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# Thirty years of music and drama education in the Madeira Island: Facing future challenges

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## Abstract

In this paper we give an overview of relevant findings of a three years long case study that was carried out in the Madeira Island, Portugal. It addresses a thirty years old project in music and drama education in primary schools, which involves all children within the school curriculum, but also in extra-curriculum activities. The study used mainly qualitative methodologies for the case study approach, and statistical analysis concerning the questionnaires that were sent out to classroom teachers, supporting teachers, and parents. Findings indicate the magnitude of the project, its educational relevance, and a strong sense of ownership and leadership as revealed both by results from the questionnaires and emerging themes in the interviews. Taking into account the contributions of activity theory, critical points were identified that may bring about a qualitative transformation capable of fostering good practices in music and drama education in primary schools in Madeira.

## Keywords

drama education, leadership, music curriculum, music education, music teachers' education, primary school

## Introduction

In the western world, the debate about the shortage of music education provision in primary school years continues to be central to curriculum development planning, highlighting the

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lack of confidence of primary school teachers who, being in charge of all curriculum subjects, systematically fail to address the arts even when they form part of most programmed guidelines (Beauchamp & Harvey, 2006; Bresler & Thompson, 2002; Figueiredo, 2004; Mills, 1993, 2005). While the International Society for Music Education (ISME) has been playing a remarkable role in providing the fundamental arguments that should form the basis for an acknowledged worldwide access of all children to the arts (see the Special Focus Issue on Advocacy for Music Education of the IJME, Vol. 23, 2, 2005), the situation in the “real world” remains one of great concern for theorists and educators in this domain.

On Madeira Island, which is part of Portugal, the Regional Government, through its *Gabinete Coordenador de Educação Artística* (GCEA; <http://dre.madeira-edu.pt/gcea/>), has been running a project<sup>1</sup> for 30 years that provides music and drama education for all children from six to nine years old in all primary schools of the island. Until recently, no systematic evaluation had addressed this valuable experience in terms of its potential for the development of arts education in mainland Portugal. The present case study is the first systematic research about this project as we believe that reflexive and critical thinking about established projects in arts education are the more valuable as they contribute not only to the production of knowledge, but to a better understanding about how the future in these curriculum areas may be constructed.

This article presents a summary of three years’ research, giving an overview of the collected data. The study emerged from the following main axes: classroom music and music teachers’ education, drama education, and the contributions of activity theory as a model of analysis for understanding the challenges and possibilities of organizational learning processes.

## Music and drama education in the general school curriculum

Within the community of music educators, it is assumed that to educate a person musically means to involve children in diverse musical activities from playing and singing to listening, improvising and composing. Christopher Small, back in 1998, coined *musicking* as the present participle of the verb *to music*, and offered a definition that takes into account all those constituents of the human engagement with music: “To music is to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing” (Small, 1998, p. 9). Furthermore, Hargreaves, Marshall and North (2003), taking into account an “international review of the appropriate purposes of music and arts education,” conceptualized a model of the potential outcomes of music education which crosses the borders of what is known today as the developmental social psychology of music and music education. Three types of outcomes, namely *musical–artistic*, *personal*, and *social–cultural*, describe the effects of music learning on the individual, leading to a “strong artistic component, such as creativity, aesthetic appreciation, and emotional expressiveness” (Hargreaves et al., 2003, p. 159).

In Portugal, in 2006, the Ministry of Education issued a law that provides music education as an extra-curricular activity implying the tacit recognition that, as a curriculum subject, it has not been implemented as desired (Boal-Palheiros & Encarnação, 2008; Mota, 2001, 2007). In fact, the situation in the schools has been demonstrating that primary school teachers continue to have a very low self-esteem in what concerns their own capacities of implementing arts education in general, and music education in particular, perceiving their musical skills as far from adequate to the demands of the curriculum (Mota, 2003a). Teacher education in the arts is therefore a serious issue which has been a major concern of the teacher education courses offered for more than two decades by the Colleges of Education of the Polytechnic Institutes,<sup>2</sup> including undergraduate and graduate courses in music education for general classroom music (Mota, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c).

In what concerns the presence of drama education in the school curriculum, this has been advocated by authors such as Aguillar (2001), Barret (1989), Caldas & Pacheco (1999), and N6voa (1989), emphasizing the idea that it promotes a “pedagogy of the situation,” in the sense of a model of action (Aguillar, 2001). However, the drama/theatre dichotomy seems to pervade the drama education literature (Bailin, 1993). While dramatic playing is seen as “pedagogy of the process,” the optimal space where the child develops not only *ways of knowing/doing* but also *ways of being* and experiencing the emotions it may generate, theatre would be rather concerned with portraying and communicating emotions to an audience. Originally viewed as in opposition, drama and theatre tend nowadays to be acknowledged by some contemporary theorists as representing the ends of a continuum, although drama goes on receiving the educational priority (Bailin, 1993; Barret & Landier, 1991; Bolton, 1984, 2007). This has not been the case in the Portuguese school curriculum, where drama education has been systematically undervalued, precluding an education centered on the child’s expressive needs as an indispensable supporting structure to develop a creative and socially productive personality (McCaslin, 1996; Ryngaert, 1981).

### Activity theory – choosing a model of analysis

Initially, the aims of this study were to identify and interpret: (1) the fundamental principles of organization and philosophy of structure, organization, curriculum orientations, and pedagogy, which constitute the project implemented by GCEA; (2) its contribution to the promotion of activities beyond the school scope such as choirs, instrumental ensembles, dance, and theatre; and (3) the role of the ongoing teacher training as practiced by the GCEA.

As the research team set out to collect the data in the field, it became clear that the complexity of the whole system called for a model of analysis capable of answering to those questions that appear to be in the core of any theory of learning:

- (1) Who are the subjects of learning, how are they defined and located?;
- (2) Why do they learn, what makes them make the effort?;
- (3) What do they learn, what are the contents and outcomes of learning?;
- and (4) How do they learn, what are the key actions or processes of learning? (Engestr6m, 2001)

Taking into account both our initial aims and the richness and broadness of the data, cultural–historical activity theory appeared as a valuable model both to an interpretation in process as for the elaboration of the final report. Initiated by Lev Vigotsky (1978), activity theory evolved through three generations of research. In our study we grasped to the contemporary applications of cultural–historical activity theory as further expanded by Engestr6m (2001), crossing the key elements of human systems and practices as viewed by an activity theory – subject, object, instruments, rules, community and division of labor – with the following five principles: (1) a system taken as the prime unit of analysis; (2) a system viewed in its multi-voicedness; (3) a system’s historicity understood against its historical development; (4) the central role of contradictions as sources of change and development; and (5) the possibility of expansive transformations in any activity system (Daniels, Edwards, Engestr6m, Gallagher, & Ludvigsen, 2009; Engestr6m, 2001).

In the last part of this article, findings will be discussed in light of the contributions of cultural–historical activity theory as an adequate model to help understand human beings in their individual and social dimensions, through the analysis of the genesis, structure and processes of development that build their activity in everyday life.

## Context

Madeira Island is the main island (740.7 km<sup>2</sup>) of the Portuguese archipelago with the same name. It is located in the Atlantic Ocean west of the African coast (Morocco), 978 km southwest of Lisbon. Together with the islands Porto Santo, Desertas, and Selvagens it constitutes the Autonomous Region of Madeira with the main town in Funchal. It has approximately 245,000 inhabitants mostly concentrated on the main island. While one of the main contributions for the economy comes from tourism, Madeira's vulnerability to poverty is quite considerable (54.4%), with 15.1% living in conditions of persistent poverty (Bruto da Costa, Baptista, Perista, & Carrilho, 2008).

After the Portuguese democratic revolution (1974) that liberated the country from 48 years of dictatorship, education was going through massive changes, impelling engaged teachers to work towards the presence of the arts in the educational system, especially in the first years of schooling. The project began in 1980 by involving a small group of primary school teachers in two primary schools on the island, under the leadership of two main figures: a teacher from the music conservatoire and a primary school teacher with a specialization in drama education. Soon, the training program was re-directed only to music students, while still working with primary school teachers and kindergarten teachers. The continuity of the project was guaranteed by the creation of the GCEA under the support of the Autonomous Regional Government.

When our research started in November 2007, the GCEA was working with 117 primary schools covering a total of 13,749 children. Today, all children in primary schools of Madeira have music and drama included in their weekly lessons, taught mainly by music specialists who have also had drama education as part of their degree in college.<sup>3</sup> The GCEA project enters in primary schools at two levels: as a curriculum subject (one hour weekly of music and drama) and in terms of five options of extra-curriculum activities (90 min. weekly) – Orff instruments and recorder, Madeira traditional string instruments, choir, dance, and theatre. According to the supporting teachers' skills, all of these options may or not be available. Children are appointed to the different groups at the beginning of the school year.

The GCEA issued four music textbooks to be followed in primary school. Although it is not explicitly required, teachers are supposed to give priority to the textbook rather than use their own materials.

The GCEA's hierarchy includes one director (the initial mentor), three coordinators for the different divisions of intervention, the teachers' coordinators, the supporting teachers, and the children. Between 1980 and 2009, 261 supporting teachers have taught in Madeira primary schools. They have been supported in many ways by GCEA, with regular workshops, supervision, and working meetings. Participation in the institutional activities is strongly advised, especially in the vocal and instrumental groups. Each teacher's coordinator is in charge of a specific number of supporting teachers, supervising their classes and planning collectively every two weeks. Each observed lesson gives rise to a written report which is agreed by both parts, and sent to the direction of GCEA.

Public visibility is considered, by GCEA, to be indispensable to the project's survival. Throughout the school year, music teachers prepare their pupils for public presentations following the work done in the above-described five extra-curricular options. These concerts usually take place in the local community and are supported both by the local authorities and the church.

At the end of the school year, a big television event takes place in Funchal in the Casino's auditorium, the *Musicaebs*. It has been running for 30 years, with the aim of publicly demonstrating the work done in the regular music and drama classes. It began as a live concert that soon turned into a full playback event. From January onwards, the preparation of this concert occupies a substantial

part of the music and drama classes. In April/May, each specialist teacher selects a small number of more skilled children that go into studio and record the different music parts. The final result happens with the input of technology, with a significant number of children on stage performing a playback, either vocally or instrumentally.

## Methodology and methods

This study combined a main corpus of qualitative, and a small proportion of quantitative methodologies. It used ethnography, content analysis and narrative inquiry (Bresler, 1992; Clandinin, 2006) as methods in the case study (Stake, 1995, 2010) concerning the whole project of the GCEA, and statistical analysis of the questionnaires that were sent to classroom teachers, supporting teachers, and parents.

Qualitative methods were manifold: analysis of GCEA's documentation; unstructured interviews to key figures/mentors of the project, and other coordination elements; semi-structured interviews to music teachers; observations of several music and drama classes; attendance of public presentations; children's focus group interviews (Bader & Rossi, 2002); and researchers' field notes.

The data were gathered during two years of research, from November 2007 to September 2009, and the final report was submitted in December 2010. During this period, members of the research team, composed by ten researchers and two research fellows, including four specialists in music education, two drama specialists, three psychologists, one sociologist, one higher education specialist, and one primary school teacher, traveled seven times to Madeira in order to cover different moments of the school year.<sup>4</sup> The research team was constituted when the application to the funding institution was in preparation. It gathered researchers from two institutions and two research centers: one from the College of Education of the Polytechnic Institute and one from the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences of the University of Porto. Given the expectation that the GCEA's project would involve a broad spectrum of epistemological points of analysis, it was considered that a multidisciplinary research team could be in a better position to answer to the expected challenges.

Issues to be addressed in the three different questionnaires (classroom teachers, supporting teachers, and parents), topics of the unstructured, and the semi-structured interviews as well as children's focus groups were previously discussed by the research team. For purposes of clarification, and giving the interviewees a feedback of our understanding of their own voices, some key elements were re-interviewed. All interviews (31) were tape-recorded, transcribed and analyzed using both content analyses for identification of emerging themes, and narrative inquiry for the analysis of the different actors' discourse. 37 music and drama lessons were observed, and whenever a parent's permission had been signed, the classes were video-taped.

The questionnaires to the classroom teachers, the supporting teachers, and parents were distributed according to the following procedures. The questionnaires to the classroom teachers were randomly assigned, one to each school of the ten regions in Madeira, with a total of 132. However, in small schools with two or three classes it was decided to give the questionnaire to all teachers, which explains the difference between 117 schools and 132 distributed questionnaires. The questionnaires to the supporting teachers were distributed to all of the 83 teachers employed by GCEA in this project. The questionnaires to the parents were randomly assigned to the parents of the children of one or two whole classes (whenever the number of children in each class was less than 15), in each of the ten regions in Madeira, with a total of 300 questionnaires.

The children's focus groups took place a few weeks before the television show (*Musicaebs*) that always occurs at the end of the school year, with the previous authorization of the parents. 50

children were divided into groups of 6 or 7, organized as follows: (1) children that had already participated, were going to participate for the first time or had never participated in that event; and (2) children that were participating in the recordings and were also participating for the first time.

## Findings

### *Initial mapping of the GCEA project*

From the 132 questionnaires that were sent out to the classroom teachers, 107 were returned. The great majority (88.8%) was female and 60.4% were less than 35 years old. Results indicate that over 60% of these professionals did not have any preparation in both music and drama. The small proportion (ca. 33%) that reported to have had music and drama education received ongoing training mainly through the GCEA. A vast majority (92.5%) attended the music and drama classes but only 9.3% reported an active collaboration. When asked about a possible responsibility for the music and drama classes, 64.5% referred total lack of confidence due to poor preparation.

From the 83 questionnaires that were sent out to the supporting teachers, 71 were returned. Their academic preparation ranged from 49% who had graduated as music educators, 14% as primary school teachers, 10% as kindergarten teachers (both with a musical training provided by GCEA), to 10% non-graduated music and drama professionals (certification provided by the GCEA), and 13% Music Conservatoire musicians. Most of these teachers (51.4%) are young (under 30) and 41 out of the 71 had 5 or less years of teaching experience. The majority reports the lack of collaboration by the classroom teachers, which invalidates the possibility of giving sequence to the weekly taught music and drama classes.

From the 300 questionnaires that were distributed to the parents, a sample of 226 was collected. The level of academic studies ranged from 119 with four to nine years of schooling (55.9%), 55 having completed high school (25.8%), and 39 with higher academic studies (18.3%). More than 40% rarely participate in any cultural events. Conversely, 80.5% indicate a regular attendance at the events their children are involved in, and 98.7% would support their choice of a musical career.

From this initial mapping of the GCEA's project, the following main ideas could be retained. Although classroom teachers include a majority of young professionals, the issue with lack of preparation and low confidence to teach the arts in primary school confirms the western international trend that seems difficult to solve. As we will hear in the interviews section, this has been addressed by the GCEA with little or no success. Further, supporting teachers' answers clearly confirmed the lack of active collaboration that may enable a sequential work concerning the music and drama lessons. We will briefly return to this issue when reporting on our own classroom's observation. As for the parents, and given a general low level of academic studies, there is a noticeable willingness to participate in their children's cultural activities together with an openness towards a future possible choice of a career in the arts.

### *Understanding the project – the GCEA*

Content analysis of the interviews with the GCEA members revealed the following emerging themes:

1. Agents of innovation
2. Magnitude of the program
3. Ownership and leadership
4. Sense of loss of some of the initial ideas

A strong coherence in the construction of the narratives was acknowledged, within each interview and across interviews. In some cases whole sentences were repeated by different interviewees whenever the same key issues were addressed.

*Agents of innovation.* A significant consciousness of being agents of innovation was identified, given the starting point back in the early eighties. The two initial mentors of the project acknowledged the meaning of their initiative at a time when in mainland Portugal music education was completely absent from the primary school curriculum (and to some extent still is).

*John*<sup>5</sup> – Remember that we are speaking of a time when there was no music teacher education at all, and I needed to create my own staff of human resources. As I taught both at the Primary Schools College of Education and at the Conservatoire, I used to get hold of my best students in both institutions. Together with my colleague Luisa we worked with the Conservatoire students that had no music pedagogical skills. Conversely, the primary school teachers were sent to the Conservatoire to receive musical training while Luisa that had specialized in drama education provided the necessary workshops in that area. In fact, she was the one to propose that the future specialists receive training in music and drama which I promptly agreed to. In sum, we tried to give the necessary training for each of our two human resources areas: those that needed more musical education were sent to the Conservatoire, while we personally took care of those more in need of pedagogical and drama education.

Luisa is now retired, and has gained some distance from the whole project. However, when she engages in talking about those early years she cannot help but show us her enormous enthusiasm:

*Luisa* – We had more than two hundred teachers attending our workshops. Those were amazing years! People would come on Monday, Wednesday and Saturday to work with us. Can you imagine? It had such an impact and level of adhesion! [...] I had myself been working with such people as Giselle Barrett and Bryan Way, precisely in drama education. Later in London I attended a course in movement and drama for children following the Laban School.<sup>6</sup> In fact, my background gave me the best orientation in drama education. [...] When I started to work with John of course I felt that my heart belonged to drama rather than music, although I had also been musically educated. I was the one to immediately suggest that we integrate the two areas, and this is in fact the beginnings of the GCEA. [...] You know theatre is theatre and drama can lead us to theatre. It is ok. I have nothing against presenting things for the others. But my struggle is another one: theatre has a message for others while drama has a message mainly for the self. And this was our philosophy in the workshops with the teachers.

*Magnitude of the program.* All interviews with the coordination team revealed the magnitude of the program in the whole island, hierarchical structure and level of organization, which enables GCEA to have, to a significant extent, control of the teaching practices.

*John* – It is important to clarify that what we have here is a regional project, not just a local one. It has a regional coordination, it includes supervision, which means that I need to know what is happening in the music and drama classes: “If I don’t know what you are doing in your classes I cannot guarantee the success of the project.” Therefore we have the figure of the coordinating teacher which should, by no means, be seen as an inspector! They are just specialists like the other teachers, and they teach their own classes. The only difference is that they have a reduced teaching schedule in order to be able to support their younger colleagues. [...] In this way not only will the good practices be acknowledged but also the bad ones, those that need to be eradicated. At the end of each class there will be a conversation about what was good and what can be improved, and a written report is agreed between the two parts and returned to us (the GCEA).

When asked about how these teachers’ coordinators are chosen Manuela (one of the three GCEA’s coordinators) explains:

*Manuela* – We select them mainly according to their engagement in the project and for their acknowledged good practices. Every two weeks we meet with them either to be informed of any kind of practical situation, such as a particular need of one school, or to talk about the music and drama classes' observations. Since they also meet every two weeks with their supporting teachers, there is in fact a strong chain of orientations passing between the GCEA and the teachers working in the field.

*Ownership and leadership.* The development of a project where ownership and leadership go in hand with the need to defend it against possible threats was clearly identified in the interviews with John. As the initiator, he tends to assume the whole responsibility for the orientations and the course of development of the project in the last thirty years, while acknowledging its weaknesses. The latter mainly came out when confronted with the feedback of our own music and drama classes' observations. He points out, on the one hand, problems with today's initial teacher training, and, on the other, with the lack of motivation showed by the present specialists to improve their skills through the in-service workshops regularly offered by the GCEA.

*John* – You know, we need to recruit our teachers from different sources, i.e., coming from different colleges of education in the mainland. And, from my point of view ... some of them are not enough prepared in terms of voice and Orff pedagogy. They are very skilful with their own instrument but they lack good vocal skills and the preparation to work with children also at the level of choral conducting. Further, they have had experience with Orff instruments but lack the necessary methodological know-how.

*Sense of loss of some of the initial ideas.* Luisa expresses her sense of loss in what concerns two of the initial ideas of the project. The first is related to the collaborative work between classroom teachers and supporting teachers and the second is the concept of public visibility that has changed over the years.

*Luisa* – After two years we had a meeting with all classroom teachers in that sense that we thought the time had come to let them work on their own without our support. But they reacted totally assertive: “No, we don't feel enough prepared ...” We then tried to have them work collaboratively with the specialists but still this has proved to be very difficult [...] In what concerns the *Musicaebs*, at the end of the school year<sup>7</sup> we had a big festival (I like this name rather than *show*) that was intended to be a demonstration of what had been done all over the year. We used to begin thinking about that around April: “What were the themes that were developed in each school? What were the good practices that the schools would pick up for the festival?” However, things have gone too big, more in the sense of a show, and I must confess that I feel very confused with the preparations that now start around January.

### *Understanding the project – the supporting teachers*

Concerning the interviews with the supporting teachers, two different profiles could be identified: teachers coming from the mainland, and teachers from the island (some left for a period of time to study in different colleges of education on the mainland). Music teachers usually start to work in GCEA at the beginning of their careers, and only a few tend to stay longer than a decade. This is a repeating pattern especially for the non-inhabitants of the island. Some rare exceptions have now assumed new functions as teachers' coordinators.

These two profiles demonstrate different involvement levels in the project. The mainland teachers see this project as a transitional state in their careers (“This is an adventure, I have better conditions than in mainland Portugal, and I wanted to live on my own ...”), and even when they exercise criticism towards some of the institutional practices, they generally try to avoid any overt

confrontation with the GCEA hierarchy. Contrarily, island teachers are more apt to feel comfortable within the system, and consider proposing changes or even not always following the guidelines “by the book” (“It is not easy to change because this is a great and established organization, but it is our task as teachers to be reflexive and propose other ways of doing things”). They are deeply involved in the project as, in fact, most of them were already part of it as primary school pupils.

### *Understanding the project – observation of music and drama lessons*

The 37 music and drama classes observed gave rise to a significant amount of field notes from which the following emergent themes were recurrently identified:

1. All observed teachers seemed to work with great involvement and dedication, and displayed a good relationship with the children. Classes ran smoothly, children behave, and all directives were docilely accepted.
2. In general, teaching style was directive and aiming at reproduction.
3. Lessons’ content either followed the music textbook or was designed according to the teacher’s own materials. A most significant part of the lessons was spent in instrumental or singing activities. Music appreciation and composition were almost completely absent from the lesson’s plan.
4. Classroom teachers were always present, though with little or no musical intervention.
5. Miming songs and small choreographies were the most often encountered situations that were understood by the teachers as the “drama education part” of their lessons.

### *Understanding the project – listening to the children*

As mentioned above in “methodology and methods,” these sessions included children that had already participated, were going to participate or had never participated in the *Musicaebs* event as well as those that had been involved in the recording sessions in April/May. Taking into account that this event begins to be prepared quite early in the school year, and takes a good part of the music and drama classes as well as the extra-curriculum activities, it was the more important to understand how this was viewed from the children’s perspective. At the beginning of the sessions, children were enrolled in a number of role-play games designed to warm up the conversation. Surprisingly, these were denotative of children’s underdevelopment in what concerns drama education.

All children were very positive concerning the music and drama classes. Regarding the *Musicaebs* event, the main questions addressed to those that *had already participated* concerned: their perception about it; their understanding about the playback performance; what they preferred to perform; and their perspective about the presentation day. In general, they seemed to enjoy the event, and especially to appear on television. They were aware of the fact that, being a playback performance in what concerns singing and playing instruments, they had to do their best possible during the presentation in order to match the gestures with the music.

Concerning the children *who had never participated* in *Musicaebs*, we wanted to understand how they felt about not being selected. Although they still had to rehearse along with their colleagues and somehow felt a part of it, some of them appeared to feel rejected in view of selection processes that excluded them from the final event.

For the children that *were going to participate for the first time*, their biggest concern seemed to be the large amount of people that was supposed to be in the audience. They understood vaguely

the whole line of the show, since their perspective was segmented through the rehearsals around their own performance.

Lastly, in the session with the children who *had experienced the recording process in studio*, they complained about the multiple repetitions they had to perform, the time they had to stand and the high temperature inside the studio. Besides this, in general, they seemed to have enjoyed the experience.

### *Understanding the project – a concept of public visibility*

As mentioned above, the GCEA strongly values schools' public presentations. Beyond those that take place in the local community, involving each school's musical products from the five extra-curriculum options (Orff instruments and recorder, Madeira traditional string instruments, choir, dance, and theatre), at the end of every school year a big television show, the *Musicaebs*, fully performed in playback, takes place in main town of Funchal. While we acknowledged the former as strong moments of live community music shared by peers, teachers and families (see above for the parents' answers concerning this issue), we consistently considered the latter as problematic both from the musical as well as the pedagogical point of view. Our repeatedly formulated question about the need of such an event, moreover in playback, was systematically answered with "it's a tradition, people expect it" and "playback is a requirement demanded by a television transmission."

The interviews with the supporting teachers also revealed that this event is more strongly supported by the island teachers and coordinating teachers than by those coming from the mainland. In February 2010, in the last meeting of two members of the research team with the GCEA's members and coordinating teachers for purposes of presenting the conclusions of our research, we proposed that this event should be understood as the output of a whole school year's work rather than as a more or less artificial show, especially designed to be transmitted by television. This was also an idea conveyed in one of the initial mentor's interview (see Luisa's statements earlier). Although we stated our criticism concerning methods of children's selection, and the whole music pedagogical issue related with the playback performance, it remained unclear how far our opinions will be taken into account in the future.

## **Final discussion**

Going back to the initial aims of the study, we considered that the first one, namely to identify the fundamental principles of organization and philosophy of structure, organization, curriculum orientations, and pedagogy, which constitute the project implemented by GCEA, represents the core of our research. The other two, GCEA's contribution to the promotion of activities beyond the school scope, and the role of the ongoing teacher training as practiced by the GCEA, as naturally resulting from the first one, and in the context of this article, will not be discussed separately. Therefore and as previously mentioned, what follows is a discussion in light of the contemporary applications of cultural–historical activity theory, crossing Engeström's five principles with the key elements of human systems and practices – subject, object, instruments, rules, community and division of labor. Since this article presents an overview of the whole research, it should be understood as a first approach to the findings, living out other, more focused, interpretations that will be explored in other articles on specific aspects of the whole study.

### *First principle*

*The first principle* indicates that the GCEA, the *subject*, may be taken as "the prime unit of analysis" as a collective activity system "artifact-mediated and object-oriented ... seen in its network

relations to other activity systems” (Engeström, 2001, p. 136). The involvement of the children in the music and drama project appears as the *object*, with clear intended outcomes: (1) improved participation for all in the arts; (2) development of high levels of musical skills, albeit almost restricted to performance practice; and (3) attribution of value to the arts by the community (parents and population in general). Further, GCEA implements the project with such *instruments* as strict guidelines for practice, including the use of the music books, and the mandatory organization of *Musicaebs*. The *rules* are both of explicit and implicit nature, like classroom teachers having to attend the music and drama classes or supporting teachers having his or her classes regularly observed and submitted to a reporting procedure.

### Second principle

*The second principle* is the multi-voicedness of the entire system as represented by the *community* of all its actors: coordinators from the GCEA, teachers’ coordinators, generalist teachers, supporting teachers, and children. They all represent a “community of multiple points of view, traditions and interests” (Engeström, 2001, p. 136). Their very different roles within the system (*division of labor*) create contradictions, that maybe a source of potential innovation as well as difficult tensions, “demanding actions of translation and negotiation” (Engeström, 2001, p. 136). Our findings indicate that this is an issue that needs careful attention. The identification of two distinctive profiles of supporting teachers, those from the island and those from the mainland, requires that a stronger interaction should be promoted towards the construction of communities of practice that share ideas and negotiate tensions in a fruitful relationship with the GCEA. In this matter, the research team recognized the important role of the coordinating teachers to serve as significant anchors of connection between supporting teachers and GCEA.

### Third principle

*The third principle* concerns historicity. The 30 years of music and drama education have been shaped by the history of its beginnings, by all the actors that played a significant role in its developments or by the changes that some fully embrace while others reject (e.g., the different views about the *Musicaebs*). As clearly shown in the GCEA’s interviews section of our findings, in the last thirty years there was a number of significant changes that sometimes could not be fully controlled by the initial mentors. These relate not only to the reported loss of the initial ideas but also to processes of supporting teachers’ recruitment that may have contributed to shape the project, as acknowledged by John, not always in the most desirable direction.

### Fourth principle

*The fourth principle* “is the central role of contradictions as sources of change and development” (Engeström, 2001, p. 137). In connection with *the second principle* we acknowledged the latent conflict between old elements and new elements in the project. The entire GCEA appears as a multilayered organizational system, encompassing different life stories, different musical backgrounds, and philosophies of music education.

### Fifth principle

*The fifth principle* “proclaims the possibility of expansive transformations in activity systems” (Engeström, 2001, p. 137) which we recognize as the touchstone for the continuity and prosperity

of the project. The emergent themes both from the GCEA's and supporting teachers' interviews call for a different mode of interaction between the GCEA (one activity system) and the community of actors working in the field (another activity system). Instead of GCEA mainly operating in a top-down mode, the desirable expansive transformation could evolve to two activity systems working in parity. We consider that this idea may be well connected with the three-pronged model of "qualitatively different modes of interaction" (Nummijoki & Engeström, 2010).

The three modes or developmental forms of epistemological subject–object–subject relations are called coordination, cooperation, and communication. Each one of these modes combines the subject–object and the subject–subject, or the instrumental and the communicative, aspects of activity in a qualitatively distinctive way ... *Coordination* is the mode of normal flow on interaction where various actors are following their scripted roles, each concentrating on the successful performance of the assigned actions [...] The script is coded in written rules and instructions or tacitly assumed traditions. *Cooperation* is interaction in which the actors, instead of each focusing on performing their assigned roles or presenting themselves, focus on a shared problem, trying to find mutually acceptable ways to conceptualize and solve it [...] *Communication* is reflective interaction in which the actors focus on reconceptualizing their own organization and interaction in relation to their shared objects. (Nummijoki & Engeström, 2010, pp. 56–57)

Building on these three modes, we suggest that the GCEA, as the subject, operates mainly in terms of *coordination* with some inputs of *cooperation*. In general it coordinates the whole system without being overtly questioned or discussed. We have, however, observed cooperative situations in which there were efforts to go beyond the "given script," and to come up with other, sometimes more creative solutions. Nevertheless, it did not mean any explicit questioning or in depth discussion of the established rules. To evolve clearly towards the *communication* mode is, from the point of view of the research team and in light of the presented arguments, the most desirable expansive transformation.

## Conclusion

We would like to point out the following four critical topics, that the research team identified as key issues to be addressed by the GCEA in order to promote the *communication* between all the participants towards a possible reconceptualization of both the object and the script.

1. Consideration of a different perspective concerning lessons' content to include creative approaches as well as music appreciation activities. This must be considered also in light of the text books in which the whole content is targeted to performance, neglecting composition and music appreciation activities.
2. Greater investment in teacher in-service workshops, especially in what concerns drama education, music appreciation and creativity.
3. Promotion of collaborative practices between the generalist teacher and the specialist teacher.
4. Ongoing re-thinking of *Musicaebs* as an event that, as shown before, cannot be pedagogically and musically defended.

We believe that the magnitude of the GCEA project, with all its positive outcomes, deserves a qualitative transformation in order to face future challenges, and be an example of good practices in arts education, both nationally and worldwide.

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## Authors' note:

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## Notes

1. From now on the word “project” will be systematically used as referring to the GCEA’s implementation of music and drama in primary schools, while this investigation will be named either as “study” or “research.”
2. In Portugal, the Polytechnic Institutes are a subsystem of higher education, originally aimed at preparing professionals for more practical and vocational careers. The Colleges of Education are part of this subsystem, offering undergraduate and postgraduate programs in teacher education, and among these, in music education.
3. The GCEA names these teachers “supporting teachers” in the sense that they will support the generalist teacher (classroom teacher) who is supposed to be actively involved in the music and drama project.
4. In January 2009, the project consultant, Dr Margaret Barrett, also traveled to the island in order to get a consistent picture of the GCEA project.
5. The names used in these extracts are fictional.
6. Rudolf Laban (1879–1958) was a dancer, choreographer, and prominent dance theorist of the twentieth century.
7. In Portugal, the school year begins in September and finishes at the end of June.

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