teacher can join the managerial staff of a conservatoire and become a senior executive.

Music schools and conservatoires<sup>2</sup> in France today

France has a very close network of music schools and conservatoires. Marcel Landowsky, director of music at the Ministry of Culture from 1966 to 1975, and later Maurice Fleuret, director from 1981 to 1986, promoted a very strong development policy reinforcing these structures in order to improve young people's access to music education (Lefebvre, 2014; Veilt & Duchemin, 2000). These music schools and conservatoires offer a specialised initial education of music – from early childhood music education up to a diploma of amateur or pre-professional practice.

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<sup>2</sup> To avoid misunderstandings between different forms of institutional logic in Europe, we will use the term 'conservatoire' to refer to educational structures of music with state approval which deliver teaching from the beginner level to pre professional diploma.

These structures are publicly funded, mainly by municipalities. The courses are generally structured according to the relevant instrumental or vocal disciplines. The conservatoires are classified according to their territorial extent: 'regional conservatoires', 'departmental c.' and 'municipal c.' or 'intercommunal c.'. In total there are around 380 conservatoires in France ([www.culture.gouv.fr](http://www.culture.gouv.fr)). The pedagogy department trains teachers who are licensed to teach within these public structures as experts in music education.

In addition a number of smaller structures can be found, including communal or associative institutions (not included in the above figure), that have kept the name 'music school'. These schools may have emerged from traditional structures such as municipal wind ensembles. Generally, they offer more limited educational services than the conservatoires, but pursue similar goals and missions, at a local scale.

During the last few decades attitudes towards music have changed a great deal in France. On the one hand, music schools and conservatoires have experienced significant growth: even if the conservatoires remain focused on one-to-one teaching and classical music, the range of services and activities has expanded considerably. On the other hand, music-related habits, especially when it comes to listening to music, have changed. Music schools and conservatoires should support this evolution, and teacher education should encourage the artist-teacher to continually develop his or her role as a professional musician and music educator in our changing society.

Even if the curricula and activities are laid down by the state, the structures are the responsibility of the local authorities. Thus, elected officials ask conservatoires to expand their services and to address a wider audience. The audience attending classes in these institutions is now different from the past. The various framework texts of the Ministry of Culture, which describe the missions of the conservatoires<sup>3</sup>, show evolution: music schools and conservatoires are given the task of further developing amateur practices, collective practices, multidisciplinary and creativity. They have a duty to engage in partnerships with associations and artists, to anchor the conservatoire in its home territory and make it shine. The conservatoire is no longer exclusively meant to train orchestral musicians. But this historical legacy is still so strong that changes

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<sup>3</sup> The 1984, 1992 and 1996 'pedagogical guidance schemes' and 'Charter for Specialized Arts Education' (2001) clarified the different missions of the schools concerned. The pedagogical guidance scheme for the initial teaching of music, published in 2008, is now the reference document for all teachers, directors and elected officials.

are often difficult to implement and only slowly put into action. That is why it is so important to support young teachers in developing an extended scope of skills and competencies to help them articulate heritage and new forms of practice.

The changes that have been outlined above are impacting teaching methods: group lessons are booming, student profiles change and diversify, as well as their relationship with music and their expectations. Moreover, information is today considerably more accessible – whether it is access to exotic music that has long been unknown to our Western societies or information about the history of heritage or interpretations.

All this also has a strong impact on the role and the mission of the teacher. Teaching music practices that are new to him, the teacher cannot rely on his encyclopedic knowledge. Therefore his role shifts towards a more accompanying one, helping the students to inquire, research for, analyse and classify information, as well as develop their critical thinking.

The development of new technologies has also brought new opportunities for students who are eager to compose music. Music editing programs or computer-assisted musics for example, make composition more accessible. As a result, the separation between interpretation and composition becomes blurry – an experience that seems to be less alien to musical styles and genres outside scholarly classical music.

These developments are also a challenge for the traditional relationship between theory and practice. The teacher must now be open to diverse approaches to music-making and to helping his students understand, compare and experiment with different ways of making music, different processes, in other words: he must find new and more flexible ways of balancing the relationship between theory and practice.

The teaching profession is changing. The music teacher can no longer only be a specialist on an instrument or a musical genre; he or she must also be a specialist on the ‘access to knowledge’, someone who is able to support their students during their research.

### Learning through project and inquiry

This is why the music education department at the CNSMDL has built a training programme based on project and inquiry. Two student cohorts have enrolled on the

programme to date, but some projects, such as the one described below, have been under development for several years.

Project work and inquiry are to be understood as two poles in a regulatory cycle. The tension between the two is productive in order to raise new questions derived from action experiences. Stimulating and releasing this productive tension between project work and inquiry with each individual student can be seen as a common basic concept which underlies all pedagogical study programmes at the CNSML.

The skills that the students have to develop in their career are, of course, prescribed by regulations stipulated by the Ministry of Culture, and the choice of devices is designed to allow these acquisitions. But in the articulation between the different projects, and within each project, the student's path is conceived at the beginning of a dialogue, or even negotiation, in which not only the teacher is involved but also the student him- or herself at an earlier stage of his or her career as a learner. There is a contractual process between the student and his or her teacher: the pedagogical team have an agreement with the students on the terms of their projects – their challenges, objectives, methods and evaluation – and, at the same time, the teachers are challenged to gradually withdraw from the role of instructor into a role as mentor and facilitator, allowing the student to develop into a professional self-reflecting and self-controlling educator.

This educational concept is based on two major theories: Firstly, 'pedagogy through project' ('pédagogie de projet'), defined by Louis Legrand (1982). Secondly, 'theory of inquiry', developed by John Dewey (1938), which can be seen from today's point of view as one of the first formulations of a theory of action-oriented learning in the modern sense.

The department of music pedagogy at the CNSMDL is not the only one to have implemented these principles into music teacher education in France. In particular, the Cefedem Auvergne Rhône-Alpes, under the leadership of Jean-Charles François, starting in 2000, as well as later the Cefedem of Normandy under the leadership of Yanik Lefort have already developed educational programmes based on these principles since 2000, with many changes over the years and different groups of students<sup>4</sup>. The

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4 Jacques Moreau has already proposed a contribution on this subject to the AEC, starting with a text written in French by Jean-Charles François (François et al., 2007), edited in collaboration between the Cefedem Rhône-Alpes and the CNSMDL: "Contractual Process in Students' Performance Projects". This paper was simultaneously presented in English by Jean-Charles François to a Connect presentation at the Guildhall.

teams from these three institutions have shared their experiences with each other through discussions and workshops.

Legrand and Dewey developed concepts that really put the student at the centre of his or her learning process.

### To learn through project: Louis Legrand

Louis Legrand, in charge of a study mission to improve the functioning of secondary schools, summarises in a report to the Ministry of National Education the main lines of 'learning through project' (Legrand, 1982). For him, a project supposes:

1. A choice of subject made by the learner, implying a conscious and personal commitment;
2. A collective approach – although the initiative can be carried out individually;
3. Planning ahead of time;
4. A presentation to others;
5. Learning by trial and error;
6. A rotation between individual work and collective consultation;
7. Teachers positioned as regulators, informants and support as needed.

One of the interesting elements in this project pedagogy, which resonates with the multidisciplinary aspects of our approach, is the interaction and interrelationships between the various components of the project. For example, it is necessary to consider the group, the profiles of the actors, their cultural and sociological context, as well as their prior experiences and previous understandings that they convey to the notions and phenomena. In addition, there is a very strong interrelationship between the activity in which they will engage and their idea of what they will learn; if one of the elements in the project setting changes, all the other elements are modified. In other words: based on an understanding which is widely shared among the leading learning theorists, the mental representation which the individual associates with a certain notion changes as a consequence of a changed perception of the phenomena.

An example: the notion of 'constraints' is particularly interesting. The 'constraint' comes from both the context (musical, production) and the teacher who will propose a certain educational setting, forcing the student to expose himself or herself to a particular challenge or obstacle instead of evading it in order to be able to achieve the learning objectives. The notion of constraint is found both in the field of educational



sciences (Astolfi, 1993; Meirieu, 1987) and in the field of pragmatic anthropology. Isabelle Stengers (1996), for example, develops the notion of constraints related to the 'ecology of practices'. When students learn from the project, they should gather all these dimensions in the same movement.

We wish to emphasise that 'project-based learning' is not to be confused with 'project society'. 'Project-based learning' aims at the emancipation of the individuals – in the sense of Tilman (2004); but a society that would exclusively be based on project work might put people's jobs and security at risk (Boltanski & Chiapello, 1999)<sup>5</sup>.

'Project-based learning' is developed in the school's context, be it a general school or a music school. This must ensure an articulation with the long-term work carried out, the fundamental values defined by the public school, and be discussed with the various actors of the school. Moreover, the school ensures a safe environment where the student can be wrong, wander, waste time, and be equipped with the material needed. Alongside this, the development of project logic in contemporary Western societies also corresponds to a liberal, competitive view of society – a dimension that should not be taught in school, even if the principles constituting a project can be similar.

### John Dewey – The theory of inquiry

The second theoretical grounding is for us the theory of inquiry. In the philosophy of John Dewey, the idea that learning is triggered by research is crucial (Dewey, 1938). In order to improve, students have to be faced with a problem and solve it through investigation.

For the pragmatic philosopher John Dewey, inquiry is the experience that aims at the acquisition of knowledge; it is experience itself, insofar as it reveals the logic of operations. Experience is both the foundation and the ultimate objective of the determined approach of investigation. This vision is particularly interesting for us: transposed into the context of the musical practice, it refers to the procedures we are used to when performing music.

To start an investigation – or even to have the idea of conducting an investigation – people have to be able to create an initial situation which is addressed as a problem,

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<sup>5</sup> See François et al. (2007) for the development of this thesis.

albeit a real or an imaginary problem, to be solved. For Dewey, the transformation from an 'indeterminate' situation to a 'problematic' situation is done in five stages:

1. The antecedent condition of inquiry: the indeterminate situation
2. Institution of a problem
3. The determination of a problem-solution
4. Reasoning
5. The operational character of fact-meanings.

In this theory scientific knowledge is developed through an inquiry process whose nature does not differ from how a problem is usually solved in the context of an everyday situation which apparently needs to be solved. In both spheres there is a continuum between experience and logic, and therefore between inquiry and practice.

This concept of inquiry refers to a cluster of behaviours that can be of a different nature, backed by either psychological, cultural, organic ('natural') or scholarly logics. Their common peculiarity is that they are all finally aiming at overcoming problems.

In the field of musical practices these 'behaviours' correspond to the different solutions that have been found as a result of the internal communication within a certain community or social group in various contexts in order to answer a question; for example, the question of varying a melody or inventing different propositions. Working with a melody (the answer can differ in nature depending on the context: harmonic, modal, rhythmic, etc.), each human group will come up with answers that differ from each other, with a variety of ways in which to make different kinds of music, with different musical parameters each treated in a specific way. The logic of inquiry makes it possible to attempt to identify these ways of doing things, to see how groups are experimenting, how they develop collective responses to an open question, how these choices stabilise at a given moment. There emerge shared musical questions for which each social entity, in various contexts, develops its own answer.

Why is this theory so important to us? Because it obviously allows us to understand that musicians, when working out a musical performance, are contained within a continuous cycle in which a concrete action (the musical performance) generates experience (which is gained by analysing and assessing our own performance somewhere in between success or failure), which in turn becomes the starting point of a new action. Dewey points out that this process of learning through action experience may not necessarily refer to one's own actions only, but also to actions that are carried

out by other members of the professional community. And that is why he considers the learners' actions to be a collective response to experience. This very pragmatic approach allows us to look at musical practices from the point of view of both their fabrication and their theorisation, as an integrated process similar to how actors themselves experience it.

We therefore also make the tools that might help students go successfully through this inquiry process: different interview techniques, observation methods, how to observe a territory, how to identify contexts, how to consider the audience from a sociological approach, etc.

The following text proposes both how to describe the project framework and how to build on a project that was conducted by a student group.

The data was collected through the observation of different sessions involving the students, and interviews:

- first discussions with the group at the start of the project;
- discussion as they go through their surveys, especially from their field diaries;
- parallel discussion with musicians whom the students had interviewed;
- observation and analysis of the workshops offered by these students to other students to help them discover and practise this music;
- participation in the research seminar;
- final interview at the beginning of a written and documented report (audio, video) of the students.

## **An inquiry about unknown musical practices to discover: the 'EPMD' method Description of the framework, challenges and expectations**

Start of the project: the preliminary phase at the beginning of the investigation

Before the beginning of the project, one teacher (who is already a musician-teacher and an anthropological researcher) offers a lesson on the issue of tradition and its

dynamics, alterity, and other fundamental anthropological questions. Some theoretical references are then discussed – especially Geertz (1973), Amselle (2008) and Lenclud (1987).

Then we constitute groups of students (four or five students per group) and present to them the musical context in which they have to do their investigation. This musical context should be a completely unknown musical genre, far away from their main musical identity. It is paramount that at the beginning they do not understand how these musicians create and play this kind of music, it must be a real mystery to them.

Our students are mostly musicians with a background in classical music or in early music (there is sometimes a jazz musician in the student group, but this is still an exception). So, for example, they have to investigate Mandingo music; jazz fusion; improvised counterpoint; Corsican polyphonies etc. The musical practices have to be very specific in order to prevent the students from creating general categories.

To perform music involves specific processes in specific contexts (Becker, 1982) – and this is the central issue of this method, what the students have to confront themselves with.

Before the beginning of the study the students have to write a text concerning their initial questions: what are their ideas about the performance practice? How do they imagine that this kind of music is created? What is to them a complete mystery? How are they planning on inquiring? What questions do they want to ask the musicians playing this music?

This text aims to identify the students' initial representations; representations that will evolve during the project.

## The inquiry

After that the inquiry can begin. The students are asked to conduct an investigation by using the method of participatory observation.<sup>6</sup> The framework is strictly defined. Although this may seem paradoxical at first, these constraints are necessary conditions in order for the students to conduct their investigations as freely as possible.

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6 To work on ways of making music, students rely in particular on the work of Perrenoud (2007) and Schütz (2007).

The students are asked to keep a logbook as they investigate – to write down the names of people they are looking to get in touch with, whom they meet, what they observe – but also their questions, their misunderstandings and their doubts.

They have to find out who is practising this music, look for contacts, meet musicians, make observations and conduct interviews. When they have started searching, the team of teachers may help them find contacts if necessary. They are asked to play with some of these musicians, try to integrate some practising moments to the project. They have to look for existing literature on this topic and conduct research on the internet.

Finally, the students have to define the different criteria: the matrix of the genre and the essential ingredients in the making of this music.

All this should not necessarily be done as a linear, progressive investigation process, but rather in a back and forth process allowing new insights to generate questions on data already collected.

### The pedagogical workshop

Having conducted their inquiry, the students offer a pedagogical workshop for a small group of students from another cohort who has yet to work on this inquiry. The workshop runs over three days, with five three-hour work sessions.

Students acting as ‘teachers’ have to make their ‘students’ understand all the issues of this music; their task is to make their peers discover the music performance practice they have studied and investigated themselves. They have to make choices, as they cannot address all the topics during the workshop, and justify these choices. The students have to develop more than one approach to fulfil their task and are asked to justify their choices of transmission modes.

In the workshop they need to define the task of the musicians, the issues, the resources, the environment and the evaluation criteria.

These workshops are seen as a real challenge by the students. It is very difficult, for example, to explain in a short session modes of transmission that in the real world run over many years and that are embedded in a very specific social setting and maybe supervised by a master or by peers, where the learner step by step acquires new competencies or the right to play certain sounds or rhythms.

The task of the students here is to reinvent a fictional context adapted to the constraints of the situation – a situation they are likely to encounter later when teaching in music schools.

### The seminar

After all this work the students are asked to animate a three-hour seminar on this specific musical genre<sup>7</sup>. The audience is made up of their fellow students in the department – which means that some of them have conducted a similar investigation on another musical practice.

The seminar must follow a particular structure. First the musicians who attended the workshop present and play the result of what they have developed during the sessions. Then the facilitators invite questions from the audience about this music and how it is made. The musicians who participated in the workshop talk about their work and practice; they address the difficulties they encountered, especially the musical and instrumental difficulties which challenged them with regard to their musical habits. They define and explain which role the supervisor had in the process.

Next, the group of investigators present their inquiry from a documented and problem-solving approach; they compare what the music students have said and what they had foreseen; they try to answer the first questions from the audience. Then they facilitate a debate about specific ways of making music.

### Return to their own music-making ways with a fresh approach

The last step is about assessment, evaluation and feedback on the various issues of the project. It is essential to verify whether the students have grasped the issues of the project in which they were involved and to discuss them.

The final interview between the students and the teacher from the pedagogy department is therefore particularly crucial in building skills. The formulation process allows the students to take a step back from the situations they experienced, to objectify them.

In addition, the students themselves propose the criteria for the success of their workshop and their musical essays. This will allow them to identify the constituent elements

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7 Inspired by De Certeau (1978).

of the practices for them and to note possible discrepancies between the words of the musicians they have investigated and their own musical vision. For example, the criterion of a certain type of accuracy, which is constitutive of classical musicians, will not necessarily be valid in all contexts or in any case will not necessarily be paramount. This is why it is necessary to be able to link, in this final interview, the different phases of the investigation. This interview represents a formative evaluation (Hadjji, 1989).

Then, each student, this time individually, has to return to his own way of making music and see what has changed in the way he looks at his own practice. This is the central anthropological dimension. The project has to be based on the students' alterity, because this is a necessary condition for enabling them to find and define their own identity (Laplantine & Nouss, 2008).

Especially in music higher education institutions musicians are highly specialised in a particular musical practice from a young age. In France most classical music students learn one instrument and often only one genre. The 'way of the hand' (Sudnow, 1978) is so integrated, incorporated, that they cannot see the musical processes and are unable to question them.

Only upon graduation when they are away from their routine can students reconsider their 'natural' musical process. This is important for any musician but especially for a teacher, who is in charge of teaching students his own way of doing things. The reflexive posture of the music teacher is fundamental. He or she should do and look at his or her practice, structure his discourse on his practice, compare it with other logics, question the evidence, think out of the box in order to explore new possibilities.

Let us now have a closer look at an example of one specific inquiry.

## **An example: 'Inquiry into bèlè'**

Investigate the way of making 'bèlè'

Last year four students (a harpist, a violist, a pianist and a gambist) investigated the 'Bèlè', one of the best known musical genres in Martinique. Members of the pedagogical staff knew this practice because some very famous artists had come to Lyon to train and graduate in specialised education; so we knew there were resources available.

The bèlè is particularly interesting because it is really a Martinican community practice with a very dynamic ‘tradition’ and therefore formats that evolve with society (Jean-Baptiste, 2008). It is interesting to see that this practice is still expanding on the island. Moreover, the various elements that constitute it (text, song, drums and rhythm, dance, assembly, structures) are completely indivisible.

By the time the island of Martinique was occupied by the French colonists, the slaves gradually structured artistic forms mixing cultural elements of the populations enslaving them (for example, the quadrilles in dance); elements that came from – or were reinvented from memories of – the slaves’ countries of origin (for example, forms of African rhythm); artistic structures which reflect the community – even the ideal of a social organisation which cannot be told (for example, the different movements of dancers describing the social division of tasks, the question of the ownership of the land, and especially the issue of the ‘helping hands’). As in the tales, texts (fixed or improvised, often according to the events) include many layers of understanding, and their real meaning cannot be read by those who do not have access to certain codes.

We will take a closer look here at how the students gradually grasped these issues and how they worked and communicated among themselves. The quotes in the text below in the text are the words of the students, formulated by the time of their assessment.

### Initial statements and key moments

At first the students had no points of reference to this practice: ‘We knew nothing before because the name “bèlè” had never come to our ears’.

They did some initial research on the internet. Then they wrote: ‘The whole thing being extremely interesting but nevertheless very theoretical, we quickly decided to directly contact the current stakeholders of this practice.’ So they contacted bèlè musicians living in Lyon, and others were approached by phone because they lived in Martinique<sup>8</sup>. These interviews and observations were the first key moment of their investigation:

We were at first a little worried because of the versatility of this practice, because the workshop required so much exploration and space for new

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8 Manuela Bapte (Lyon), Philippe Montout, called Philo ; Simone Vaïty (Vaïty, the first woman to take the ‘tanbou’) and Nathalie Ardanu (Artana).



things. Then we realised how multidisciplinary was at the core of this practice, and rich. At that time, we were not able to consider that the three components (drums, voice lead, dance) couldn't exist separated from the other, because the *bèlè* has this particularity to lead the voice, the dance, the percussions, by some sort of 'calls' which make it essential to consider them together as a whole. For the pedagogical workshop, we were thinking first to establish three simultaneous workshops, separated – music, dance, text; but this idea has been invalidated by our observations.<sup>9</sup>

It is interesting to note that what seemed obvious to our students, namely to separate the different artistic roles, to look at them and to work on them separately, was immediately invalidated by the first observations. The constraint of adopting the same way of doing things as the musicians they observed is in that sense very effective; if this instruction had been bypassed, the musicians would not have been able to face this challenge of an holistic approach to learning music.

The second key moment was a 'swarè bèlè' in which the students participated. It was when they had to play and dance that their first impressions were contradicted and that the constitutive elements of the *bèlè* made sense to them: *'We had very quickly cultural reflexes inherent to our practice as classical musicians: common breathing to start together, representation of rhythm in the form of written rhythms we knew (quavers, semiquavers etc.); we had to get rid of all this.'*

For example, during the 'drum climb', a dancer steps out of the circle and heads to an improvisation spell towards the drum. At first, just through observation, the students had the impression that the drum led the dancer and was the one who proposed a movement. Then they experienced the role of the drum, and the role of the dancer. They understood that it was the dancer who led: he is the one playing to contradict the musical proposals, made of ambivalent moments. He questions the limits of his equilibrium. Students can also relate to one of Vaity's sentences in an interview: *'the good musician is the one who is a good dancer'*.

Another point: they realised how much the audience of the evening was a central, constitutive element. They could see the intergenerational dynamics, the mixing of levels of competence, the political and social dimensions of the genre.

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9 All these quotes come from the final report of the students; it includes their own analyses and the interviews that they conducted with the musicians during their investigation.

Everyone holds different roles during the evening: 'le chanté' (singing), 'le bwaté' (the rhythmic), 'le tanbouyé' (the drummer), 'le répondé' (responsorial singing), 'le dansé' (dance), 'lawonn' (the round, the assembly); it is also important to help with preparing the food, and to take active part in the evening by talking, singing and dancing. *'While we were beating the drums, dancers were preparing the table on which various victuals were laid. Dance levels, although very disparate, were not a hindrance to our learning or to the smooth running of the dance.'*

It is interesting to note that the students were aware of these key moments and of the evolution of their statements.

Our way of understanding the learning of this practice has evolved between the beginning of the investigation and the seminar, our tests happening at different moments and in different learning contexts. Our way of working has therefore been influenced as we proceeded with the project.

### The pedagogical workshop and the seminar shape the inquiry

The timing of the pedagogical workshop developed by the students was particularly interesting: it was necessary to balance moments of *doing* the practice with moments of *information* of the practice in order to give the students resources to participate as investigators and develop artefacts.

Students have looked for solutions to how to transpose the experience into the context of the classroom, with precise schedules, a moment of swaré bèlè. To do so, they first had to identify the constitutive components of these evenings. And it was important for them to find a specific identity for the participants.

Expression and learning is done by 'doing' (instrument, dance, singing): those who do not dance in the quadrille observe the best dancers, but they are still an integral part of the performance by responding to the song and continuing to follow the dance steps from wherever they are.

The pedagogical workshop forced them to define what were, in practice, the unavoidable components (for example, the 'tibois', rhythmic rotation on the body of the drum), and what was an unavoidable principle, where it was necessary to change the elements to adapt them to the context – for example, to make a *bèlè Lyonnais*, with

peculiar elements referring to the way of living in Lyon, and not to repeat the same thing as in the *bèlè* of a specific region. In that sense, we can say that the pedagogical workshop is an integral part of the investigation and of the research process.

The objective of the workshop is not only to transmit knowledge of a musical practice. When preparing the workshop the musicians conducting the survey must know what they want the participants to learn, they must choose and define which elements to convey, in which way they want to do things, which elements of the contexts must absolutely be discussed. At this point the act of transmission is entirely linked to the question of inquiry and artistic practice.

The time of the seminar reproduces, in terms of formulation, the same constraints as defined in the workshop: coming back to the conservatoire, the participants of this project must decide what to report to the student-teacher audience. They also have to think how to get people on board in the debate and discussion around the posed questions.

The seminar forced the students to get out of the first personal impressions and prejudices in order to formalise the impact and knowledge they had received from the experience.

More specifically, a political aspect was also embedded in this project. This Resistance through Art was identified and modelled while preparing the seminar:

Practising *bèlè* in Martinique is a form of resistance.’; ‘The need affirmed by the artists that the practice evolves with the society, keeping the fundamental idea: to anchor in the structure of the *bèlè* the foundations of a social organisation based on mutual aid.’; ‘that’s the *swaré bèlè*, it’s really the community.

Finally, the students were able to highlight how this research helped them to take a fresh look at their own music and re-examine the relationship between fixed and improvised elements, the holistic interdisciplinary approach, the separation of levels, the collective practice, the relevance of everything that appears outside the game, the place of the audience and the artist as part of the community.

Above all, the questions of music, society and transmission, could be questioned in the same movement – and this is the issue of this inquiry and an essential skill of the artist-teacher.

## Critical analysis

### The choice of the musical practice

The question of choosing the musical context to investigate remains delicate. On the one hand, there are contexts that are more or less suitable and relevant to investigate through this kind of project work. In particular, we have noticed that when the chosen musical context is too close to the context in which the student has evolved musically, the inquiry does not work so well. Students tend to rely on things they think they recognise and find it harder to spot differences.

On the other hand, when the practice is very far away from the students' own realm of experiences, they may tend to see only the 'exotic' side of the music they are asked to investigate. They think things can work the way they do because it is a very distant form of music, but they then have difficulty questioning their own practices.

In addition, the contexts are chosen on the basis of the stylistic characteristics, but we could also imagine dealing with musical practices that are very different with regard to the process of how this music is developed, produced and performed even if the style and the aesthetics are not. The criteria may even be 'music that we do not understand' rather than a remote geographical or historical area. For example, investigation of the pianos installed in railway stations or at airports or singing mothers in private spaces. This would lead to very different musical questions, but it may be worth a try.

### The workshop and its pedagogical questions

A second question concerns educational workshops. There is a tension between two logics. On one hand, the students were asked to use methods and modes of transmission they identified during the project, while on the other hand, they were also expected to apply a student-centered pedagogy, which might have a very different approach. This sometimes gave students the impression of having to follow contradictory injunctions.

### The question of the report-

Finally, there is the question of the different reports. It is very important for students to take a reflective look at what they are doing, but they sometimes feel like they are asked to write endless, very formalised reports.

However, it is essential that this inquiry and this work remain something joyful, centred on the practice and the pleasure of playing.

### ‘Le maître ignorant’ (Rancière, 1973)

One of the main objectives of this work is to show the students that they can do research and develop an educational concept of music they do not know. This is based on the notion of the ‘ignorant master’, developed in France by Jacques Rancière. But this can, of course, have limitations if it is misunderstood or misused.

It is especially important for students to develop different types of ‘relationship to knowledge’. The teachers must be able to assist their students in the process of identifying their own projects. Students will not have the same musical preferences and project ideas as their teachers come up with. The teachers should be able to facilitate these desires – even if this should not be the only pedagogical modality.

It is also essential that the artists in a community (for example, here, the students) are able to locate, analyse and perform with the different musicians resident in an area (here, the Bèlè’s artists in Martinique) – and that their students can play with these various musicians too.

## **Conclusion – Return to the theories**

In conclusion we can emphasise the fact that looking at the musical performance practices in light of the initial question the performer has to face (rather than in light of the burden of repertoire and tradition) has both pedagogical and artistic consequences. The way in which the performer learns and performs the music will change. However, when we take the role of the artist in society seriously, both as a researcher and as a resource in a community, such a project will in addition to educational and artistic consequences also have social implications.

Developing an anthropological view on musical practices allows students to consider musical practices that they would not even spot, to quote Becker (1999). This skill is essential today for an art teacher, who is asked to connect different audiences and different music on the territory of the conservatoire.

Moreover, participatory observation is very central. It is by playing with other musicians that students realise that they cannot do it automatically and that they can understand there are different approaches and ways of making music.

The separation between 'practising' and 'transmitting', 'artist' and 'teacher', 'musician' and 'researcher' no longer arises in the same terms. Nor between 'the one who knows' and 'the one who doesn't know'. Students tend to think of the elements of the musical language they have been taught from a young age as 'natural'. Decentring allows them to imagine new possibilities.

Conducting an investigation allows the students to take a global view of the musical issues, while they are used to focusing only on 'musical material'. They identify the multiplicity of conditions for the emergence of a musical practice – which is essential since they have to encourage and accompany new practices.

If we go back to Dewey's theory of inquiry, we can emphasise here that such an approach allows us to look at the time of the pedagogical workshop, as well as the musical game, as constituent elements of the investigation. This is a strong challenge in the sense that it will bring together theoretical and practical issues. The interviews with the musicians, the sociological analyses, the musical exchanges between the artists and the transmission courses will all be part of the investigation and will help to define the artist researcher involved in the society.

Students in teacher training have other opportunities to work on this articulation between societal, pedagogical and artistic questions. In particular, in the context of another project, they have to investigate a field, to reflect the existing and underlying musical practices in order to be able to offer a practice accompaniment that connects audiences who, otherwise, would not necessarily have the opportunity to build things together. This involvement of the artist is therefore at once social, educational and musical – and he or she participates in the same movement in a community of researchers.

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