

NARRATIVE AS STRATEGY FOR HANDS-ON LEARNING IN CHILD EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

We present the project “Captive, don’t capture” developed by Children, aged from 2 to 7 years old, pre-school students at a private school in Belo Horizonte, Brazil. Here we present the narratives contributions for creative learning.

KEYWORDS: Narrative, Pre-school education, Programming, Hands-on Learning, Teacher Training, Methodology.

1 – SPACE DESCRIPTION

Casa Fundamental School was born in the city of Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, Brazil, under the guidance of its young founder-educators, who delivered for the community a space of teaching and learning, of living in community, educational debate, pedagogical experimentation, and more careful and gentle relationships.

The purpose of building an institution for pre-school education entails guaranteeing the manifestation of the human essence, the foremost principle of Casa Fundamental, with children aged from 2 to 7 years old, in full time period, during the morning and afternoon, from 9am to 5pm.

The school’s essential duty is forming opinionated citizens, capable of analyzing, synthetizing, comparing, understanding, and acting in varied situations, aiming the interests of man, as individual, or as the collective. Casa Fundamental aims to make available to its students conditions to be able to fulfill these ideals.

In 2018, the first working-year of our school, our school community is of 41 children and their families, 15 teachers, 6 of them being in the pedagogical coordination, and 8 employee-educators in the sectors of the snack bar, cleaning, administration and gate.

We are a tight-knit group of learning.

1.2 – DESCRIPTION OF THE EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE

With the help of the narratives mentioned in the twelve chapters of the Literary Book for Alphabetization “In the elephants’ path”, the paths of our activities followed what is there of most importance in educational actions: the consciousness that all and any learning must be shared with the other, the environment, the world, and that no results are achieved in solitude.

Stricken by chapter 7, “Ivory, the jewel of the elephants”, children and teachers went in the search of more information about the elephants’ extinction and found a sad and close reality, mainly because the permission for the commercialization of ivory given by the president of the USA Donald Trump in 2017 is one more threat to the specie. Therefore, stricken by the reality that they found, the project “Captive, don’t capture” was created.

The certainty that we needed to make something for the elephants followed the program that, basically, is presented through the dissatisfactions put into questions by the students, and that represent the project’s main trajectory, through the two stages mentioned bellow.

2 - MAIN TRAJECTORY

2.1 - First stage – Jewell of the elephants

- why is the ivory captured? What is it good for?

- how do the hunters capture the ivory? Where do they take it? How do they transport it?

2.2 - Second stage – Elephants are sacred!

- if the hunters don’t know that the elephants are sacred, we need to explain it to them!

- let's take care of the elephants! We need a lot of people to help us with the cause!

In the pedagogical routes of the two stages, all practices of learner-maker touched the following areas of knowledge: math, technology, the arts, multiple languages of programming, the acquisition of linguistic codes, the body and the environment.

Bellow, we describe the execution of the project from the principles of the maker movement and the approach of creative learning.

Execution of the project: maker movement approach

Part 1 – The logic in programming

- i) In order to understand the trafficking of ivory, the children understood the concepts of laterality and spatiality with the knowledge of their bodies.
- ii) With the programming sign they could simulate with routes how hunters escaped investigators and managed to get to China. Here, it was necessary to understand about Asian geography.
- iii) Therefore, they created their own programming game, “Route of the Ivory Trafficking”, that had saving the elephants safely as its main aim! Getting to China was a huge risk and it was necessary to take the elephants to the oasis!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ERP25GIUxXs&feature=youtu.be>



First picture – the body as a means of knowledge



Second picture – Programming using Cubetto

Part 2 – Campaign #EveryElephantMatters

- i) Campaign launch #EveryElephantMatters: video production for social media: here, children were divided in producers, art directors, photographers and video editors.
- ii) For the campaign, hand-stitched elephants were handmade by all of the school community, the students' families mainly.
- iii) Production of written and oral manifestos, and funk music (Brazilian musical genre) with the name of Elefunk. For the music, the lyrics and melody were composed by the children. Comic books were written to promote the campaign.
- iv) Around the school, promoting the campaign and the Maker Day event.
- v) Production of art in shirts for sale and earning money for the campaign: tie dye and stencil.



Picture 3 – Maker Day

Third Part: Maker Day

- i) Manifesto presentation.
- ii) Presentation of the games created by the children: using the Cubetto, the “Route of the Ivory Trafficking” game.
- iii) Sale of the hand-stitched elephants, all customized by the children for raising money for the campaign.
- iv) Presentation of Elefunk music.

ELEFUNK

Be, be, be, before, save the elephants (2x). Mister Hunter, pay close attention. We are children, and we know a lot. We are here to send this message. Leave them alone, leave them alone, they're sacred! Be, be, be, before, save the elephants (2x). Mister Hunter, think fast! If you don't stop, I won't see you on the way. On the way of the elephants that are part of Nature. Bringing us joy with all their beauty! The savannah is the place, the elephants live there. They spread seeds where they pass. They spread seeds wherever they go. They spread happiness wherever they go. The savannah is the place, the elephant lives there, they spread seeds where they pass. They spread happiness wherever they go. Be, be, be, before, save the elephants (2x). Search and learn about the animal life, elephants are good, hunting is not legal. This is a campaign, a global campaign. Count me in with Casa Fundamental.

In the featured link we can listen to the music:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hf_y8Btwuyg&feature=youtu.be

3. CONCLUSION

3.1 – Results

The results obtained clearly transcended borders. From Brazil to Africa! Besides contributing to the funds of NGOs and sanctuaries for the elephants' protection, we got the school and the nearby communities to get to know the reality of the extinction of elephants, and contributing to causes of protection.

Besides that, students could work on widely on the abilities which are necessary in their age group: acquisition of linguistic codes, laterality, spatial notions, environmental notions, and numerical concepts. Other abilities were also extraordinary in the education of our children: programming, modeling, prototyping, video production concepts, and melody and poetry production.

For us, the commitment with creative learning is the most productive result in an educational methodology that makes sense. The articulation between narrative, creative learning and group production showed how this route is productive.

3.2 – Value for the Educators

The experience with the “Every Elephant Matters” campaign allowed all of us in the school community the possibility of using the learned concepts, the transformed material, the established relationships, to act in society significantly. Knowledge is the reason for real intervention

in society in the Every Elephant Matters campaign in order to contribute for the survival of another living being – one of the terrestrial mammals.

To the educator, the most important is the inspiration to guarantee, in the learning environments, the gift of working with concepts and enabling the creative abilities in our students, through real situation, not forging the reality, as it frequently happens in schools, but creating pedagogical routes that give the students a way for acting sensibly to solve critical situations in the society they live in, be it their home, school, or their street, be it in their city, their country, or the planet. This is real knowledge. This is the power of creative learning.

Mathematical alphabetization, abilities to solve problems, environmental awareness, empathy, Portuguese alphabetization, ability of acting out in a real and global context, body knowledge, development of computational thinking, team work, collaboration, stitching, design abilities, and many other abilities were developed by the students in the project. As a formal private school in Brazil, some of these abilities and skills are not mentioned in the curriculum as a whole. On the other hand, our teachers monitor and evaluate all of them.

At the same time, we know that one of the most common worries of educators is: How do we start creating hands-on spaces? Another would be: how do we integrate the curriculum and the social-emotional abilities using spaces of creative learning?

Narrative, Teacher Formation and Specialists' support were the strategies we prioritized that guaranteed the creation of ways to knowledge, the methods, and that call the attention as effective strategies and tools. And how does all this work in the school Casa Fundamental?

3.2.1 – Narrative: Bolivar (2002) understands the narrative as the structured quality of the experience, seeing it as an explanation, capturing the richness and the details in the meaning of human affairs, based on evidence from the world, from life. We rebuild the experience reflecting about the meaning given to what happens. The narrative (the texts from the literary book *In the Path of the Elephants*, book that was written exclusively for Casa Fundamental) was used as strategy and work tool, for it enabled that the paths to knowledge were structured by the teacher, so as to guarantee the children the discovery of the reality of the elephant extermination, or the recognition of one bit (electronic bits) or the use of handmade tools in contextualized form to understand the construction and reconstruction of reality in an organic way.

3.2.2 – Teacher Training: weekly meetings with two hour duration that enable the team of educators to think of the present and the challenges the children pose. Normally, during the first hour of the meeting, they have the opportunity to put their questions, reflections and worries about their lives forward, as well as the result of the assessment of the students' development, their emotional awareness and curriculum aims. During the second hour of meeting, specific interventions (seminars, workshops, etc) about concepts and necessary tools for the development of the projects activities are created. Subjects such the maker movement in education STEAM, robotics, and alphabetization in the Portuguese language, designing tools and Brazilian literature as examples were approached.

3.2.3 – Specialists support: throughout the weeks, specialized teachers were invited to take part in the second hour of teacher training. Other teachers were available for the educators through several channels of communication to help in what was necessary. Besides that, every week our educators have a private meeting to discuss points of the project with a pedagogical coordinator that works basically as the curator, a counselor. Throughout these meeting, they can together talk about some aspects of the project, and for the teacher these meetings also work as a platform for taking decisions about the students' learning processes in a more assertive way, but also lighter and less isolated.

Children are human beings that build their life experience supported by the certainty that they need to grow. Learning everything that is necessary with this purpose is what they do. And they learn things which are highly complex as their brain establishes its connections in the atomic level. What is impossible for a child, when guided, challenged, sustained, and elevated? Nothing is impossible to them.

