Fieldnotes: From Artistic Gesture to Philosophical Thought

Sophie Chappel

Abstract: *Within the field of emerging philosophical practices, this publication introduces a distinctive methodology in which creative artistic processes–both vocal and corporeal – intertwine with the play of thought.*

"*Art does not think any less than philosophy, but it thinks through affects and percepts*" (Deleuze G., Guattari F., 1991, p. 198).

Through this "field note," I wish to present the methodology I have developed as a practitioner of "Art-Philo" workshops in Bezons (greater Paris region), while also providing a more theoretical perspective so that readers may perceive the unique nature of my approach, bringing art and philosophy together within a single vital impulse. The originality of this method is first rooted in my personal life experience. From an early age —and later as a singer, actress, poet, and dancer— my search for meaning and my grasp of reality have always been inseparably bound to my sensations, perceptions, and emotions.

The originality of the method also stems from my training in art therapy and my professional experience. While philosophical practice aims to teach children to think for themselves, for over thirty years I have observed that creative artistic practice holds a transformative and emancipatory power that strengthens children's psychological, emotional, and cognitive development. And finally, the originality of the method is also drawn from authors whose work supported my research hypothesis for my university thesis and also G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, H. Bergson, F. Nietzsche, V. Jankélévitch, C. Fleury, and D. W. Winnicott.

My pedagogical proposal may come as a surprise, and I readily acknowledge this. Yet, as Jean Jaurès wrote, "One teaches, and can only teach, what one is" (Jaurès J., 1910, p. 1). Shaped by my family history, my difficult school years, my university studies, and my experience as both an artist and teacher, it became evident to me that creative artistic practice needed to be integrated into the practice of philosophy.

The thinking skills traditionally developed through philosophical practice (conceptualization, problematization, argumentation) appeared too limited to adequately reflect the complexity of reality. Remembering my earlier readings of G. Deleuze and Jankélévitch, I searched for that "je ne sais quoi," that ineffable I know not what," to propose a methodology in which sensitivity, creativity, musicality, and vitality hold a central role in acquiring the abilities to "think", "be," and "live together."

I will now describe my methodology according to the structure of a typical session. Before doing so, it is essential to emphasize the importance and consistency of the pedagogical framework, articulated in three phases:

• The workshop begins with an opening ritual.
• Then comes a time of philosophical and creative experimentation: depending on the week and the theme, the collective reflective time and the creative experimentation time may alternate or overlap. The practitioner, drawing on their dual training as artist and philosopher, must be able to perceive what is unfolding so that the existential and philosophical journey retains its meaning.

• The session ends with a circle of sharing—or for the youngest children, a drawing period.

The solidity of the framework is ensured by the importance accorded to silence which ensures respect for all and promotes compassionate listening—and through the practitioner's posture, whose caring authority and empathic availability uphold the values of justice, equality, fraternity, kindness, and tolerance.

I. The Opening Ritual

The children sit up in a circle. At the center, I place a globe and ask a ritual question: *"What have I put a globe here?"* The immediate and predictable answer comes without delay: *"To think like all the inhabitants of the planet, from the North Pole to the South Pole!"* The phrasing of this sentence is put to music to emphasize the universal nature of thinking shared by ALL mankind. This idea is simultaneously conveyed in a broad outward movement of the arms.

At the start of the year, I teach newcomers a song which, over the years, has become a "hymn to philosophy":

- *Couplet*: J'sais pas si j'suis normal/ mais dans ma tête à moi/ il y a des tas questions/ qui tournent, tournent en rond/ T'inquiète pas, c'est comme moi/ C'est tout à fait normal/ de s'poser des questions/ même si y a pas d'réponses/ Argumenter, penser, partager ses idées avec tous ses copains/ reprendre ce refrain :
- *Refrain*: C'est chouette et c'est génial/ et tout à fait normal/ de s'poser des questions/ qui tournent, tournent en rond/ de s'poser des questions/ même si y a pas d'réponse.

While the verse takes the form of a gestured discussion, the chorus invites the children to dance freely, in a joyful outpouring.

This ritual marks a break from the chronological time of everyday occupations and introduces the extraordinary time of the workshop, perceived *"in a certain thickness of duration composed of two parts: our immediate past and our imminent future"* (Bergson H., 1911, p. 5). It becomes flowing time —the living time of change and metamorphosis, the time that distances, carries away, or brings closer; the almost perceptible, vibratory time that makes the workshop a space of experimentation, exploration, wonder, and astonishment—a place for encountering oneself, others, and the world.

II. The Time of Experimentation

This is the heart of the workshop. Depending on the themes explored, I adapt the pedagogical proposals each week to nurture children's curiosity and enthusiasm. Each session is lived as a *"new existential adventure": "What will happen today?"*

I may begin with a song, the reading of a picture book, the announcement of a key word, a harvesting of questions, or the viewing of film excerpts. Thanks to its flexibility, the framework also allows me to open with a philosophical dialogue. If the proposals vary, the key is to remain attentive so as not to separate artistic practice from reflective practice. At times I deliberately blur the boundaries by interrupting the philosophical discussion to experiment sensorily or metaphorically with the ideas or concepts being explored.

1. Creative Artistic Practice

Artistic practice mobilizes a wide range of competencies: cognitive (attention, concentration, memory), motor, sensory, emotional, and creative capacities that —whether consciously or not— enrich reflective thought. The goal is not abstract philosophizing, but to practice philosophy through engagement of body and voice.

This recalls the original spirit of philosophy in ancient Greece, when it still embodied an organic unity, later fragmented through its evolution into an academic discipline. I see creative artistic experience resonating with what Pierre Hadot describes as spiritual exercises. By seeking an alliance between body and mind, sensitivity and concept, the pedagogical aim is to develop not only reasoning skills in children (philosophy as a search for truth), but also to open them to philosophy as an art of living oriented toward the good life.

In this artistic process, the goal is not to impose predetermined vocal or physical technique but to encourage children to discover gestures, sounds, and forms intimately linked to their own subjectivity. To support this, I offer numerous examples of vocal and bodily games opening a wide range of possibilities. The practitioner's involvement is essential: beyond guaranteeing the framework, they act as a guide—an "enchanter"—who invites children into the adventure. Through creative freedom, humor, and playfulness, they may even reshape how children perceive adults, who often remark *"You're not like our parents!"*

After these examples, children experiment with various vocal techniques and aesthetics that may unsettle them—challenging their listening habits—yet also open their minds to strangeness and difference.

Through creative play, I aim to cultivate humor and a sense of freedom. Humor, for me, is a virtue, as it allows children to gain distance from themselves and from the gaze of others while shared laughter strengthens and unites the group. The sense of freedom generated by play can trigger profound change, as illustrated by my own personal experience: when I was sixteen, my contemporary dance teacher asked us to imagine we were horses. I began to gallop and neigh with an unsuspected existential

energy. The significance of this experience did not lie in a desire to resemble a horse, but in the capacity to create images from sensations and emotions —to think less abstractly about the concept of freedom. This vivid memory nourished the spirit of my methodology.

The aim is to invite children to seize what emerges in the present moment so that play becomes embodied experience. This requires attentiveness (to oneself and others) along with concentration and memory, enabling them afterward to reflect on the sensations, perceptions, and emotions they felt.

This demand for "full presence" carries its own challenge; children must free themselves from stereotypical, conventional representations. For example, rather than forming a heart with their fingers to express love, they are encouraged to seek a unique bodily and vocal image to express what love inspires in them or makes them think.

Modalities of Creative Play:

- Individual and collective vocal and bodily improvisation

I typically begin with a "*mise en jeu*": children stand together in a circle. Each child improvises around a word connected to the theme of the session.

The practitioner welcomes each improvisation benevolently while offering an "*aesthetic reformulation*" to intensify the expressive traits proposed by the child. The goal is to help children discover themselves—surprised by their own ability to go beyond what they thought they could do or say.

After this optional reformulation, the group echoes the child's proposal. This collective reprise fosters a sense of efficacy and strengthens self-confidence, as it validates each individual proposal without comparison.

This individual exploration culminates in a polyphonic moment where children learn to attune themselves to others—not by covering their ears to hear only themselves, but by locating markers in the voices around them in order to affirm their own. This mirrors the philosophical community of inquiry, where one thinks collectively while maintaining one's own voice.

- Collective Artistic Creation

Collective creation also mirrors the philosophical community of inquiry: thinking/doing together in the search for co-constructed meaning and form.

In small groups, children compose short musical and physical phrases inspired by the workshop theme. They may reuse ideas from earlier improvisations. The goal is to create a shared "sound and visual image" filled with meaning, sensations, and emotions.

The challenge resembles that of problematizing how to arrange, clarify, and deepen artistic proposals so that they are meaningful to both *"thinking performers"* and *"thinking spectators"*?
After creating, children present their work to the group. Spectators provide feedback focused on technical mastery and coherence with the session's theme. Criticism must be reasoned and expressed in the first person ("I think that... because..."). Accepting negative feedback requires emotional distance and a certain degree of psychological maturity.

A successful collective creation presupposes that children have mobilized both individual and collective resources to overcome the trials and doubts inherent to any creative process. Collective creative work requires many virtues: courage, perseverance, humility, sincerity, temperance, tolerance, and kindness.

Conversely, an unfinished piece reveals a failure that must be examined: was there a lack of cooperation? Difficulty tolerating frustration? A lapse in concentration? Excessive excitement? Inhibition? The resulting shame or powerlessness often manifests physically (lowered gaze, slack posture, heavy silence). In such cases, it is best to invite the group to immediately try again so that they may leave with a sense of accomplishment, concluding with: "We did manage in the end!"

Given the deep personal engagement required, moments of "letting go" (free dance, vocal improvisation inspired by free jazz) are essential, with no pedagogical expectation attached.

The entire process is demanding and requires an authentic form of "initiation," almost spiritual, as it compels us to renounce the illusion of purely rational mastery and to touch the limits of verbal language. Childhood, fortunately, is a fertile time to explore such poetic and sensitive relationships to the world.

2. The Philosophical Community of Inquiry

After experimenting with different approaches—including AGSAS-inspired workshops (J. Lévine) and M. Tozzi's structured philosophical dialogue—I chose to draw on aspects of Brila's methodology (N. Fletcher), due to its inventiveness and playful forms of philosophical dialogue, which echo the spirit of my own pedagogical approach. The use of "chattering hands," for example, which allows the group to interact silently through coded hand movements, has greatly enriched my practice.

However, I differentiate my approach by considering that the creative process itself initiates and activates thinking skills —through a deep intertwining of artistic sensitivity/creativity and philosophical questioning/conceptualization.

- Conceptualization

Artistic practice becomes philosophical in the following way: if conceptualization is an expected skill of philosophical dialogue, it is already prepared by the vocal and physical play, which lends it a new playful, poetic, and sensory dimension. The goal is to make the concept vibrate, to embody it, to play

with its phonemes, its sound, its meaning—so that it may be rediscovered, marveled at, and approached with astonishment. Playing with the signifier prepares the mind to question the signified.

- Problematization

Similarly, if problematization entails a complicating of the initial question by introducing comparisons, oppositions, or hypotheses that invite doubt, the artistic creative process follows the same trajectory of trial and error: What should be done, and how? Which ideas should be selected? How should they be articulated, arranged, and imbued with meaning? The questioning inherent in the creative process already places the children on the path toward problematization.

- Argumentation

Developing a collective creation requires the group to accept evaluating each other's ideas through argumentation: *"I think we could do this or that because..."*. The pedagogical value of the final product lies in its capacity to mobilize the group's collective intelligence to make choices, organize the *"musical and bodily discourse,"* and engage critical thinking through a shared commitment to cooperation.

To conclude this section, I wish to emphasize that this creative and philosophical pedagogical approach may destabilize children (and adults), even provoking anxiety. The creative process confronts them directly with the vertigo of the unknown and the uncertain. Yet it is precisely by accepting this letting go of what we think we know or can do that thought becomes more complex and reinvigorated. Some children grasp this intuitively far from being unsettled, they exult in the experience.

III. The Sharing Circle

At the end of the workshop, a speaking round invites children to share their experience with sincerity. Although this introspective immersion is open-ended, it is guided by general questions such as: "What did I feel through my body, my voice? What did I think? What emotions did I experience?" Its purpose is to foster self-knowledge and self-awareness, while also cultivating curiosity and attentiveness toward others. It opens a path to alterity, allowing children to compare differences and similarities to reflect on what unites us and on the universality of the human condition.

However, this sharing circle can feel risky or threatening to insecure children. The practitioner must remain attentive to the quality of listening within the group because sincerity makes one vulnerable by exposing the child's inner truth. Valuing "sincere speech" is therefore a fundamental ethical concern since, when shared within a reciprocal relationship, it promotes understanding of others, empathy, and love.

One may draw an analogy with artistic performance. A genuine interpretation arises from the sincerity of the artist's expression. It invites the audience to share that "*je ne sais quoi*," that "ineffable" element that surprises, touches, and inspires wonder. False speech, by contrast, resembles a missed encounter between the artist and their audience confining the artist to solitude, in a presentation devoid of emotional resonance.

I do not propose a sharing circle for the youngest children. Instead, the end of the workshop is devoted to drawing and noting the workshop's concept. The use of a dedicated notebook each week provides coherence to the pedagogical process. At the end of the year, I invite children to return to the first pages to revisit their journey and select their favorite drawing, explaining the reasons for their choice.

IV. The "Art-Philo" Celebration

At the end of each year, I organize the "Art-Philo" celebration, which brings together all groups (children, adolescents, adults, seniors, intergenerational participants) to present the year's work in an atmosphere of joy and shared experience, with the audience invited to participate.

The annual theme ("Humans and Nature," "Humans and Animals," "Life," "Self and Others," etc.,) ensures coherence in the presentations, with each group offering a creation, song, or dance related to the various questions explored throughout the year.

The celebration has three primary objectives. First, it seeks to counter the notion that art and philosophy are reserved for an elite or that intellectual practice is necessarily off-putting. The celebration becomes an opportunity to reconcile everyday life, intellectual inquiry, and the world of art. Second, it encourages participants to free themselves from fear of judgment, fostering a joyful and emancipatory momentum. Finally, it has a more political and spiritual dimension: to contribute, patiently and humbly, to reinfusing the spirit of fraternity into our divided societies.

To illustrate my entire pedagogical approach, I will now present the workshop I led on the concept of fraternity during the Idéation colloquium organized by Brila at the University of Montréal on August 9, 2025.

V. Example of a Workshop: Toward an Embodied Fraternity

Given the time constraints, I chose to prioritize the creative dimension.

As an introduction to the workshop, I presented a short video created by Christian Mrasilevici to give participants an overview of my pedagogical approach.

To begin the workshop itself, I invited participants to sit in a circle and each to say a word associated with the concept of fraternity. All the words were written on a board.

After this first speaking round—drawing on the AGSAS methodology—participants were invited to stand and walk without paying attention to their neighbors. Then, at my signal, they were asked successively to:

- Approach another participant and look deep into their eyes.

- Move toward a person of their choice and touch them. The instruction allowed any form of contact, from the most discreet to the most expressive.
- Converse without using verbal language while paying attention to the quality of the interaction (intonation, facial expressions, bodily attitudes).

It was certainly a joyful cacophony! Cacophony often has its virtues, for it allows emotional release and fosters freeing, emancipatory vocal expression. After this first large-group exploration, I invited participants to form small groups to create a short conceptual scene consisting of organizing vocal and bodily phrases based on three words chosen from the list on the board.

After a lively research phase each group was invited to present their work twice in the same way. This requirement of identical repetition is essential because it compels participants to structure ideas and artistic proposals according to both meaning and sensation, and to pay sustained attention to themselves and to the group to take responsibility for their role. *For some groups, this was easy, for others, more difficult.*

Each of the four creations was radically different, offering a unique perspective on the concept of fraternity. Creativity and joy were undeniably present. One group emphasized the duality of fraternity and sorority, while another highlighted solidarity. If the diversity of viewpoints contributes to collective intelligence within the community of inquiry, it also reflects the forces of subjectivation that must be strengthened—a crucial issue for democracy. Indeed, as Cynthia Fleury writes, there can be no living democracy without powerful subjectivities: *"Attempting the subjective experience for what it is simply what it is means stepping outside the alienating circulation of power, discovering the spirit of adventure"* (Fleury, 2015, p. 175)

The workshop concluded with a completely open speaking round. Many expressed joys at having explored a concept as abstract as fraternity in such an embodied way; others emphasized the lively and dynamic nature of the pedagogical method. Two participants shared how difficult it had been for them to embrace this kind of process. This type of workshop is as much an encounter with oneself as it is with others.

Opening

As Dr. C. Guéguen explains *"sadness can profoundly slow down the flow of our thoughts, whereas joy increases that flow and enhances our creativity (2015, p. 146)."*

This is why I pay particular attention to the atmosphere within the workshop, ensuring that a playful and creative spirit is maintained in order to stimulate the children's desire for life and knowledge. Joy is an ethic that invites us to care for ourselves, for others, and for the world; it nourishes and sustains the vital impulse so essential in childhood. It is particularly precious for children growing up in a world marked by fear, withdrawal, and intolerance.

This is why we must "sow," as Edwige Chirouter says... The soil is dry, and very few local authorities truly professionalize this practice at least in France! This is what led me to make my

professional commitment known by asking Christian Mrasilevici to create a documentary capable of faithfully and sensitively conveying this civic, existential, and poetic practice, along with its benefits.

I now need to think about how to transmit this methodology so that it can endure over time. While the dual expertise of the practitioner in both art and philosophy is the strength of this approach, it is also its fragility. Indeed, this work can only be carried out by professionals sufficiently engaged in vocal or bodily creative practices to be able to lead these workshops over several years, since they follow a progressive approach. It is a practice that requires time, a long time necessary for the maturation of gesture and thought, much like learning a musical instrument. These conditions of appropriation can constitute a limitation in transmitting and implementing my methodology.

However, through the training courses offered to the teachers I have been working with for several years, I have seen that it is possible to continue this practice sustainably within a school setting. I hope that the recent creation of my website, https://www.lart-de-sophiem.com/ will allow me to share and train future practitioners in schools as well as in various cultural institutions.

I would like to conclude with this quotation from Vladimir Jankélévitch, who gives music a special place in human life. Music, he writes, is *"an experience lived within life itself [...] we have refused to grant music the power of discursive development, but we have not denied it the experience of lived time" (1983, p. 118).*

This is, without any doubt, what makes my methodology innovative: it invites us to think within the experience of lived time. *

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Address Correspondances to:
Sophie Chappel, Project Manager, Art-Philo Workshops,
Department of Cultural Affairs for the City of Bezons (Ile de France)
Business email: s.chappel@mairie-bezons.fr / Home email: clanama3@gmail.com