"CREATION OF IMAGES OF DEATH THROUGH PICTURE BOOKS" report

Project CREARTE/2015-1-PT01-KA201-012989

Creative school Partnerships with Visual Artists

artist Margarida Dourado Dias

teachers Felisbina Antunes e Cristina A. Rodrigues

school Oporto Music Conservatory (Conservatório de Música do Porto) **classes** 1st and 3rd

Process of project's implementation

The project of artistic and conceptual exploration of the death idea through picture books published in Portugal in the 21st century was implemented between April 11 and May 10 with the participation of all students of the 1st and 3rd classes. In the first meeting that I had with the teachers, explaining the theme and proposal of the project, provoked two reactions: a silent acceptance and another one with "chills". The same reactions had the parents of the children when permission was asked. The full acceptance for the participation of children took place after the first session and the signed authorization were delivered to the teachers.

During the implementation of the project, I created a logbook to record events and to reflect on the work process, the following steps, the problems encountered and the comments that was getting. The photographic record was another media that used as a basis for the discussions. Some of the photos were posted on the blog Crearte - https://crearte2016.wordpress.com - to share the project's implementation.

The sessions were distributed over time according to the table presented with the path that has been set and adjusted either prior to or following in the art workshops. This path had the following steps:

> 1st - reading of images of the picture books without the text - we analyzed the illustrations artistically (composition, materials, supports, characteristics) and conceptually (what messages and stories tell us the images). From here, the children created new stories for the images. The 1st year expressed orally the texts and the 3rd year created and wrote the texts individually. In the next step, they created individually new images (with the artistic techniques of the illustrator) from their own experiences;

> 2nd - text reading without the images of the picture books - the reading of the texts respected the visual organization of the books, maintaining the characteristics of the letters and their spatial arrangement. This method allowed the approach to the books and the understanding of how the text was prepared and exploited. From this reading, the children explored new images, relating them to the text, and creating with the materials and supports that had been used by the illustrator;

> 3rd - reading the picture book through images and texts - full analyzes of the book, reflecting on how the text and the images relate themselves, which served as the starting point for the conversation with the illustrator and the writer in a meeting. This meeting had a structure of questions-answers, in which children could ask what they wanted to know and understand the creation of the picture book (*Efemera*). Through this book children found new expressions of death used in language (eg.: "scared to death") and created new illustrations, always respecting the artistic technique of the illustrator.

> 4ª - reflection about death - I introduced a collective discussion about the relation of death and life beginning with the film of the *Symphonic Poem for 100 metronomes* of G. Ligeti, questioning about "what we are before we exist" - in peoples life and in the music. In the 1st year the children explored, in group, scenic positions of their body expressing life and death, registered by photos. In the 3rd year the children explored their (individual) ideia of death in a drawing. The charcoal that they used was also a point of connection to think about the idea that a dead object continues to give life. Concluding, each child answered individually two questions in front of a camera: "what did you learn (or liked
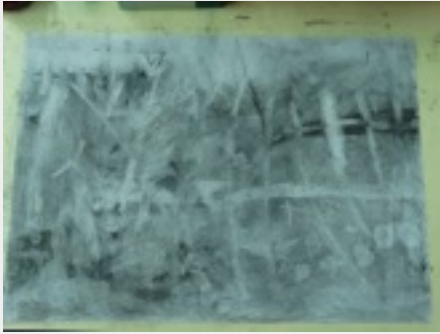
more) in this project?" and "what color is death?". The children of the 3rd year had also to explain their final drawing.

class	book/reflection	day	duration	proposal	materials and resources
3ºA	*Queridos extintos* ("Dear extinct"), Arianna Papini	11.04	1:30	from image to text: 1) reading of images; 2) new images and texts	• powerpoint and book; • paperboards(white, beige, black); • white chalk and dry pastels; • color paper (crepe and wrapping); • scissors and glue; • pencil and black pen
	The bear and wildcat, Kazumi Yumoto and Komako Sakai	18.04 21.04	1:30 1:30	from text to image: 1) reading of texts; 2) new images	• powerpoint and book; • grey pressboard with 2mm; • oil pastels; • China ink
	Efémera ("Ephemeral"), Eugénio Roda and Gémeo Luís	29.04 02.05 04.05	1:00 1:30 2:00	from image and text: 1) reading and analyzes of the texts and images; 2) conversation with the writer and illustrator; 3) new images and texts	• powerpoint and book;; • paperboards (black, pink, maroon, orange, yellow, green, light blue, dark blue, violet) • scissors and glue; • pencil
	Final reflections about death	10.05	2:00	1) searching for death in life and in music; 2) searching for death in a drawing; 3) learning?	• *Symphonic Poem for 100 metronomes* G. Ligeti; • white paper (A3); • charcoal and eraser for charcoal; • camera
1º A	*The Heart and the Bottle*, Oliver Jeffers	15.04	3:00	from image to text: 1) reading of images; 2) new images and texts	• powerpoint and book; • watercolor paper and rough paper; • charcoal and white chalk; • watercolors; • brushes and used toothbrushes

class	book/refletion	day	duration	proposal	materials and resources
	A carícia da borboleta ("Butterfly caress"), Christian Voltz	22.04	1:30	from text to image: 1) reading of texts; 2) new images	• powerpoint and book; • rough paper; • dead objects (wood, tissues, woollen yarn, corks, buttons, sticks, shells, plants, etc.); • cooked spaghetti; • earth
	Efémera ("Ephemeral"), Eugénio Roda and Gémeo Luís	29.04 02.05 04.05	1:50 1:30 1:00	from image and text: 1) reading and analyzes of the texts and images; 2) conversation with the writer and illustrator; 3) new images and texts	• powerpoint and book; • paperboards (black, yellow, blue) • scissors and glue; • pencil
	Final reflections about death	10.05	1:30	full reading of *A carícia da borboleta* 1) searching for death in life and in music; 2) staged photos of life and death; 3) learning?	• powerpoint; • *Symphonic Poem for 100 metronomes* G. Ligeti; • camera

Despite the difficult choice of children's works to exemplify the different steps, the following selection of an image for each session might help in the reading and understanding of the developed works:

	3rd class	1st class
from image to text		

	3rd class	1st class
from text to image		
from image and text		
searching death and life		

Ending the project with the final though of death collectively, there were individual spontaneous reflections that were recorded in video. The answers given are relevant to understand the learning with the project. Thus, the children of the 1st year said that:

‑ they discovered that there are many ways for making books;

‑ they found that it is possible to imagine many things, including transforming "dead things" in "living things";

‑ they found that there are different types of deaths;

- almost all said that they enjoyed all the work, and some said which was the favorite one (1st work was the top);
- they liked the possibility that had to meet and talk to an author and an illustrator;
- they liked to be able to tell their stories.

As for the 3rd year, the children related their responses to learning:

- of death - differences and complementarities between life and death; death is also good and necessary; different lifetimes of living beings; different ways to die; there are expressions of death; death can cheer or sadden, depending on the point of view; death and life are lacking;
- of art - art is not only doing things, it is also to express the imagination; new forms of drawings and new forms of art; new materials and objects (and not only the pencil and graphite) to work artistically; art is very important in our lives; it is possible to work collectively in art;
- of books - reading and knowledge of new books related with death and life; several ways to make books; knowledge about the people who create and make books.

None of the children referred that didn't liked to participate in the project, and several asked for it's continuation.

About the teacher's appreciation, I include the words of the teacher Felisbina (1st class):

> Images, sensations, feelings.
>
> **Charing of interpretations**.
>
> Questions that arise.
>
> Images that gain words and meaning in the mouth of each one.
>
> Singularity of feeling the same image.
>
> Enrichment through sharing.
>
> Respect for the ideas of others.
>
> Freedom of expression.
>
> Dealing with feelings and share ways to resolve naturally.
>
> Handle different materials and realize that everything can be taken advantage of and win it's place, it's importance.

Reflection about the project's implementation

From the conclusions that were recorded in each session on the project logbook, I can highlight the following summary thoughts:

- Duration - each book required more time related to the pace of the children and that had not been foreseen in the planning of activities. Initially I thought that it was possible to work with a book in one session (one hour or one hour and half), but in practice I realized that I had to adapt the work to the children's pace if I wanted to achieve the proposed goals. So we worked in each class three illustrated books instead of the scheduled six.

The session that lasted longer was with the last book (*Efémera*), divided into three sessions because there was a need for three stages - preparation; conversation with author and illustrator; and artistic creation.

- Space - the arrangement of the desks in the classroom was not always the most suitable to work artistically. In the case of the 1st year's classroom, the distribution in group worked far better than in the 3rd year, which had a distribution in "line" that worked well for individual work, but not in group. Working outside the school is pleasing to all children (experience taken only with the 1st year), because they felt free in circulations and the findings of the surroundings.

- Computer technologies - (a) in the 3rd year when it was necessary to show in the screen the books for the readings, we had to ask the exchange room. This process limited the use of digital technologies and withdrew more working time to the sessions; (b) the projection of books did not allow physical contact with them, losing in some cases the characteristics. I always had the books with me to let them handle, but only a few had chance to do so; (c) the movie projection of the *Symphonic poem for 100 metronomes* failed in the 1st year (the projector didn't follow the actual speed of the poem), so I chose not to show the screen for the 3rd year, but restrict it to listening.

- Wishes - (a) as the art projects were being developed, the children asked always for more opportunities to continue the explore the new artistic techniques (it was difficult in some cases to limit the number of works); (b) the children always showed interest in being able to continue with the sessions, wanting to explore more books, more artistic techniques and more deaths; (c) the need and desire of children to share their experience with death was quite evident (the opportunity to talk about death was as if nobody had ever heard them or wanted to have heard); (d) there was often some delusion with the result or the process of work when they needed special manual skills (eg.: children's tendency to draw small size drawings limits their ability to cut with scissors), because the idea of "best" drawing, "correct answers" and "fear of failure" was always present. The request for help to colleagues or me offer some hope in the "success" of the work. On the other hand, the belief conveyed by the educational institution that you can not go wrong and that there is always a correct answer or a final work presentable had to be fought in the sessions - my desire as an artist was to transmit: the importance of exploration and discovery; the idea of creation without worrying about the "beautiful" or "perfect"; the thinking without expecting a final answer.

- Relations - there was no conflict between artist and teachers in the management of sessions, but the dynamics of working together on the project was restricted. As an artist and as project creator the whole schedule of activities was designed by me. I tried to approach the teachers for a more active participation (at least in the choice of some books), even understanding that the project is of an artistic nature, which is not exactly of their skills. The participation of teachers was related to: the management of children's behavior; the link with the parents; and the arrangement of class periods (day/time/space) for the project's sessions; booking of conservatory specific areas (such as the Piano Bar to the conversation with illustrator and author). With the teacher of the 1st year there was a better opportunity to establish joint working relationship because she always accompanied the sessions and shared work materials; with the teacher of the 3rd year was more complicated because she was on sick leave for a few weeks. This teacher was present only in the first and last

sessions, and in the others a substitute teacher took place, but not interfering in any way in the activities, leaving me with full responsibility in the sessions.

- Suggesting - (a) I only gave the materials and supports for the artistic creation, which resulted with the children. However, in the 1st year, just because I showed the cover of the book *A carícia da borboleta*, the children's tendency was to create new covers for the book and not illustrations for the story; (b) the final thoughts of death were filmed in different ways: in the 1st year, all children heard the questions previously and heard each other's answers, which undoubtedly influenced the results; in the 3rd year, I asked the questions individually and in a special room, away from everyone. So, in this case, there was no interference in the children's discourse and the answers obtained were more intuitive.

The project allowed children a new reading experience of texts and images of books, the possibility of thinking about death and experimenting new artistic techniques. They have shown repeatedly that they were enjoying the project and a different time in school, as for me it was a new experience of thinking the death through art. The teachers may have also had a new experience, but in the middle of so many projects in which they are involved, how to connect to another one? This project did not come from the will of the teachers, but the artist (and the possibility given by Crearte) and I believe that sharing experiences among teachers and artist is more likely when the project is created with time and wishes of all parties, including the children. Bringing work plans for the sessions does not allow for discovery of new possibilities. The teacher-child-artist relationship has to be rethought so that the project grows with the interest and commitment of all. Similarly, the time (and space) must be expanded so that there is an hypothesis for maturating ideas and artistic experiences. Concentrated project + concentrated time = concentrated (or limited?) result.

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