

# *Entrevista*



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Jos Wuytack (2010) and Graça Boal-Palheiros (2007)

# Towards a teaching approach in Music Education: interview with Jos Wuytack and Graça Boal-Palheiros

*Sergio Álvares*<sup>1</sup>

Jos Wuytack was born in Gent, Belgium, on March 23, 1935. He earned his degrees in Music (Composition, Piano, Organ) and Pedagogy at the Lemmens Institute, University of Louvain, where he later became Professor of Music Pedagogy. He has also taught at the Higher Music Institute of Namur, Belgium, the Music Conservatoire of Tilburg, Holland, and the Music Institute of Active Methods of Lyon, France. Jos Wuytack was also guest Professor at the University of Southern California, Los Angeles, U.S.A. Throughout his international career as music educator, Jos Wuytack has developed an active and creative approach to music education based upon the ideas of Carl Orff, who recognized Wuytack as a leading figure in this approach. He has been often invited by European and American universities and has taught over one thousand courses and workshops for music teachers, in 50 different countries in Europe, Africa, America, Asia, and Australia.

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Graça Boal-Palheiros is Full Professor at the School of Education of Porto Polytechnic, Portugal, where she teaches in both graduate and master courses and coordinates the Master in Music Education. She received a Ph.D. in Music Psychology from the University of Surrey Roehampton, London, an M.A. in Music Education from the Institute of Education, University of London, a B.A. in Music Pedagogy, from the Lemmens Institute, University of Leuven, and a degree in Psychology from the University of Porto. Graça has been a member of the International Society for Music

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Education Board and Executive, chair of its INA Committee and co-chair of the ISME Research Commission (2008-2016). Former president of the APEM – Portuguese Association of Music Education (2006-2012) she was editor of the APEM journal for nine years.

Co-founder and president of the Wuytack Association of Music Pedagogy, she coordinates its Teacher Education Centre as well as editorial and musical projects. Co-founder of the CIPEM (Centre for Research in Psychology of Music and Music Education) and former member of the CIEC (Child Studies Centre, University of Minho). She is currently an integrated researcher and director of CIPEM/INET-md (Branch at the Porto Polytechnic), where she coordinates the research group Education and Music in the Community. She has published in several countries, presents at national and international conferences and has lectured at universities in Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Japan, Spain and the UK.

The interview was conducted by Sergio Álvares, Full Professor of Music Education at Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, after-hours during a Teacher Training Course offered by the Associação Wuytack de Pedagogia Musical, on a beautiful summer sunset evening at Porto, Portugal, on August 31, 2016. The topics included cultural diversity, the concept of totality, formal and informal education, school settings, teaching methodology, and teacher training.

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### **Theme 1: Cultural diversity**

**SERGIO ÁLVARES:** Professors Wuytack and Boal-Palheiros, what was the importance of living in so many countries, with a lot of cultural diversity, for your perception of teaching music?

**JOS WUYTACK:** Already from my youth, I was interested in the music of different peoples and different cultures. In Belgium, we have different cultures: French, Flemish, and German. We speak different languages and that makes us open to feel good about songs from different countries, which is very interesting. When I was studying music pedagogy, I found out that Folklore was a very important way to observe and know

better the heart of different cultures. Culture is the heart of the expression of feelings, emotions, love, and openness of the people. That was really the start. Then, I had my teachers who brought me to Orff, and we became good friends: I was Orff's student. Of course, Orff built instruments from different parts of the world: from Asia, the metallophones; from Africa, the xylophones; from Europe, the glockenspiels; and from the Americas, the percussion of different cultures. Within the thought of putting these instruments together, I had the idea of opening the scope. I started to teach in France and to work with French songs and that was fabulous. And I was also teaching in Flemish in Flanders (Belgium), which is my country. By teaching more and more courses, I became interested in a wider repertoire and strategies. In the years of 1965-70, I travelled a lot. I was interested in cultures everywhere and collected many music instruments. My interest was mainly to put people together and I think that a way of putting people together is to go to them and be open to understand what they have to say. Most people study music because that is the heart of their speaking. To contact with different cultures was really interesting because you can go very deep into the people's heart and through the art you can make people feeling happy and well, and that is important. I collected more than 2,000 pentatonic songs myself, not only in my courses and visits but also in the books. I found out that pentatonic is universal and that is the reason why now, after all these years, I still believe that pentatonic is a common element to all my courses. It is very interesting to see that in most cultures of Western Europe, pentatonic is rarely found. In Europe, you have to go to Hungary and to the Balkans to find it. In America, there are a lot of pentatonic songs. In the U.S.A., you have the Afro-descendant. Also in South America: Peru has lots of pentatonic music, fantastic... I was in Philippines, and in Indonesia, and there you find the pentatonic all over. My idea is that a very important work can be done using the pentatonic, because pentatonic is very easy, there is no harmony. Children can use it very simply and you can teach the teachers to do natural melodies in a happy atmosphere.

**GRAÇA BOAL-PALHEIROS:** When teaching people of other cultures, by making music of your culture and learning songs from their culture, people learn from each other. For example, when Jos is teaching a Portuguese Folk song in the U.S.A., American teachers learn about Portugal and the Portuguese culture as well. Through the different musical materials of different countries, teachers open their horizons and get more aware of music from other countries because they do it, they sing, play, and dance it, they live it and do not only see it in a book or a video. There is a cultural exchange. Many teachers and students, like me, participated in the courses and, in that time, we didn't know how songs from Indonesia or Senegal sounded like. By creating the atmosphere of the song, not only singing the melody, but also playing in the way the Africans play the xylophones or produce different timbres, you get to understand that song in a very deep way, I think.

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**J.W.** That's really true, that has always been the highlight of my pedagogy, highlights of the courses I have taught, in which I have used so many international materials. I like the dances from Africa. Lots of the songs that I use in the courses are songs that I heard and notated. Not all of them, but lots of them. I have used a traditional repertoire that is really universal. It is interesting because, in this way, you open the spirits of the people, you open the spirits of the teachers. Teachers have to be open and not only use their own little songs or their own little pieces, but be open and help students to be open to other people and to respect and to understand other people.

### **Theme 2: Totality**

**S.A.** When you teach the music from other cultures that you have experienced and when you were there, you got involved not only by the sound but also by the whole feeling, the whole atmosphere. Do you try to teach not only sound and silence but also the movement, the colors, and the styles? I see that, in your classes, you use many theatre, speech, movement, and imagination resources. At UFRJ, we develop a research based upon reunification of fragmented musical knowledge, called "Musicalidade

Abrangente”. Could you talk about how the unity of knowledge presented as a whole would be much more important, if you think so, than when presented in parts or fragments, and then could you potentially have trouble reuniting them later?

**J.W.** At first, I start with the pedagogical principle of totality. When you listen to music, you have a totality. At the end of the piece, not at the beginning, you have its totality. When you teach, you have a totality, because you have to teach the rhythm, the melody, the harmony, the form, and the timbre. You have to teach the five elements in a way that is active, creative, and in relationship with the community, where the whole group works together. Music education is not an individual education. Music education is always within a group. You cannot do music education individually with a computer, you need a group. It is not about an individual that is sitting there and says: I do music, I can make a melody: that’s not music education. Music education is a totality, practicing in a group, and music making is the feeling of being well with other people. Another perspective of the principle of totality is, for example, when I teach a song, we listen to the whole song. I will sing the song myself. First element: the teacher sings the song. To start, this is what he will do. Then, after that, from totality, I go to the differentiation. For example, we could start with the rhythm or with the melody, that is possible. I teach the melody through imitation. If I may say, after all these years, I come to the idea that solfege is theory, and imitation is a natural way of learning. That is a very important point, after all these years.

**S.A.** I see.

**J.W.** At the beginning, I was also teaching reading notes and all these things. Now, I say to children “imitate”, and it works. I say: imitate this little melody. Then, comes the rhythm. Only with clapping, don’t say: “*ta-ta-ti-ti-ta*”, “*ti-ti-ti-ti-ta*”. Do the rhythm in a creative way. Let the children say the text in different ways, with different expressions, happy, with humor, and then you can do whatever you want: loud, soft... Put the things together and you did already teach rhythm and melody, or melody

and rhythm. Now you say: let's have a little accompaniment, and you play some harmony with them. Then you say: we will do first this, and then we improvise a little bit. That is the part B, so you play in a form. Then you go from totality to differentiation. Then, from this point, differentiation, you come to the appreciation. And you appreciate it: isn't that fine? Oh, that's fun, let's do it one more time! That's the reaction of the children. That's the appreciation. From the appreciation, you go back to the totality, and that's what we call reintegration. You go back to your totality which no more is a totality that is unknown, but it is a totality that you feel as well with your voice as with your body. That's the principle of totality. There you will find all the elements. I don't think that solfège is the way to teach the children. You start in an active way, and sometimes you can teach the notes. Let's sing with the notes, that's simple, and there you have a game to teach the children, always in a game form. And likewise, you should not teach the same activity for too long, but rather do it always with variations. If the song has four lines, now try first to teach two lines and do different things with that and put things together. That is the real start of the pedagogy. I want to insist on that. For me, the best way to teach is through imitation. That is the most natural. Look to the little one year old boy that cannot speak. What does the mother say? Say daddy. The little boy says: daddy. He imitates, and that is the way that you learn the language. Why could we learn the language in this way? Learning the music language is similar. It is important, also, that we do not separate subjects at school. We should be more flexible and put things together

**S.A.** Integrate?

**J.W.** Yes, integrate them. That should be much better for an education for future music teachers. Here you have music education: you have to learn to play an instrument; then you have to learn to teach the children; then you have music history; and so on. That is not good, it is not a totality. The curriculum subjects should be all together in different ways: alternate them, variate them, be creative, use your imagination.



**G.B.-P.** The idea of performance in a totality is important as well. When you teach a lesson you have different parts of the lesson, and then you make a sum of all parts in a final concert, as we do at the choir in Jos's courses. Then we always have the full satisfaction of achieving the results. Actually, the final concert is more than that. It is also making music. Performing concerts is what musicians do. You perform a concert for yourself, for your group, for your class, and there, at the end, you have a different moment, which is like the lesson in the form of a concert. The choir lesson that we have in the courses has the form of a concert, because we perform the different pieces at the end. So, you have the feeling of performing, you are totally absorbed by this experience when you are performing, and you have the real satisfaction of performing. This is also the idea of totality. So, the children get prepared to perform, to do something important for other people. This is, again, music in community as a way of communication with others.

### **Theme 3: Formal and informal education**

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**S.A.:** How do you see the differences we have in formal learning settings, as college or university, versus the learning we have in an informal environment? Education comes before schooling. People are educated by their families, friends, peers, the community, and not necessarily need to go to school to learn music, especially in modern societies with technology and distance learning. How do you think today's music education students could be aware of that, and how could music education professors help to enhance their student's education?

**J.W.** We have the tradition, and the tradition is still going on. We do not have classes where you can work at your own level, but you can take your own speed. At the university, you go to your class, then you go away. That is not the best way of learning, because to learn well you have to be interested. So today, I would like to do piano training. So, I should not sing or play another instrument. Today, I would like to do gymnastics, but do it in a dance way. You should try to develop that idea in teaching.

The teachers should know their class well. Sometimes you will see that today is not the day you should teach a song, because the students are too nervous. Do rhythm and train them to the rhythm and forget that song. On another day, you feel it's a beautiful day and say "let us sing a beautiful song", and there you go. That is the way that good music teachers should teach their classes. And also teach not the theory, but the practice. Go to the practice, and then teach a little theory, not much. Because, for children in the classroom (in the general schools), is it necessary that they know solfege? No, it is necessary that they can sing. And, as I already said, they can sing through imitation. Is it necessary that they know what is a quarter note or a half note?

**S.A.** Not really.

**J.W.** Well, I would say that they already learned it by doing it. It is only after they perform it that you can say: you see this? This is what big people call a half note. The children should be interested in learning that way. You should start from the child. You should go to what is interesting at this moment. I think that a good music teacher should know also about history, music history, and play an instrument. If you have a good voice, you could use your voice as an instrument. I would say: you should play an instrument, and know lots of psychology. Education at the university is too theoretical. You should have more experiences in the training for being music teachers, isn't that so? I did it in Belgium, already in 1965. I asked my students to go with me in a classroom to practice their teaching with the children. From the first year on, we are in the classroom and they teach. After, we discuss together about their teaching practice. You see, this is very important. Some professors know a lot of theory, but do not know how to teach. If you cannot teach, don't teach music education. A good music teacher should also have interest, as I already said, in psychology, also in human relations. The children that are in the classroom are different, even from different cultures. You should be open to that, and you should try to find out about the cultures in your classroom. You should know about the native music in Brazil, or about the black music in the

U.S.A. As I said in the beginning, that is being open to different cultures, what makes it interesting. There are also other little things. If someone has a special instrument, like an instrument from Brazil, you should show it to the children. You see, that is an instrument from Brazil, and you will open the eyes of the children. You should be more of a pedagogue. You should open your vision of the whole world. That's what I think.

**Theme 4: School settings**

**S.A.** The issue about formal versus informal education is quite complex. Music is present everywhere in the world, fully integrated in the society or as the heart of a culture, as you mentioned, and this heart is pounding with all the passion, beauty, sadness, and all the human feelings as a whole. When you go to a formal setting, education may become too rigid with doors and walls that fragment the whole knowledge in disciplines.

**J.W.** Yes.

**S.A.** When the newly graduated music teacher goes to his first classroom, will he find music fragmented in disciplines, like in the university setting, or music as a whole, like in the community setting with, probably, a wide diversity among children? What could we do to build a bridge to connect these settings? Will a professor who take his students out to an internship be like a father who takes his child out for a walk holding hands?.

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**J.W.** Exactly.

**G.B.-P.** The experience outside the university is very important to our students. For the future music teachers, the trainees, it is essential that they go to a school where they meet real settings as you were saying, so they understand how children react and behave. They understand how to be a teacher by teaching, and they see what works better or does not work so well. They observe and can reflect afterwards. They can observe their colleagues trying to teach and learning how to teach. For example, I thought it worked like this, but it does not work, it is the other way... Of course, when they participate in a training course, where they see real music working, they can understand it more easily and suddenly, things

become clear because they understand how this is accessible to children. I think that the experience outside the university is always essential. On the other hand, as a teacher, you cannot always go to places outside school. For example, you may take your children to a concert at a concert hall in the city, but not in a small village. But you can always travel through the music. You can stimulate their knowledge, their curiosity about the world by starting from that songbook or that dance, if you want, of course, if you are motivated. Sometimes people don't do it because they have not thought about that. It depends on your own experience. If you never went to a museum to see a painting or never walked five minutes to observe the paintings, for example, how can you teach the love for art to the children, if you did not experience it yourself?

**S.A.** Yes.

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**G.B.-P.** Why teacher training is important? Because you have experienced it yourself, I think. When a student of ours during his teaching practice teaches a dance song from Turkey, the primary school teacher gets the globe or a world map, after performing the dance the children are curious to know more, because they know it is a dance from Turkey. Where is Turkey? I have never seen it, I don't know, I have no idea... They observe the map and find out. That is the integration in the primary school that children can do and understand, of course, if they are stimulated and you tell them to be curious. In Music Listening, I can teach about different cultures, traditional or classical music, if they sing a melody or if they know that melody... From that, you already know the melody from the inside, and then it is much easier to know who the composer is, from which period... Children are not always aware of time and history, because they are too young to understand the world. But they are very curious and very interested in learning, contrary to what some teachers say. I am talking about children in public schools, in poor neighborhoods, and all these contexts. They are interested if you show them the ways, and stimulate them.

**J.W.** You have to.

**G.B.-P.** So now, all of your students in your course [Jos'] will leave, and they will teach different things, and from one, they go to another. That's the way you help people to integrate, I think. Primary teachers, for example, should not be afraid of teaching different things that they know. Young teachers know something, they know about a certain music but they forget they can teach it to the class. Suddenly, they think: we can do that with the children in the classroom. That's a point for integration. The experience of going to a primary school and study the primary school program would be interesting, because when you know many things, you can integrate most of them with your students.

**J.W.** There is a problem if you teach the teachers to teach music. When I started in 1965, there was not a music room in our school in Belgium.

**S.A.** No?

**J.W.** No, that did not exist. You took music in a regular classroom, with desks and benches... You could not sing standing. That's why I think I was interested so much in movement in my courses.

**S.A.** Oh...

**J.W.** What we did was we got up from our benches, we were standing in the corridor, and we did movement in the corridor. That was in 1965. You may not forget how much everything has changed. That's what I say now... I think most schools have a music room and you can move, use instruments, whatever. You always have to adapt to the concrete situation. Now, here in the course I am teaching, I have to adapt. Why? Because the room is not big enough. We are normally in a big room, and I was used to that big room ... Now, in this little room, sometimes I think: what can I do? So, I changed so many strategies, because, as I said, you have always to adapt to the concrete situation where you work.

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### **Open talk 1: Methodology**

**J.W.** I think that we did not talk about the most important thing in my teaching: it is that I use the idea of Confucius. Because this is very important for me. It's so important that we know all the pedagogical field that

we have planned. If you teach teachers that, you should give them a plan. My plan is this and that and that... and for everything, I will do the same procedure. Then, you have a method. That is not something that you do only on this occasion. You always follow the same structure and, in this way, the children will learn faster. Because they know what will follow. If you teach that for three months, on the fourth month it will be much faster, and you will have covered much more material. This saying attributed to Confucius is: “Tell me, I will forget; show me, I will remember; involve me, I will understand”. That is really the essence of teaching. First, the teacher says it, and all children are involved with their intellect, and they are mentally prepared to do the other activities. Secondly, the teacher always should show how to do it. If it is a melody, you should sing it first. If it is a movement, you should perform it first. Each time, the teacher sets the example. Then, when it is mentally clear, children can see it because viewing is easier than only listening. Visualization helps the auditive experience. Afterwards they do it, which is important, because each child is independent. What happens sometimes in the teaching practice? The teacher sings with the children. Because the teacher is so good, he or she wants to help the children. But it should be just the opposite. The teacher should not sing with the children because the children have to sing individually, they have to show that they understand and become independent. There is something that I want to share with you also.

**S.A.** Thank you.

**J.W.** If you sing simultaneously with the children, you cannot hear them.

**G.B.-P.** I see many, even experienced teachers, playing the recorder at the same time. The children cannot hear them. The important point of teaching, and it is not only music, is your way of teaching. Jos, you teach the students to think first, and then do it. If they have time to think of what they are doing, to process mentally, of course, then they do it well. When teachers do it at the same time, they have two problems: the children cannot know what they’re going to do because it is at the same time; and, if the teacher is busy playing, he cannot listen and cannot correct the

children. That is why it is always better to do it in a different moment, because there is time to process, and it is possible to involve and being involved and being independent. Children will say: I can do it by myself, you see? It is the same with adults. They know that they are not waiting for you to do it at that moment. They know already because they were trained before, and then they can do it independently. That is to learn to become independent from the teacher. They know and they can do it themselves, and they can enjoy it, because they know it. That is when they become happy. If you are not independent from the teacher, at that moment, you don't know what is going to happen.

**J.W.** Everything requires training and that's also something we forget sometimes, as teachers. Training is doing the same thing over and over. When you teach, don't be happy with the melody that you sing only once, but sing it with "o", then sing it with "lai", sing it the third time with "plum". Training is doing the same thing. Musical performance is like sport!

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### **Open talk 2: Teacher training**

**G.B.-P.** There are many different things that you can learn immensely just by observing a teacher who is doing well. That's one point about teacher training. You learn many more things actually, than the activities that you are doing on the moment. I reflect about that in my experience. When you are a teacher, if you train young teachers, for them that person before them is a reference in everything. The attitude is very important. Jos, the way you teach, and you take the student teachers to do something that you wish. Your inspiration, even, your way of making music, your musicianship. That are so many things that a young teacher may be not so much aware of. Not only a song or a piece that is in front of you, but the dynamics, breathing, phrasing, articulation, and all the aspects that make something musical. An important point for a trainee or for a teacher is that you can teach people how to be more musical. If you call for their attention, let's say, to the way of playing the claves: not "boom-

*boom-boom*”, but *tic-tic-tic*”. These little things, for me, mean a whole world of music education, a whole world of musicianship, I think. You can say it even to a kindergarten teacher that may not have so much experience in music teaching, but she will understand that this makes a difference for developing the musicality of the children, not to have a whole class singing and shouting. Some people may be not aware of this, but you can develop musicality through little things. As a music teacher, when performing music, when playing the flute, you are asked to pay attention to your breathing, your body, your posture, your face, the way you express yourself and communicate with people. All these details make a difference for student teachers to understand how it is to be a good music teacher, a musical music teacher. I think it makes a big difference.

**J.W.** Yes.

224 **G.B.-P.** When you [Jos] explain the principles, you put them in practice in your teaching. The principle of community, of including everybody... or everybody feeling being included. Whether it is a triangle playing a short *“plim”* or is a bass xylophone that is playing on the book, as we say. The point of feeling being included is important. Another point is relevant to all teachers, not only to music education, not especially to any approach. Your way of teaching is appealing directly to students’ intelligence. Pushing them to be more active in learning, more involved, to think, to analyze, and to feel all these small things, such a musical phrase. This is your way of teaching, I think. Put your intelligence to work, concentrate. There are little things that you pass on to the other person in front of you, to the teachers in front of you, at the center of your teaching, that are not written in the books. There are attitudes, and that’s why maybe people learn in different ways, and at different levels. That is another point, maybe, being so universal, when teaching people from different countries. There is something very human with your relationships.

**J.W.** Are you talking about me?

**G.B.-P.** Yes, of course, about your relationship, what you do with music teachers, with humans... That point is universal. Appealing to people’s



intelligence and concentration, and all these things. Doing it yourself, you say: involve me, you understand; but you also are involved, not only saying that, but doing it yourself. There is a lot of knowledge that people get from the practice. The practical knowledge that people learn that is not written, but people learn from the practice you are doing. I think there is a lot that people learn from that.

**J.W.** Thank you.

**S.A.** Thank you both.



### **SERGIO ÁLVARES**

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