



## EXPERIENCING AND TEACHING – A PEDAGOGICAL EXPERIENCE WITHIN THE SPECIFIC DIDACTICS OF GEOGRAPHY

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### **Abstract:**

In this paper, we present a pedagogical experience with future teachers of the 1st Cycle of Basic Education and kindergarten, with the objective of introducing spatial and geographical concepts in their levels of education. We have based our practice on Kieran Egan's stages of children cognitive development, and on a spatial approach, which states that relationships between space and man are established when positive experiences occur in them. The significant experiences that happen in a given location allow the understanding of the geographic reality and of the concepts and contents of this science. The experiment was structured in two phases. In the first one, the future education professionals carried out activities as if they were the pupils. The activities took advantage of local resources (both material and immaterial), such as historical heritage sites. In those places, the students felt the difficulties that the children might have in the activities. Thus, the future teachers could adapt their activities to the age level they would work with. In a second moment, in professional practice, the students carried out some of the activities that aim at the understanding of space through significant experiences in the places where the pupils went: games and activities oriented to interiorize the geographical contents. The success of these experiences is presented and the results are discussed and sustained through the testimonies of the teachers and pupils.

**Keywords:** geography; significant experiences; space / child affective relations; early childhood education and 1st cycle of basic education

### **1. Introduction**

The spatial support in which we move is so present in our lives that we tend not to value it or assume it as responsible for aspects or phenomena of behavior that we attribute to social, economic, political or cultural factors. The organization of the

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territory, urban centers or localized social phenomena is usually explained by several sciences, and Geography is not always highlighted as an area of fundamental knowledge.

Attention to space, its social construction and individual or collective experiences are directly linked to the standard of life. Thus, attention to geographical aspects should be started as soon as possible, in order to train active citizens towards the space support where they are included.

Therefore, in education, we must provide meaningful experiences and moments so that space acquires importance, symbolism, sense of belonging and leads to the formation of an identity. Space is lived-through each person's experience, it acquires meaning. *"...Reducing the world to a spaceless abstraction ... [has] very limited utility"* (Hubbard et al; 2002: 39)

The interiorization of space, on a personal and collective level, is acquired from the significant experiences we live in the *locos*. Positively or negatively, the experiences that we try out connect us to the space where they occur.

Familiarity with the space is always incomplete without physical contact. Getting to know a city does not just happen by sightseeing, visiting monuments, or participating in attractions. The lights, the smells, the sounds and the experiences, positive or negative, which occur to each individual in a given space, are the true responsible for this interiorization.

Consequently, the experiences we live in a certain place induce us to make it part of our personal history and create relationships of affection or repulsion with the place where those experiences took place. When we travel, we get to know places, people, habits, customs, smells and environments; but those that are imprinted in our memory correspond to the spaces where something significant surprised us, or any occurrence made them meaningful. We create empathy with the place, it belongs to us and we, somehow, belong to it.

The study of spaces and territories must take into account that these are not innocuous for individuals – they acquire meanings. These sensations lead us to like places, and, by extension, Geography. Thus, the introduction of geography in the lower age groups should be concerned with giving space-based experiences that lead to a training for the observation of the landscape and its explanation. If children understand the functionality and the reasons that lead (or led to) the organization of a space, they are more likely to understand it and to connect with it, making it part of their individuality.

The weight of Geography, in kindergarten and in the 1st Cycle of Basic Education, is not big. In Childhood Education Geography is "lost" in the so-called natural sciences; space is only used to establish some simple opposites, like countryside/city, day/night, with a poor level of explanation. In the 1st Cycle, Geography is shown as a science which essential aim is to memorize concepts, such as mountains, forms of coastal modeling, districts, the countries of the European Union, or the economic activities of each of the Portuguese NUTs.

In an age where information is all around us and is connected to all spaces, also in schools, kindergartens and our homes, it is necessary that we reflect on this and take a step further: leaving the screens and going to a real place and landscape, observing, touching and, above all, experiencing the spaces we are in, assimilating the information and data in a real way, not in a virtual one.

In schools and kindergartens, many teachers try to overcome the bureaucratic and economic difficulties, leading students to meet the landscape. However, what is currently happening are visits to places that do not provide meaningful experiences for children. We all probably remember school trips that were marked by the experiences and experiments that happened to us, not so much by the knowledge that we were supposed to acquire. The memory is linked to the remarkable experience of traveling, the conviviality, not the acquisition of knowledge. What is intended with the teaching of Geography is that it becomes meaningful for children, going beyond the conviviality and closer relationship that the output provides, enabling the experience in a more profound and enriching way.

Given that Geography is one of the most effective tools to deal with landscapes, we have to try to provide experiences to introduce it effectively from an early age, as one of the essential objectives and tasks of the teachers. As an instrument, we can always use local resources, so that the children can progressively prepare themselves for wider realities. The expression of George Benko (1999: 145): "*Thinking global to act local*" acquires more and more sense. The basic idea of this project is to provide pedagogical tools that, in a practical way, introduce didactic-pedagogical aspects, enabling future professionals of education to use local resources to pass on a message of global experience.

One of the most transversal instruments that can be used is nature itself. It has immense educational potential, both in a broader perspective and in a narrower sense. Education for the environment is not restricted to the respect, use, usufruct and interpretation of the natural space; it also opens room to teachers and pupils' relationships, self-esteem and citizenship. In addition to these aspects, environmental education is not restricted to a notion of natural space; it integrates knowledge and landscapes where human activities are distinctive embedded in space, and where areas such as History, Geography, Sociology, Economics, among others, are also present.

A dimension we have always wanted throughout the project is the link to the regional and local realities (with emphasis on the geographical perspective). This approach, itself, is a field that drives to the development of diversified processes of understanding the environment, allowing leveraging resources that, being external to the school, can and should be used in the teaching and learning processes.

Considering this, we conceived a project, within the framework of the Pedagogical Practice, in the Superior School of Education of Portalegre (Portugal), which would allow students to be prepared, once in professional practice, to provide meaningful experiences to their pupils. It was intended not only to introduce geographical concepts, but also to make the children feel part of the local and acquire tools to explore other spaces. The first phase of the experiment was called "Weekend in

Serra de São Mamede Natural Park", taking advantage of a local resource, but making use of a comprehensive approach that prepares them to explore other places.

For a child, Geography and space, being concrete realities, appear as abstractions. If the father is in Helsinki and the mother is in Madrid, the child only knows that they are far away. Absolute distances are irrelevant. The father is no closer than the mother, nor the opposite. The distance is incomprehensible; that is, an abstract reality.

Space is a complex notion and its awareness is only possible if the child is attentive to it and realizes its importance through integrative experiences, which later make the notion of space intelligible.

Children get to know the places through physical activity that allows them to understand the functionality, the history, the natural and social aspects present in a certain spot. Although the geographic reality could be an abstraction at a young age, experiencing something meaningful leads the child to empathize with the place and to be able to understand it.

In order to do so, children need to experience the space, to feel some emotion that makes it intelligible, consequently appropriating and integrating it as part of themselves. One can achieve this objective through the creation of a story's plot for children to identify themselves with the characters and to live the story through them. This perspective is well illustrated by several of Kieran Egan's (works 1990, 1992, and 1994), where narratives structured according to children's stage of cognitive development are used to convey concepts of historical time. What allows this perception is how the child engages and identifies with the characters and integrates into the action.

In "Stages of Historical Understanding" (1990), and especially in "Educational Development" (1992), Egan defines four stages of cognitive development: the Mythic (4/5 years at 9/10), the Romantic (8/9 years 14/15), the Philosophical (14/15 years at 19/20) and, finally, the Ironic. The first corresponds to the steps that interest us in this experiment.

For the children to be aware and able to integrate knowledge into their universe you have to approach them within the characteristics of their stage (the Myth), which, according to Egan, has four fundamental characteristics. The first characteristic of "mythical" thinking is its need for intellectual security; if we present reality in a mythical way, it will be within the reach of the child's understanding. The Myth provides "*exhaustive explanations of why things are as they are, and fixing the meaning of events through their relationship to sacred patterns*" (Egan, 1992: 23).

The second one is the lack of sense of spatio-temporal diversity and logical causality within the spatial context – "*the fact that children do not have the sense of the diversity of things can be explained simply as lack of experience and knowledge of change and causality on a historical scale and in a given geographic space*". (*idem*: 23) The third mark of infantile thought "*is the lack of a sense of the world as something autonomous and objective. (...) The world of the child is full of entities that acquire meaning through the things that the child knows best: love, hate, joy, fear, good, evil*" (*idem*: 24).

The last characteristic, perhaps best explained by infantile thought in its interpretation of reality, is the articulation of reality from well-defined binary oppositions – “*children begin to give meaning to things in binary terms*” (*idem*: 25) .

It is from this theorist framework that we structure our experience of introducing geographical, spatial and historical concepts. On the one hand, the activities must provide a knowledge and appropriation of the space through the experience and experimentation; on the other hand, the activities should be structured according to the characteristics of the children's cognitive stage, the Mythic.

Kieran Egan (1992) argues that the child, from an early age, can manipulate abstract concepts and interpret reality if introduced to it according to its mythical cosmogony. For example, good and evil or love and hate, being highly abstract concepts, are not an impediment for the child to manipulate or understand them.

Children do not have the reflexive capacity to know the space if not by experimentation and physical contact. At preschool age, the child is essentially concrete. Theories of cognitive development that inform education emphasize logical-deductive aspects, ability to understand phenomena, and manipulation of concrete and abstract concepts. Piaget (1968) emphasizes logical-mathematical ability and the capacity for abstraction by establishing, even with flexibility, age groups to understand and manipulate concepts, more abstract or more concrete. According to this author, only from the age of seven does the child begin to manipulate concepts that are more abstract.

Also, Yi-Fu-Tuan (1983), in chapters 3 and 10 of "Space and Place", marks the need for experiences by humans in general and also by children to get the notion of space. By internalizing the place where a meaningful experience took place and evoked (positive) emotions, the child becomes able to understand it, therefore becoming aware of what is going on or what is happening in it. Tuan advocates that the knowledge of space is personal and comes from the experience of the experiences that occur in specific cultural contexts that influence how we know and appropriate the geographies that surround us. Geographers linked to cultural currents do not look at space as a social construction that comes from how society is organized and how society produces it. It is not the relations of production or the structure of society that make us aware of space, but rather what we learn from our close environment through individual experience, though also filtered by the cultural context to which we belong.

What we present in this paper is an experience of integration of cognitive and motor aspects through the activity of space exploration. The children are involved in making concrete what apparently is abstract, in order to meet their imagination, and presenting concepts they can internalize when they carry out activities in significant contexts and with a playful component. This approach embodied the Curricular Guidelines for Pre-School Education, as well as the Curriculum Targets defined by the government, proving to be effective and with positive assessments and evident success. The process had distinct phases: the first focused on making the future teachers get in touch with significant spatial experiences - they played the role of children trying various activities. In a second moment, some students, in their pedagogical probation

period, introduced and experimented with the children the activities they had worked before, evaluating and validating didactic strategies.

## **2. The pedagogical practice. Brief Theoretical, didactic and methodological contextualization**

Within the curricular units for the preschool and 1<sup>o</sup> Cycle of E.B., instruct the students with two ways of introducing geographical concepts. We concluded that playing activities that stimulate integral development (motor and cognitive) would be the most effective in achieving the main objective of this stage of the educational process - the harmonious development of the child. If the space is a learning context, we can get the child to understand and internalize it, leaving a mark that allows the association of the concept to the space and vice versa.

The approach of this project was carried out in an action-research perspective. This type of pedagogical perspective allows flexibility in the research process that adapts to the course of the experiments and allows adjusting the course according to the children, individually and collectively. Action-research *“é uma intervenção em pequena escala no funcionamento do mundo real e um exame próximo dos efeitos de tal intervenção”* (Máximo-Esteves; 2008: 19). The same author on the following page (citing J. Mckerman, 1998) draws attention to the flexibility of this position regarding intervention in context, in general and particularly in pre-school education: *“(…) investigação-ação é um processo reflexivo que caracteriza uma investigação numa determinada área problemática cuja prática se deseja aperfeiçoar ou aumentar a sua compreensão pessoal (...) é uma investigação científica sistemática e autorreflexiva levada a cabo por práticas para melhorar a prática.”* (Máximo-Esteves; 2008: 20)

This experiment was not intended to be an extensive investigation, but an experiment considered as a Case Study. We thought that this methodology would be the most adequate to test our objective: to verify if there is more effective internalization of contents by the child when presented through games that integrate cognitive and motor skills in a significant space context.

Although the results could not be extrapolated, the conclusions allow us to point out ways of thinking. *“A investigação qualitativa é uma forma de estudo da sociedade que se centra no modo como as pessoas interpretam e dão sentido às suas experiências e ao mundo em que elas vivem”* (Vilela, 2009:105).

With two pedagogical pairs (set of students on stage), in two different classes of kindergartens in Portalegre, having 21 and 19 children respectively, the two games were prepared including History, Geography, motor coordination and physical activity. The comparison and validation of the results were carried out with two other control groups, consisting of two pedagogical pairs placed in another kindergarten, introducing the same concepts in a more traditional way.

The concepts were related to daily life in the time of the Roman Empire and in the Middle Ages. These themes are often treated in Portalegre, due to the rich regional heritage, in particular: the Roman city of Ammaia and the village of Marvão, with a

medieval castle with unlimited educational potential. In this castle, the medieval tournament was staged; in Ammaia, the game was performed simulating the transport of water in a Roman city.

### **3. Pedagogical weekends in Serra de São Mamede Natural Park - Local Resources and Pedagogical Practice**

The proposed tasks were in accordance with the legal and curricular framework of Pre-school and 1st Cycle.

From the Basic Education Law to the National Curriculum of Basic Education, and also the Curricular Guidelines for Pre-School Education, we wanted the approach to the teaching practices to be integrated. We bear in mind a call for an ecological and environmental awareness and the use of simple and local resources which imply that learning is not limited to the classroom (well-equipped as it may be), but that it goes beyond the school walls.

The concept of "competence" encompasses not only capacities, social and inner attitudes but also knowledge; it integrates the ability to mobilize previous notions to be able to act when people face a situation and make use of their skills, even in contexts that are less familiar to them.

We try to develop in the future education professionals a mentality to go beyond the curriculum matters, understanding that education has a broader sense. Sir Ken Robinson, in his presentation at TED Talk 2006 (Monterrey), stated that the speed of change is so fast that no one can predict how the world will be in 5 years' time. However, we are asked to prepare the children for an unknown reality and with the tools that can make them survive in the complexity and unpredictability of the future. International institutions, aware of this reality, have also built guidelines for education that emphasize the main abilities to develop in children and young people, which go far beyond the curricular and academic logic.

The educational goals for the 21st century that are intended to take part in the formation of the students are connected with developing skills and competences in extracurricular areas. The OECD (Rychen et al., 2002 2003, McGhee, Dexter, 2002, OECD, 2016), the European Commission (2012) and UNESCO (Education 2030, 2016; Schools in Action, 2016) point to the need to equip students not only with knowledge, but also with tools that give them the ability to interpret reality, social and individual relationships, as they are intended to face a globalized world. The ability to deal with and seek autonomously knowledge and information, problem solving and solutions are more important than the accumulation of contents and knowledge about a world that, inside a classroom, seems artificial. The active methodologies that allow the approximation to reality are the most capable of preparing students for an uncertain future. By being able to investigate and manipulate information autonomously, they can decode the world, whatever it may be. As a starting point, in pedagogical terms, it is intended to put situations and problems related to the real and to the nearby (or distant) environment, but never disconnected from the concrete life and from the needs

of individuals and communities. Through this process, critical thinking and the search for solutions to problems are promoted, not only to achieve marks in tests, but also to stand by problems and realities that should emerge from the concrete world, in an integrated way and related to the life of the common citizens.

The child naturally possesses intellectual curiosity about the surrounding environment, whether it is a natural, constructed or intervened one. Working from this reality, we are influencing the taste for knowledge, for the innovation and for the investigation and observation of the landscape in a critical informed way. To promote that attitude we must provide activities that simultaneously connect children to space and to the concepts that we intend to introduce. Thus, in order to meet the concerns expressed in the reference documents, but also to emphasize essentially the aspects that arise from the social contexts and environments, we highlight the construction of an ecological and social approach that can lead to an attitude of conscious preservation of the natural, the men made, and the cultural heritage.

The "Weekend in P.N.S.S. Mamede - Local Resources and Pedagogical Practice" intend to provide the future professionals of the 1st Cycle of the E. B. and kindergarten teachers' active didactics. Also, the playful character of learning has to be evidenced; the pleasure of learning and mastering certain skills requires effort, concentration and personal investment, but it must be compatible with playfulness. Pre-school and Basic Education should be directed to the success of children's learning, promoting self-esteem and self-confidence so that we can promote conditions that create and develop competencies in the children. We can enable each one to evolve and recognize that they can still progress in knowledge and in the ability to deal with diverse situations.

This line applies to all children and youngsters, being essential to bear in mind that knowledge implies perseverance and personal investment, but that the ultimate goal is also to acquire competences for integration and participation in society. The existence of a playful character is not only productive, but predisposes the individual to a greater appetite for learning and knowledge.

The actual transformation is not only related to the technological advance and the change of social and economic relations, which are reflected in the territory and alter the landscapes; the changes due to the anthropic action have caused an acceleration in the alterations of the environment, which leads to the need of education practices to be oriented to environmental sustainability.

Environmental education appears in this way as an instrument for enhancing knowledge and for developing skills in the social environment, which reaches its full potential in a local and regional base. We can find definitions of environmental education that are transversal to various societies. In Brazil, the Ministry of Environment proposes a definition that fits the objectives of this Pedagogical Project. "*Environmental education is understood as the process through which the individual and the community construct social values, knowledge, skills, attitudes and skills aimed to the environmental conservation, as well as the common use of the people, essential to a healthy quality of life and its sustainability.*" (National Environmental Education Policy - Law no. 9795/1999, Art 1º - Min. Of Environment, Gov. Fed. Brazil - free translation).



As we can verify in the definition, the concept of environmental education has extended from an area of the natural sciences to an area of action and analysis in other fields of knowledge, such as Geography. In this way, the project also follows the concept of environmental education and adjusts itself in the area of World Knowledge and Study of the Environment.

One of the opportunities that we intend to offer to future teachers is to make known local spaces and ways to explore them, both in terms of knowledge of space, and with regard to the social and affective development of children in preschool and 1st cycle, always in a playful way.

Sensitization to the natural and human sciences has been carried out in contexts that tend to become significant for the child and which provide and reinforce the connection to the local environment and culture, and can convey feelings of belonging to the group and the community in a sense.

It is through Geography that children and citizens acquire a sense of belonging to local, regional and national spaces. History takes place in spaces, these acquire different meanings, both by their intrinsic nature, and by the way, they are manipulated and used by human beings, during different times. The contact with these realities prepares the students, fomenting and developing their preparation as intervening citizens.

The spatial awareness of individuals will thus be reflected in the quality of life of the populations, as well as in the promotion and appreciation of natural and built spaces. For this reality to become richer and more meaningful, the need for historical understanding complements and integrates spatial reality as a natural and human whole. The activities that we proposed were to be integrated in the Study of the Environment and in the Knowledge of the World, in its more general and transversal objectives, developing specific concepts, contents and competences of History and Geography.

The Weekend project at P.N.S.S. Mamede, in a different way from traditional teaching practices, intended to provide students with specific techniques and teaching skills so that they could meet the requirements not only as teachers, but also as citizens in the different educational contexts where they develop their activity.

The proposed activities were not just practical, since it was intended that spaces of reflection and exposition of the theoretical contents and specific pedagogical practices would be opened simultaneously.

### **3.1 Objectives**

- Mobilizing and integrate theoretical and practical knowledge acquired in the scientific-didactic components of the curriculum;
- Promoting the analysis and the development of pedagogical strategies within the scope of History and Geography, having as reference the curricula of the 1st Cycle and the Curricular Guidance's of the Pre-School Education;

- Developing educational methodologies appropriate to a pedagogical action that proposes to construct an educational project focused on the child and aiming at their promotion and development, in the personal and social dimension;
- Designing and building pedagogical materials capable of conforming with active methodologies, centered on the child and their integral development.
- Establishing and encouraging ways of working in partnership with local and regional institutions and resources.
- Promoting a positive attitude towards the contact with natural and historical realities, locally based, in order to prepare education professionals with dynamic work methods in the teaching and learning process.
- Proposing techniques of reinforcement of the sense of belonging to a group, self-esteem and self-confidence that prepare students to deal with different realities.
- Promoting collaborative working habits.
- Strengthening pedagogical relationships.

In order to operationalize the Weekend, three fundamental aspects have come together:

- the first aspect was linked to the natural aspects and environmental education, (provided by the environmental education services of the Natural Park);
- the second one was a Geographical approach, related to the curricula;
- the third one, in addition to playful moments, provided didactic / pedagogical techniques, which will enhance the pedagogical relationship in the future practice.

The activities we organized in partnership with the Natural Park services were as follows:

- Good Practices' Code;
- Along the Sever river ...
- Pedestrian walk to observe the environmental aspects.
- Discovery of the jewel of the Natural Park
- Pedypaper of orientation and knowledge directed to the environment, fauna, flora and landscape aspects.
- Night-time oriented activity for insect watching.
- Marvão walking tour - Trekking with landscape interpretation.

In these activities, and with the agreement of the technician who accompanied us, interventions were made on the geographic and historical aspects, as well as didactic aspects that could support future interventions in school practice.

Didactic and Pedagogical Activities:

- Games to increase and reinforce self-esteem and self-confidence.
- Games to increase the sense of group and personal responsibility.
- Guidance activities with letters, compass and natural elements.
- Landscape interpretation activities from a geographical point of view.
- Visit to the Roman ruins of the City of Ammaia.
- Guided tour to Marvão and its castle.

- Games and activities in the own historical monuments that relate space with actions that would occur in the daily life of these places, in their historical eras of origin.

The games we imagined provided meaningful moments for the students to internalize the space and to experience it. Thus, the first concern, apart from the playful nature of the games, was to create a scenario that would refer to the historical period in which the actions had taken place. In the Roman ruins we used helmets, cardboard shields and plastic swords. In the castle, the same shields were used, swords and water balloons (which can be replaced by foam balls), in addition to other common equipment that do not involve great investment and are innocuous.

In the castle of Marvão a medieval tournament was simulated. A student stood in the center, with small plastic rings hanging on their open arms. The two opposing teams consisted of two elements each - a horse (the one that carries the fellow on the back) and a rider, armed with a sword and shield. They had to take possession of all the rings, in the shortest time. The first team to remove all the rings was the winner.

The second game held in the castle was the "defense of the princess". A student (the princess) was placed in the center of a square of defense. Another group of students defended her with shields. The attacking team used water balloons to try to hit the defense soldiers. When the defenders were hit, they left their place, opening a fissure in the defense, which would expose the princess a bit more. As soon as the princess was caught, the game finished.

In the Roman ruins, we imagined other games: "Food Hunting" and "Bringing Water to the City". In the first activity, we tried to demonstrate the probable difficulties of seeking food for a city in the age of the Romans, appealing to the imagery of books and animated films that children know. Thus, toys were hidden, representing food (hunting) around and inside the ruins. The teams tried to find them, following the group's instructions that had hidden the goods. For the 1st Cycle, the orientations were given based on cardinal points and for preschool, left / right instructions, developing laterality.

In the second game, we took advantage of an old stream of water that passes in the ruins, but which is still in use to transport water. We organized two teams, who had to take water from the stream to fill a bucket, using a plastic cup. Thus, the student closest to the stream filled a glass of water and received an empty one from the colleague, passing the full glass hand-in-hand, to the last element that would pour it into the bucket, forming a chain; the first team to complete the task would win.

We can summarize this project as a way of presenting specific didactics to future education professionals, allowing them to introduce geographical concepts to the students but, fundamentally, provide them with meaningful experiences of living in the spaces that mark them from an early age, which will certainly contribute to more participating and interventional students.

#### 4. Presentation, analysis and discussion of results

The project intended to provide children with activities that linked them to space and simplified the acquisition of concepts of History, and mainly Geography, in a playful way. To make it happen, in partnership with the students, we developed pedagogical strategies to be used in a period of approximately one month, in which the children's feedback would be assessed through the observation of the Educator and classwork and games performed later in the classroom to have a real evaluation of the success of the strategy.

We based the assessment on qualitative data. The response given by the children was rapid and assertive, when questioned about the themes that were the base of the fieldwork, the reading of stories about the subject of activities (in the visited places). They easily solved activities alluding to the concepts (ordering and/or grouping cards or with tasks, dramatizations and role-plays) which allowed the success of the results.

The children had previously been prepared for the themes, through stories, local legends, books with illustrations and small excerpts of videos, about the realities that they would visit, the adventure spirit of the characters of the stories and films were transmitted and the strong and brave knights, who were preparing for the fights were seen in Disney movies and the adventures of Asterix and Obelix, in the Roman times, filled the children's imagination. The preparation created an environment and expectation in the children, regarding the school trip to the places where, in their children's imagination, similar scenes to those presented in the room had taken place.

Alongside this work, the pupils constructed some props for the children's manipulation - clothes and utensils, wooden horses, plastic swords, and cardboard shields, like in their previous experience.

The group of 40 children, aged 4 to 6 years, accompanied by four students, two educators and two assistants, visited the city of Ammaia. After having visited the ruins, they performed the game: "Taking water to the City in the time of the Romans". The excitement of the children soon began when they started to wear the props. Cardboard helmets and suits, made from large rope-bound plastic bags took the children to assume their Roman's roles and other striking characters they had 'known' in the movies presented in the Kindergarten. In the middle of some agitation, they performed the game, which the trainee students had done before.

In the castle of Marvão, the activity was the simulation of a tournament. In one of the larger spaces inside the castle, the children were divided in several groups. With a sword and a shield, two children stood at two ends of the yard. Again, they reproduced the game that the students had accomplished during the Pedagogical weekend. In addition to developing motor coordination, these games foster team spirit, mutual support and group organization, as well as compliance with rules as essential requirements to achieve a common goal.

Learning depends on multiple factors, objective and subjective ones. Physical and spatial factors, such as comfort, quality of teaching materials, and access to technologies are fundamental to the educational process. However, there are intangible

factors without which one cannot achieve pedagogical goals - affection, well-being with oneself and with another, but also the relation with space.

If the child empathizes with space, they are more predisposed to learning and, ultimately, if they fail in their attempts at learning, they will not feel defeated or frustrated and will be all right both with their peers and with adults. By providing facilitating experiences of access to knowledge and appropriation of space and making it possible to be closer to it, it is more probable to construct learning frameworks and introduce concepts of geography - the observation of the environment, spatial functions and physical and humane characteristics. At the same time, it develops interdependence, group belonging, responsibility and the valorization of self-esteem, offering the child an opportunity to activate a set of social skills for discovery and learning.

The results of this experiment cannot be linearly extrapolated to other realities and contexts. Nevertheless, they show that there are countless ways to allow reflections for transformations of pedagogical practices in Kindergarten and 1st Cycle, where the importance of space and geography can take a much more relevant role and importance in the training of children.

The results of the project have been very positive and encouraging for our approach. However, in the context of pre-school education it is always difficult to quantify and measure them. In addition to this, the research-action methodology tends to value qualitative, rather than quantitative data, in preschool practice; the use of instruments to achieve quantifiable and objectively measurable results is something that still raises many questions, as well as doubts in different theoretical frames of didactic thinking.

The evaluation of the results was qualitative and constructed from the opinions of the children that were registered and systematized. We focused our attention on the notes taken, the knowledge about the eras and small questionnaires from narratives that approached the subjects considered. Drawings were also analyzed, and small problems of ordering and grouping cards were solved, as well as role-plays. In addition to these data, the kindergarten teacher's opinion and observation, shared with the observations of the students, was also an assessment factor. The contrast with the control groups allowed an empirical validation of the results and their comparison with the answers and opinions of the other children. The performance of the children involved showed that the project not only provided basic learning and internalization of basic concepts easily and effectively, but also developed social skills.

Positive results? Undoubtedly, but the children's commitment was a more salient Indicator. Children 'transported' themselves to the old ages, living space and life as it was, a long time ago, in those ruins.

## **5. Final considerations**

We are constantly dealing with space problems, from our everyday life spaces (at home, or work), to wider spaces, such as cities or countries and regions. The geographical

understanding of phenomena makes our attitude more interventional. Encouraging it from an early age should be one of the educators' objectives – the training of curious interventional children. Turning to local resources, so that students can progressively prepare for broader realities, seems obvious and appropriate, especially when dealing with young age groups.

The idea is to give our children the necessary preparation in order to allow them to deal in a practical way with space reality. Didactic-pedagogical interventions that enable future professionals of education to use local resources, to pass a message of global experience through space education, should be one of the training objectives of kindergarten Educators.

The main dimension presented in the project was the connection to the regional and the local, emphasizing the geographical approach. Geography is an advantage to the understanding of diversified and complex processes; studying space needs to distinguish and recognize all the dimensions that are expressed there. For the school it is possible to shift resources, even those that being external can and should be used in the processes of teaching and learning.

The experiences that we live in a particular place will be part of our personal history. We establish relationships of affection or repulsion with a space, where experiences occur. We travel, we get to know places, people, habits, customs, smells and environments; those that are printed correspond to the spaces where something significant has surprised us, or any small or great fact made sense to them. We create empathy with the locals – they belong to us, and we belong to them.

The sensations lead us to like places and, by extension, Geography. The early introduction to this science through experiences and pedagogical practices that lead to the taste for the observation of the landscape and its explanation impresses on the memory experiences and appreciation for the space support. If children understand the landscape, the functionality of spaces and the reasons that lead (or led) to its organization in a certain way, they are more likely to understand it and to connect with it. They will undoubtedly be more capable of dealing with reality and with an uncertain future. That skill is an essential aspect for survival, in a world where innovation and the rhythm of change is so fast that defies familiar patterns.

This project intended that the children understood the reality. The games in the historical spaces allow the child to capture the abstract, dealing with the concrete. They allow you to realize the importance of physical support for human activities. Through these striking experiences, children are affectively linked to spaces, humanizing, understanding and appropriating them, transforming them into meaningful places and understanding concepts and contents essential to their education.

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