

WORKSHOP NOTES

a record of the Creative Workshops
VISÕES ÚTEIS (USEFUL VISIONS) / VENCER AUTISMO (BEATING AUTISM)

pilot-project
(October 2015 – June 2016)



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“Thus, while the damages caused by development disorders horrify us, we can also see them as creative processes – for even though they destroy particular paths, particular ways of doing things, they can sometimes force the nervous system to find other paths, other solutions, obliging it to an unexpected growth and evolution...”

Oliver Sacks

index

1. Introduction	page 4
1.1. project synopsis	page 6
1.2. the partner institutions	page 6
1.3. the target audience.....	page 6
1.3.1. characterisation of the group of trainees of year zero (2015/2016)	page 7
2. Characterisation of the Creative Workshops	
2.1. the assumptions	page 8
2.2. general objectives	page 9
2.3. programmatic and methodological guidelines	page 9
2.3.1. steps	page 9
3. Sessions	
3.1. concerning time (planning and unpredictability)	page 10
3.2. concerning space (physical and material conditions)	page 10
3.3. concerning content (a general overview)	page 11
4. Exercises – some examples (materials, synopsis, descriptions and impressions)	page 12
5. Assessment and conclusions.....	page 25
6. References and Support materials.....	page 27
7. Biographies.....	page 28

1. Introduction

In 2015 the artist collective *Visões Úteis/Useful Visions* was challenged to conceive and implement, in collaboration with the association *Vencer Autismo/Beating Autism*, a training for children and young people with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), which would use activities and exercises concerning the artistic experience and training in theatre, adjusting them to the necessities and difficulties of these trainees. This challenge was born from the experience of a family member of an Asperger teenager, whom had witnessed the significant positive impact of a previous experience of this young girl with theatre lessons, yet also of her close knowledge concerning both the activity developed by the association *Vencer Autismo/Beating Autism* as well as the activity developed by *Visões Úteis/Useful Visions*.

Thus the “Oficinas Criativas *Visões Úteis / Vencer Autismo*”/“*Creative Workshops Useful Visions /Beating Autism*”, started being designed, and were implemented at Porto between 2015 and 2016, made possible through the combination of a public support and a private investment – an unusual situation in our area and in our context.

Training in particularly challenging contexts as well as working with groups and communities at risk of social exclusion is, and has been for many years, a characteristic of the regular activity of *Visões Úteis/Useful Visions* and, namely, of the activity of its Educational Service. At the basis of this work is our belief in the transforming power of the contact with the arts and with the artistic training. A belief supported by experience, but also by the several studies and investigations that have been proving it – as those recently developed in the field of Neuroaesthetics or, to give an example in our country and in our area, the work published in 2017 by the investigator, actor and theatre director José Eduardo Silva, contributing for the development of a scale of assessment of the impact of the theatrical practice in the individuals’ sociocognitive complexity.

Due to all of this, we believed we could indeed design and carry out a training that would respond to the specific difficulties of these children and young people, all the more since we would have the support of an experienced association such as *Vencer Autismo/Beating Autism*. It seemed clear to us the obvious connection between the particular work developed on theatre training and the variety of deficits with which individuals with ASD struggle in terms of socialisation, interaction, individual expression and communication with others.

During the investigation we undertook for the preparation of the Workshops – notwithstanding the previous experience with Asperger students of one of the trainers, this was, in a large extent, an unknown work context for us – nevertheless, we found great difficulty in finding theoretical support for this conviction of ours. We have found several references to the beneficial connection between Autism and Arts, experience reports which were more focused on the preparation of shows and less in the training without the purpose of public exposure, we have found the work of Amelia Davies and the experiences of SENSE Theatre®, at the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center, run by Blythe A. Corbett in the United States. However there was not a more thorough investigation, no scientific support, no theoretical basis which would allow, from the beginning, to fundament the interest of our training to a deepened level, beyond the more superficial value of “healthy entertaining”.

In a coincidence that only later we would acknowledge, in September of 2015 – precisely when we were preparing to begin the Workshops in Porto – the study “Improvement in Social Competence Using a Randomized Trial of a Theatre Intervention for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder” was published, developed by Blythe A. Corbett and a team of investigators. In it we can find the results of an experience which tested the effectiveness of the intervention based upon theatre and mediated by pairs with a group of 30 children with ASD, with ages ranging between 8 and 14. At the end of the intervention, composed of 10 sessions of 4 hours, the investigators observed improvements in terms of social competences, difficulties in communication, ability to play within a group and face memorisation.

This was the first (and so far the only) work we found where a scientific basis is stated, with measurable results, for the defence of the benefits of a theatre-based intervention in these children and young people. Notwithstanding the possible existence of other similar works, the fact of not being easy to obtain this kind of data sparked our desire to increase the potential impact of our training. To a large extent, the information sources that we have found while preparing our Creative Workshops were the record of artists who implemented this kind of *workshops* or creation experiences, and the testimonies of autistic trainees, namely their recognition concerning the benefits that the encounter with the artistic practices has brought to their lives.

Thus, we designed this first year of the Creative Workshops – in which we decided to combine the potentialities of visual arts to the training set on theatrical practices – as a first experience of learning, testing, observing and constant redesigning of our ideas and proposals. Yet always with the desire that this would be just a first step in the development of an activity and of an investigation to which we could come back to, with a regular nature even, as a yearly line of activity within our Educational Service, whose results could gradually increase its impact and feed the study of the benefits of artistic practices in therapeutic contexts.

These “Workshop Notes” are the record of this first step or pilot-project. They have as main ambition the sharing of our objectives, of our difficulties, of the exercises we have implemented, of the little victories achieved and of the barriers to overcome with all the interested community, whether they are therapists, teachers, investigator, relatives of children and young people with ASD, or other artists who desire to develop similar projects.

In order for this sharing to be as wide and comprehensive as possible, we translate this record to the English language and we have made both versions available freely (Portuguese and English) at the “Gallery” of the *Visões Úteis/Useful Visions* site, and we also had a special attention to the descriptions and key words attributed to the documents, in order to facilitate the indexation by the search engines and, thus, enhance its diffusion.

These “Workshop Notes” are, also, a record of our desire to continue doing. And doing better every time. Or, as Samuel Beckett would say, failing better every time.

Ana Vitorino, Artistic Director of *Visões Úteis/Useful Visions*
May of 2018

1.1. project synopsis

The **Creative Workshops Visões Úteis/Useful Visions** in partnership with **Vencer Autismo/Beating Autism** had as main target audience children and young people with Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD), namely Highly Functioning Autism and Asperger Syndrome.

On its pilot experience, the Creative Workshops have occurred throughout 10 months, from mid-September 2015 to mid-July of 2016 (9 months of contact, period corresponding to the school year + preparation time + assessment time). In this year zero, 68 sessions occurred as well as more than 100 hours of contact, of interaction with a group of children and young people with ASD, relatives and surrounding community.

The training was composed by two weekly sessions in the facilities of **Vencer Autismo/Beating Autism**, in Porto – with the length of 1h30m each – oriented by two experienced trainers. These sessions combined activities and exercises from the areas of the performing and visual arts, and were designed in order to enhance the benefits of the artistic activities within the context of the characteristics and specific needs of these trainees.

1.2. the partner institutions

The collective **Visões Úteis/Useful Visions** develops for more than two decades an artistic work characterised by collaboration, by the intersection of the different arts and by a strong ethical sense linked to aesthetic exploration. On its productions and, mainly, on the activities of its Educational Service it has consistently developed initiatives which include the work with different communities and with excluded populations – housing districts' residents, senior populations, inmates, immigrants awaiting legalisation –, seeking to intersect audiences and defy prejudices. Approaching exclusion through artistic practices is an integrant part of the collective's identity.

The two trainers of these Workshops – Ana Azevedo and Inês de Carvalho – make part of the team of **Visões Úteis/Useful Visions** for a long time, participating not only on its creations – in the areas of acting and set design – but also guiding several of the initiatives of its Educational Service. The trainers also had the support of Ana Vitorino, Artistic Director of **Visões Úteis/Useful Visions** and graduated in Psychology (Clinical Area) by the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences of the University of Coimbra, and Carlos Costa, Artistic Director of **Visões Úteis/Useful Visions** and with a PhD in Theatrical and Performative Studies by the Faculty of Letters of the University of Coimbra.

The partnership with **Vencer Autismo/Beating Autism** added to this dynamic and experience the specific *know-how* as well as a broader and committed vision concerning the approached disorders. The Association **Vencer Autismo/Beating Autism**, founded in 2010, has developed several activities for a bigger awareness and sensitisation towards autism, having brought to Portugal the training The Son Rise Program®, with the purpose of providing the families with children and young people with autism tools in order to help them develop their highest potential..

1.3. the target-audience

The Creative Workshops are a training destined for children and young people with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), namely Asperger Syndrome and Highly Functioning Autism. On this year zero of the project (2015/2016), the Workshops were experienced by participants with ages ranging between 2 and 21 years.

The project is more relevantly applied to an age spectrum where the cognitive, expressive and interaction/socialisation skills are still being developed.

People diagnosed with ASD suffer the consequences resulting from cognitive gaps and behavioural deficits – in the field of communication, of decoding the contexts and situations, of the expression and of the interpersonal and social interactions on various levels. In parallel, to these pathologies are also associated particularly rich and complex ways of apprehension and interpretation of reality, of relationships and of emotions – which, when explored creatively and performed, bear a relevant artistic potential.

This project aims for the fulfilment of the diagnosed gaps – placing the artistic tools at the service of autism's specific deficits -, simultaneously transforming in strengths aspects which are commonly denominated as weaknesses – encouraging their creative potential -, helping these children and young people to understand and defend their role on society, never ceasing to express their individual identity. The Creative Workshops aim for the promotion of an

increased self-confidence on individual performance and on social interactions, through the exercise of a better understanding of emotions and actions, on themselves and on others.

Children and young people with ASD suffer not only with their own difficulties but, mainly, with the maladjusted ways in which society tries to deal with them; it is thus relevant to promote new relationship contexts, where the comfort and the freedom are ensured, so that the lacking social and affective competences can be worked; children and young people with ASD, in their majority, have a difficulty in communicating, in expressing their feelings and emotions, in finding their autonomy in the world, because they cannot articulate their necessities and desires at any given moment; they normally cannot follow the rhythm and the rules established by regular school, they show difficulties in making or maintaining friendships, they cannot establish nor keep relationships outside their core family or of their caregivers.

1.3.1. characterisation of the group of trainees of year zero (2015/2016)

Carolina (16 years) – young teenager, verbal, deeply inspired by the musical and magical universe of fantasy. Bearer of an enormous creative capacity, she responds well to the physical and verbal challenges. She adores drawing and she does it with a lot of detail and colour. When motivated, she takes on the exercises in a surprising way yet, as a counterpoint, she presents a lot of inflexibility when the proposal does not motivate her, or when the former does not correspond to her plan of game/action/themes for the moment. And, in that case, she becomes very resistant to everything that is proposed. Sweet in temperament, she discovers each day new challenges due to her immense curiosity for everything that surrounds her.

João (21 years) – young adult, with relevant motor difficulties and practically non-verbal. João communicates through his sweet gaze and writes in a surprisingly brilliant way. With some stereotypies which immediately indicate his state of mind, João participates in a more distant and observant way and, when he feels involved, he “embraces” the group as well as the proposed challenges. Bearer of a remarkable sensitivity, he absorbs everything with enormous ease, interpreting the events at his own very personal way. He writes his summaries and impressions from the classes in a unique and poetic tone, sharing with the group his emotions when facing each challenge.

Teresa (10 years) – pre-teenager child very curious and attentive, although sometimes more withdrawn and difficult to conquer; demonstrating, despite this, a great imaginative ability. Very intelligent, bearer of an incredible memory, with excellent physical and verbal skills. She does not present relevant stereotypies, yet her humour is oscillating, which requires an extra effort on her conquering. Curious, dynamic and a perfectionist in everything she does. Demanding with herself, with an enormous ease in comprehending the proposed activities. Teresa left the group in the middle of the year since she changed to a school outside of Porto.

Joana (10 years) – very dynamic child, happy, with clear signs of hyperactivity; the biggest difficulty she presents relates to concentration, her not being able to dedicate herself to a same task for more than a couple of minutes without dispersing; which compromises from the start any idea of completion. With some stereotypies, obvious and occasionally disruptive, she is very agile on a motor level and reveals good verbal skills, although not very coherent when writing, an activity where a disperse, fragmented and dismantled thought can be found. She responds effusively to any and all material stimulus, from where her difficulty in maintaining a focus during the session derives. Energetic and very eager to interact with others. Joana joined the group in the middle of the year, a few sessions after Teresa left.

The Workshops were also attended by:

André (3 years) – non-verbal child, younger brother of two young adults, also autistic. Very agile on a motor level and particularly in the fine motor skills, showing interest, focus and concentration in the fitting of solids and shape and colour alignment, forming rigorous patterns. He never effectively entered the group, yet when he was present he was effusively welcomed, especially by Carolina and by João.

Pedro (6 years) – enthusiast and active child, verbal, attending therapy sessions of Vencer Autismo/***Beating Autism***. Integrated the group sporadically, participating, with interest, in several activities.

Tiago (2 years) – happy, confident and very developed child, on a motor level, non-verbal, tried only one session.

2. Characterisation of the Creative Workshops

2.1. the assumptions

The Creative Workshop Sessions are designed in a way as to enhance the benefits of these artistic activities within the context of the characteristics and specific needs of these trainees. The combination of activities from the area of the performative and visual arts allows for a widening of the work scope, offering a wide field for creative experimentation, where the non-verbal expression, the sensory exploration and the simple act of “doing”, “acting”, and doing it in a group is given special attention.

The theatre training experience increments self-confidence and bodily and vocal awareness, simultaneously stimulating the interaction and the discovery of creative freedom within defined rules.

Theatre game and interpretation enhance the development of social and communicative competences in a safe and controlled environment. They are also particularly useful in the practice of recognition, identification and emotion expression- essential tools for any actor.

The combination with activities from the visual arts area allows for the broadening of the scope of these sessions, offering a wide field for the creative experimentation where the non-verbal expression and the sensory exploration also have a paramount place.

It is this place of intersection between *performance* and visual arts that allows to explore, to learn and to practice that “acting”, in all the shades of its essence and in all the intensities of its outlines. Practice and experience within artistic context will create conditions of conscience and domination of strategies for social and human interaction, that shall allow the trainees to live better with themselves and with others, better controlling their performance.

The Creative Workshops intend to be that space of special functioning, of freedom and of immersive creation in which, in some way, we, trainers and training space, will meet the trainees. So that afterwards, we can exit together and, simultaneously, with a reinforced social and individual conscience.

Progression in the training allows for the transmission of a series of strategies to deal with the outside world. The practical benefits of the training translate into the dynamics of socialisation, into the development of empathy, in knowing how to work in a group, in bodily awareness, in recognizing situations and emotions expressed by others, in the choice of the correct way to respond in any given moment or interaction – functionalities studied and developed by actors during their work.

In parallel, the project includes a work of assessment, record, reflection and synthesis of the problems and the evolution of the group, of the proposed methodologies and practices, of the results and of the real and phased impact of the project. The trainers maintain an internal work *blog*, where the materials produced in the sessions (photos, videos and texts) are placed, as well as observations, impressions, and reflections about every work moment. This *blog* represented an important impressive document collection, organising information and materials for the most thorough and informed continuous assessment.

Besides the sessions *per se*, the weekly record of their results (through the internal blog) and the formulation of this final reference document - synthesis of practices and reflection -, we also envisaged as an assumption of these Workshops the previous survey concerning the difficulties, necessities and expectations of the trainees and the final assessment of the initiative’s impact, within the group of participants and with the contribution of relatives and other potential close assessors.

These two initial purposes were those that revealed harder to achieve. We were confronted with the difficulty of concentrating the entries and previous assessments of the trainees in a single and first moment, and also with the inability of collecting a structured and diversified final assessment. This year zero served, however, for us to do the survey of the characteristics and procedures needed for this assessment, namely, for us to create questionnaires suited for the relevant information at each moment and for the entity to which they are intended.

2.2. general objectives

- _self-confidence acquisition on individual performance and on social interactions;
- _development of a notion of individual self-esteem;
- _promotion of a notion of group identity;
- _acknowledgment and comprehension of emotions within himself and in others;
- _development of a more accurate bodily and expressive awareness;
- _acquisition of a better control concerning tone of voice volume;
- _conquering of a better control in the range of gestures and body movements;
- _acquisition of expressive competences which ease interpersonal communication;
- _promotion of a space of creation and aesthetic-artistic enjoyment;
- _learning of new competences for the performance in a group activity;
- _development of an activity, in continuity, which generates an idea of commitment.

2.3. programmatic and methodological guidelines

In this year zero of the project (2015/2016) we kept very much in mind the idea that we wanted the Creative Workshops to function as a facilitator context of moments of contact (physical, emotional, relational):

- _of each participant with himself – *who am I today here, now? how do I feel, what do I want, need, desire?*
- _of each participant with the physical space surrounding – *how can I move, what can I touch, what can I do? where, how, can I? what will I find? where do I feel safe?*
- _of each participant with the other – *who is (in the) present today? what do I want to tell you, make, ask? what do we do, discover, find together?*
- _of all the group, between themselves, with the space and in time – *how are we going to position ourselves, relate with space, with the materials, with each other? what will happen (to us)? what is going to transform (itself)? what power do we have today, what necessities, what wills, what desires?*

The Creative Workshops intended to create a space - physical, social, emotional and of creation -, a place of encounters, of discovery and of sharing, provider of safe and free interaction contexts. A place where the individual and specific characteristics of each trainee, that “outside”, in the world of normalised socialisation, tend to cause problems and misunderstandings, could be seen and worked as being the most valuable, for being eminently creative and related with an artistic vision of the world and of emotions.

2.3.1. steps

BLOCK I

On the first big stage we become aware of the physical space and, together, became aware of each other, of each individual within the group. We give time to the group formation as a set of individual entities that are, slowly, revealing themselves. In an environment of security and trust, a freedom of expression is allowed which can even be quite individual.

BLOCK II

On a second moment we try to generate intersections between the individual spaces of each group element and are alert to the discovery of contact points, commonplaces, expressions which are in some way connected. We seek to create a feeling of comfort, of continuity and of stability through way of belonging – of the connection to experience, to the space and to the group, through the realisation of the individual action and of the interactions and dialogues deriving from there. The observation of own expressions and of the other produces a feeling of awareness, of understanding and of acceptance, and it is through these expressive intersections, generated by the functional interaction of different individual entities, that a more effective and consequent trust begins to germinate.

BLOCK III

On a third moment the bridge with the rest of the world is created, a bridge where the *performance* – arising from the idea of “play”, of “making for himself and for others”, of “making something together” – may bring benefits on several levels. The children and young people with Highly Functioning Autism and Asperger Syndrome do not develop the usual and progressive socialisation learning, for which the dimensions explored within the context of the visual and performative arts may arise as true tools for the interaction and for the decoding of situations, emotions and reactions (of themselves and of others).

3. Sessions

3.1. concerning time (planning and unpredictability)

While planning and, afterwards, accomplishing each session of the Creative Workshops, we have found a more “elastic” form of time. No matter how much we planned the sessions, we quickly understood that they would never run as planned. In fact, we never invested much on this exercise on futurology. Rather, we planned the present and “made it happen” every minute, every second, of the hour and a half of the duration of each session.

The planning ended up being more related with the theme choice, with the question to be taken to the session and, very particularly, with the materials selected in order to confer tones and “temperatures” to that proposal (literary or plastic, visual or audio); it related more with the way of how we organised the space and with the ways that that time “to be inhabited” opened – or that we imagined would open.

There is the time of arriving; the time to understand who is present, as well as the disposition; the time to feel the group’s energy and motivation; the time to meet and present the proposal. And from thereon, the session acquires a time of its own. In a sort of roller coaster of moments in which a minute or two, or even a small instant, fulfils the purpose of the session as a whole.

Each session was prepared with its differentiated narrative motto (literary, visual, audio, material, sensory) serving as a proposal, invitation, formal start for something we knew we would never be able to predict; what we could indeed do was to be focused, attentive, with the listening senses keen in order to follow the path or paths that were being drawn.

Each session had, in fact, its unique story and we, as trainers, tried only to be guardians of the access gates – of entry and of exit –, the caretakers of the spaces, not only exterior, but also interior, emotional, physical and material, assuming our position of guarantors of an integrated stability, of the needed comfort and security. It was up to us to design the appropriate contexts for each discovery and each exploration, to open paths and build bridges, to inspire, to encourage, to support the journey of each participant as well as the common journey of the group in each session. And our learning was always being updated, from session to session, without formulas or predefined formats.

3.2. concerning space (physical and material conditions)

We know that, on the whole, space and its physical and material characteristics condition what happens, having a strong impact in the way of being and doing of the individual and of the group. And we know that for our trainees this question is particularly important and decisive concerning the way they position themselves and relate in sensory terms. The space of the room is the first instance of physical contact that the trainees experience for which it must be safe, comfortable, seductive, and effectively transmit the suited environment at every moment and according to the practical necessities of each class. The space must respond to the physical necessities of each session, but also of each group and, in a closer scale, of each individual. It must be cosy, seductive and inspiring even though, in a first stage, void of information for there to be enough scope for the construction and the filling with personal elements corresponding to the motivations of each participant (students, trainers, relatives).

The lighting of the space must be cared and prepared for each moment and for each intention. This is a fundamental aspect that must never be disregarded. For each session different lighting layouts may be prepared that allow to create and play with different light intensities, responding to diversified emotional intensities caused by the exercises, or responding to the needs of the group and of each one.

To demarcate in the space a centre of reception and of completion is essential for the creation of an arriving and welcoming routine, yet also to ensure that there is a place of escape and pause where, during the session and whenever there is the need for it, calm may be restored, the confessions heard and the experiences shared.

It must be a space in some way unified and centralizing, with few corners and stripped of elements which may disperse or disturb. The acoustics is fundamental. The echo may be extremely disturbing and conditioning.

As time passes the space becomes familiar and acquires the desired facilitator role of wellness and of a good predisposition for work and discovery. The physical space becomes the emotional and intimate space, where

everything that happens remains. It will always be a space of memories and reflections which help build, layer after layer, in a relational and progressive investment.

Nevertheless, this familiarity and this at ease, which naturally happen throughout the sessions and with the accumulation of experiences, may, at some point, make the space of the room so intimate that the students may start feeling that they are allowed to do whatever they want, breaking the established rules. It is, therefore, essential to identify these moments and intervene in advance, renewing and adapting the space to the new necessities.

3.3. concerning content (a general overview)

_mapping exercises: awareness of the spaces of the body and of the room

Through the concrete observation of the spaces which our body occupies and which occupy the things that surround us, and of how that body and those things are composed, we can elaborate cognitive maps of the world. Organising, defining categories, is a procedure very present in the formation of concepts for the understanding of the world. To assume the body and the world in parts helps to better understand the spaces and places of intersection, hence of interaction. Resorting to visual and plastic forms of expression, we can recognise patterns of encounter.

_self-awareness exercises: bodily, expressive and emotional awareness

Through diverse tools, verbal and non-verbal, we use creativity to explore ways of being and of acting. We understand that there are varied ways of integration and, before an audience (colleagues or public), we learn how to use these expressive and creative tools for a better self-expression and individual presentation.

_visualisation exercises

To cut, to select, in order to see better. This is an aesthetic-expressive tool which we use complementarily to several exercises, making the creation processes visible to the group. To deconstruct in order to construct, to disassemble in order to understand, and leave visible in the space of the work room these processes, these transformations. These acts of recording or documentation promote a feeling of safety and continuity. And also of commitment.

_implementation, imitation and observation exercises

To look at oneself and at the other. The imitation and observation games allow for the broadening of social skills, to understand the other, to know how to wait, to observe and thus communicate and adapt oneself. To repeat and implement small actions, exploring them in several ways, extending the possibilities of new postures, assuming different characters or ways of being.

_decompression exercises

In the space and moment of the theatre, it is allowed to scream, to run and to stretch out, without limitations or castrations. In this space one learns to explore emotions, to show them without fear, being thus able to understand them. To decompress, to exteriorise, in order to understand and learn how to control.

_concentration exercises

The space of the creative expression is a privileged space of journey, of dispersion and of decompression. After being more freed and lighter, there is more room for concentration. The dedication to a short and specific exercise beginning from the concrete and the repetition, from rehearsal and improvement, having as final purpose the presentation at the end of the class is fundamental in order to motivate the student to define a path and concentrating on its implementation. It is important that these exercises, whose purpose is to stimulate the ability to focus, are well adapted to the group's dynamic, respecting each and every one's time, as well as of the group, without pressure, yet with purposes.

4. Exercises – some examples (materials, synopsis, description and impressions)

Here we present some of the exercises carried out during this year zero of the Creative Workshops, whose description we complement with some “impressions” recorded in the internal *blog* of the trainers after the respective sessions.

- MAPPING THE BODIES



materials: big pieces of cardboard; thick markers of different colours.

synopsis: drawing of the contours in a cardboard and filling each silhouette with “internal” information, specific of each trainee, selected by himself; a map of silhouettes which begins a process of self-knowledge, of recognition of himself and of the other.

description:

With the cardboards disposed in a vertical position and leaning against the wall, it is asked for each trainee to choose a colour and to stand, in the position of his choosing, so it is possible to draw the contour of his body. With the silhouettes drawn, trainees are invited to fill or add on “the inside of the bodies” what they wish (they can paint, draw, write their name, write their ages, likings and desires, etc.). In the following sessions, the maps should remain visible and present in the room, so that the students may continue filling that interior, adding information they bring from home: objects or representations of objects – that are glued or fixed inside the silhouettes -, important for themselves and for their life, in some way related with their motivations, such as flowers, rocks, cars, pencils, representations in modelling clay or drawings of favourite food or favourite animal.

impressions:

Initially, in the room that acts as an antechamber to the workroom, we drew the silhouettes of our bodies in white board plates and, inside that frontier, we drew/wrote things about us (facts and preferences, like for instance our height and the things we like, smells, flavours, objects). In the following classes, João took a rose crystal (that represents the energies in which he believes), dog biscuits (friend) and a pencil (represents the calling for writing, which is also the way he communicates best) for us to glue in his “map”. Inês took a cinnamon stick and Ana a modelling clay fried egg. Carolina and Teresa didn’t take anything, but they drew and wrote.

- 4 CORNERS GAME



materials: paper tape to mark 4 spaces on the floor.

synopsis: exploration, in a tangential and physical way, of the 4 big emotional territories: HAPPYNESS, SADNESS, FREEDOM, APATHY; to show through mimicry and/or sounds how we interpret these emotions on each marked space.

description:

Each corner or space in the room is marked on the floor (forming a square so that the representation may be directed towards the centre) and indicates a state of mind – APATHY / HAPPINESS / SADNESS / FREEDOM. It is requested of the group to occupy one of these spaces of the square and to “pretend” to laugh (joy) or to cry (sadness), to do what they desired (freedom) or do absolutely nothing (apathy), being thus only able to observe others in each space. This is an exercise of physical expression, not seeking to feel or deepen emotions too much, yet to understand how each one reacts, immediate, physical and expressively to their own idea of representation of each one of these states.

impressions:

We all passed more than once through each one of these corners, the trainees would express in their own way each state with our guidance and many times mimicking what we (trainers) did. In the end, it was requested for each one to choose the corner best liked in order to continue exploring and representing. It was interesting to observe that the trainers and the mothers (that is, “the grown-ups”) all went to “freedom” and the trainees (that is, the “children”) all went to “joy”, continuing to jump and laugh; deep down a form of freedom in which they feel more comfortable and happy.

- THE 4 SEASONS



materials: 4 different songs, different materials and textures.

synopsis: warm-up exercise which consists of exploring, through the space, feelings and key moments that represent each season for every one of them; the different songs, together with the trainer’s watchword, help the trainees to understand when the season changes.

description:

The trainer indicates the season and, moving along the space, the trainees try imagining they are feeling the sensations/emotions which correspond to that season (such as cold in Winter, heat in Summer, rain in Autumn...) as well as the most significant moments/events (going to the beach, taking walks in the garden, representing Christmas, jumping on top of the Autumn leaves, playing in the park...). Whenever the music changes, the season changes. The actions and expressions of each season must be explored to the limit, each one being able to discover individually the situation which is being represented or to join in a group, in order to create stories and interact in the universe of each season.

impressions:

We did a little warm-up through the space passing through the 4 seasons with the most notable actions of each one. We warmed up, stretched and imagination began flying, the “super-glow” (Carolina e Teresa) sprang into action and with everything more agitated we came back to the centre, to low light, to calm music and talked about the seasons, about the best and the worst of each one, up until the gifts for Christmas. Meanwhile João wrote about Summer, his favourite season, and about the sea. “What I like is the Summer because there is the sea and the sea is powerful and healing”. We took props, outfits and other materials in order to continue working within the season universe. With everything calmer, we prepared a fan. Carolina and Teresa accepted being blindfolded, João did not join and even tried to close his eyes, yet he preferred to watch his colleagues’ surprise when they started feeling the wind on the body. We explored the wind, the cold, the chill and it was refreshing. We were ready to face the bad weather so we got costumes, rain covers, blankets, hats...

- TELL-SING-READ



materials: 9 sheets (graphical scores) rolled up and placed inside cardboard tubes, numbered, in the vertical; on each sheet is an alignment of words-sounds (interjections and derivations within the same emotional family; ex: WONDER = oh! oooooooooOH! Ó ó ó H.....Ah!).

synopsis: each sheet is a graphical score, written in a way as to model/manipulate the intonations, using different sizes and intensity in the drawings of the letters, using and abusing of punctuations, composing a text that is to be told, while reading or singing or, more precisely, while vocalising, improvising freely.

description:

Each trainee takes a sheet and reads, trying to vocalise what is written, experimenting the biggest number of sounds and interpretative variations. For the non-verbal trainees, the trainer sets the example, seeking to open possibilities of imitation, for them to feel comfortable verbalising some sounds and variants.

impressions:

Inspired in the work “The book with no pictures” by B. J. Novak, we created a game to explore different sounds and their variants. The whole session was developed from this game, with solo vocalisations, in pairs or in a trio, with spontaneous choreographies, with solo or accompanied role-plays, resulting in a surprisingly creative way of answering (once in a while Carolina couldn’t resist commenting: “we seem like autistic little girls!”).

- ARTICULATED DOLLS



materials: full body photos of the trainees printed on A4 paper in black and white, scissors, tape, glue, tacks to unite the pieces, cardboards.

synopsis: plastic and interpretative creation work; character construction in order to develop improvisations, played situations or stories around the manipulation of the articulated dolls.

description:

Through the images of every one, printed on paper, and using their motivations and favourite themes, we will colour, paint, cut, and add new elements, such as costumes or props (capes, crowns, tails, hair). All of these elements are glued on a cardboard and afterwards the different parts of the doll are cut (head, torso, limbs). The cut parts are again united with tacks in order for the doll to become articulated. From the photos of every one, more or less fantastic characters are developed which are summoned for small improvisations and stories, where all the articulated dolls appear. Every one projects on his little "I" a character which he would like to be.

impressions:

We have been explaining that the classes are also of creative and plastic expression, and that to do theatre it is necessary to create other things and other conditions to "make happen". Low lights, calm music and points of light pointed at a wall, we invite everyone to sit down to watch a little improvisation (Inês and Ana) with the dolls. The attention was caught and, from that moment on, everyone wanted to try and the "theatre" began. The dolls jumped off the wall and ran the whole room, we flew through several planets and the journey was long. It ended up working well and being a success.

João wrote: "The green man is the healer. He seeks on the planet with a lot of density to make people love yet there are mundane super heroes which occupy people's minds with fantasies. The queen seeks the energy change and with open wings wants to fly, but the earthly fairies distracted with the rings of Saturn cannot see the glow in the eyes and in the unopened heart."

- TELL ME THROUGH MOVEMENT



materials: music, scenery paper, markers.

synopsis: seeking ways for provocation of the doing based on purely sensorial channels - action/reaction, emotion/expression, gestures made visible through the graphical and pictorial record; the exercise begins with music

as the provocative stimulus of the relationships with our own body, with the other and with space and, last and almost accidentally, with the sheet of paper placed on the wall, as an horizontal landscape ready to be marked, recorded or painted.

description:

A diversified *playlist* is prepared (classical music, music with different rhythms and sounds, with different instruments). First the body responds through movement as warm-up and musical recognition; we seek to move all the muscles of the face and body in parts and then the whole body freely to the sound of the melodic variations. In a second part, the songs repeat themselves, yet, this time, the trainees influenced by the several musical rhythms attempt, in a wall with stripes of scenery paper, to streak, to scribble, to draw lines, circles, which represent the musical variants. First the student is guided, the trainer accompanies hand on hand in a sort of dance with two partners and, afterwards, continues alone and free, drawing his musical “graphic” influenced by what he is listening and feeling.

impressions:

After the experience with the body parts and after the free style dance on a first “encounter” with the chosen songs, we focused on the graphical record of the emotions and sensations music causes in the body, channelling those strengths to the hand that inscribes colours on the sheet, that definitely marks it. Alone we heard the song and reacted with the trace produced by the hand, streaking the paper as if the heart was right there, inside the hand; in pairs we listened to the song and used the other one’s hand (Carolina was able to maintain her eyes closed while being guided through the drawing) to streak the paper as if in a dance (of trust) performed by two elements. It resulted in a kind of graphics, resembling musical electrocardiograms which are also like writing that can be read from left to right. It was a well shared, well danced, calm session.

- TELL ME THROUGH YOUR EYES



materials: chairs, tables, markers, sheets, scenery paper, paper tape.

synopsis: inspired in a known exercise of art/philosophy – *the blind painter* -, the exercise “tell me through your eyes” was designed; a group exercise (3 elements) where one (A) creates, painting or gluing pieces of paper on the wall, while another (B), with the back turned to that drawing “in construction”, tries to reproduce the same illustration/narrative that the third person (C) describes/reports verbally while simultaneous observing the record that “appears”.

description:

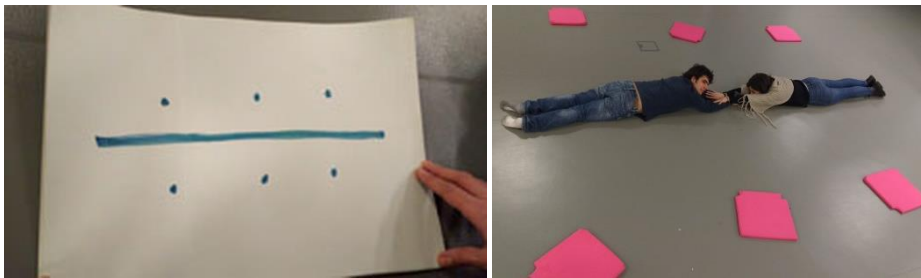
A very long white sheet is prepared on the wall, reminding a roll of film prepared for the capture of an image. The sheet divides in (for example) 5 areas numbered at the margin, leaving the full extension of the work sheet clear of information. The exercise develops from left to right as a kind of writing, afterwards allowing the “reading” of the result also from left to right as a long book page. The logic of the exercise is the following: one element of the group (A) intervenes directly on the paper placed on the wall, drawing and painting or gluing pieces of paper of a certain colour previously painted and cut, searching for a composition with recognisable shapes; while another element of the group (B) tries to represent (replicate, duplicate) within the space of an A4 sheet the spatial and visual situations which are happening (doing it through what he hears), seated with his back to the drawing and back to back with the third element of the group (C) who, directly turned towards the wall where the drawing “happens”, sees with his own

eyes and tries to describe as rigorously as possible to his colleague who, blindly, intends to reproduce what he hears described, only seeing what his hands create on the small sheet.

impressions:

The exercise was absolutely surprising, with moments of brutal revelation – when, for instance, two drawings (the one on the wall and the one on the small sheet) of the same moment are confronted, exposing not only everyone's ways of seeing, but also the ways of describing, communicating and thinking visually which become visible through the course of the process. The exercise ran sequentially on the space of the sheet, from left to right, from situation 1 to situation 5, but also in the space of the room, in one movement of passage or translation. We were able to determine that we all participated actively, in a collaborative way, jointly immersed in the exercise. The hour passed without us noticing and, in the end, each one told the story he saw exposed in the roll of film, a horizontal landscape, now inhabited and "happened" on the wall.

- SCHEMATIZE WITH THE BODY



materials: pillows, shoes, A4 sheets, markers, camera.

synopsis: through graphic sketches drawn in paper with dots and lines, the purpose is to reproduce each one of the sketches with the body and with the objects on the floor (imagining that the reproduction would be seen from up above). A game of observation, an awareness of space, of the body and of the possible relationships.

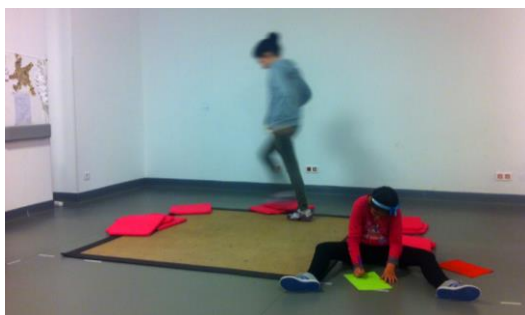
description:

Sketches on paper composed by lines and dots were prepared – each sheet is a graphic. Two by two, and after observing the sketch attentively, it is intended to reproduce with the body and resorting to some objects that may exist around the space the lines and the dots of the sketch in the positional relationship proposed by the composition. Seen from up above, the 3D composition of bodies and objects shall have to present the same composition than the one (2D) presented on the sheet of paper. A third element which is left out does a photographic record to be compared with the initial sketch drawn on the paper. Both are compared.

impressions:

In groups of two when starting and then all together. It worked really well and João adhered to everything and did all the asked positions maintaining himself motionless for the necessary time in order to compose the image.

- MIMICRY WITH LITTLE STORY



materials: music, list with 12 descriptions/mimics.

synopsis: 12 simple mimics with little story, actions which we recognise from day-to-day to explore without leaving the same place, allowing to work the body and the expression to the maximum.

description:

From a list with 12 mimics, the trainees choose a number in turns; to each number corresponds a mimic which is done without leaving their seat. Trainees and trainers must position themselves in a circle so that all can see what the others are doing, working the individual, yet in a group. After all the numbers are explored, the list can be repeated, this time with the possibility of interpreting the mimic throughout the whole space.

Examples:

1. to go up a very big ladder and to catch a balloon
2. to fall into a deep hole for a long time
3. to take a bath with cold water
4. to brush teeth and comb hair at the same time
5. to prepare a complicated dinner
6. to fall asleep standing
7. to backstrike standing up
8. to fly among the clouds
9. to walk without leaving the place
10. to become frozen with so much awe and surprise
11. to remain still
12. to catch a lot of rain on the head

impression:

A list of 12 actions to do, each of us would choose a number and afterwards we would do what was asked. Carolina, accompanied by her doll, was keen on doing everything. João, less active than the week before and with less energy, tried to accompany what I did with a lot of insistence on my part yet would end up sitting down and just watch Carolina "dramatizing" and exploring each action in several ways.

- PAINT AND PLAY



materials: 4 dice – one with colours, one with numbers, one with sound proposals and one with movement proposals (one proposal on each of the six faces of the dice); paper and markers.

synopsis: a drawing and painting exercise with rules dictated by luck and chance, activated by the fun dices; with the possibility of adding sounds and movements during the process.

description:

Each one or each group draws in black ink whatever they desire (just with streaks, leaving empty spaces). After being finished, the drawings are divided with horizontal and vertical lines forming a kind of grid. The purpose is to paint the drawings respecting the colours and the number of squares to paint – this information appears at the time of the rolling of the dice. On a first stage of the exercise only the dices with colours and numbers are used. On a second stage, after the rules were well implemented, the sounds dice is added for which, whenever each part of the grid is painted, corresponding sounds may be produced within their possible variations. Afterwards, the movement dice can be introduced, which triggers some action, reaction or position – these dice may be integrated after each task or at the end of the activity as a way of decompression and liberation. They may also be used individually for warm-up exercises on any session.

impressions:

Carolina drew a doll with a big hat and João drew a heart. Carolina excited and very perfectionist with the painting and João concentrated and dedicated trying to paint within the squares, and successfully. We made a big heart to paint and play together and it was at that moment that we introduced the sound dice we had to do while painting. It was fun. In the end, and to decompress, the surprise and reward of the position, movement and action, we all did what the dice “ordered”, jumping from a table, rotating the arms, doing the bridge, running, rolling... Success! Good disposition and growing complicity between the four.

- ROUTE WITH A BLINDFOLD



materials: long mesh yarn, blindfolds, chairs and tables existing in the classroom, sheets of paper, coloured waxes, watered black ink.

synopsis: a route of trust, a path which designs a journey as far as imagination, curiosity or the feeling of security allows, an important exercise in order to instigate trust amongst peers.

description:

A route is prepared led by several wires tied to chairs and tables to be done blindfolded, a trust exercise, a journey guided by imagination of an infinite space of creation. The dark and the path through the transformed space allow for different possibilities. The room must be dim lighted and the environment must be calm and quiet, as to create a feeling of comfort and security. The trainees who offer resistance to being blindfolded may do the route without the blindfold respecting the path the wires draw. At the end of each route, one returns to the start and the peers are exchanged – who was led has now the responsibility of being the guide and transmitting the same trust.

impressions:

We began the session in the space at the entrance of the room (the route was already prepared on the inside), we began by drawing with waxes on A4 sheets, as a sort of record of a dream, a journey wish. Over it we passed the watered black ink and the sheet was “left in the dark”. At the end of the session, and using the “grattage” technique, we revealed the drawings, our route, our experience.

Carolina accepted being blindfolded without a problem, concentrated and much more alert to all the sounds around her, she walked the route with a lot of trust and only got scared once with an object she wasn't expecting and, thus, when we exchanged and it was her turn to guide me, she was always cautious in warning me of all the objects around me. João also guided Inês, accompanying her, yet sometimes we would hear Inês calling him and he would again go and hold her hand, it was on those moments that Inês felt safe and confident thanks to João's hand. We swapped again and this time Carolina wanted to guide Inês, who, according to her, is very beautiful and loves her very much, for what she felt more confident. João guided me and ran away from time to time, yet whenever I called for his help he would immediately come to hold my hand and guide me. In the end we revealed the "route" of the wax drawings on the black sheets, the colours began appearing and the path became lighted, each one discovering with his interpretation. There was still a small moment in which João, with the help of Carolina, accepted being blindfolded and guided for a few seconds. And these are the big conquests.

- OUT THERE



The "Route with a Blindfold" can also be done outside. In that case, the path is adapted to the outdoor location, taking special care on its modelling, as to profit from the natural elements such as trees, branches and leaves, uphill and downhill, field accidents.

impressions:

Everything is different outside. Open and full of air.

We agreed that the session would be held outside, in the open, and we chose the Parque da Cidade/City Park, close to the Pavilhão de Água/Water Pavillion. Joana was very dispersed and we were not able to make her concentrate on the first part of the activity we proposed. At Joana's turn, it was her father who allowed himself to be blindfolded, immediately after Carolina, for the exercise of being guided on a sensory path through the forest (with the sight covered and, therefore, with all the other senses more awoken). He had never done anything of the sort, he had never been blindfolded, nor guided by another. Thus it was a strong and remarkable experience for him. He told us that it made him value more the blind's sense of space, and that he felt the space bigger, wider... Carolina already accumulates some experience on this type of exercises and, once more, responded very well. She fully trusted Ana as her guide and was swept away by imagination – she travelled through forests and beat a volcano! The route was drawn with a line of cotton in strong pink which connected trees amongst themselves and ended up in a table and benches made of stone. Oh the second part of the exercise, we asked for them to collect from the surrounding space 5 objects which they thought interesting and with the white line to choose a specific place of the route in order to tie them up/suspend them in the air. In this mission, both Joana as Carolina collected on top of the table much more interesting objects and Joana even prepared a stick, leaves, sand and rocks' pizza.

- BOTTLED EMOTIONS



materials: the book “The Colour Monster” by Anna Llenas, 5 transparent jars, coloured papers (yellow, blue, green, red, black)

synopsis: separating the emotions, understanding each one and thinking about what they make us feel; what do we feel when we are sad? What makes us happier? What do we miss most?

description:

We began with the amazing story about the colours and the emotions which they represent, “The Colour Monster” by Anna Llenas and edited by *Nuvem de Letras*, a story that explains emotions through colours. This Monster feels confused for he has all the colours mixed up and the solution given by his friend is to separate the colours into jars and to explain that to each one of them corresponds an emotion. In the end, the Monster adds a new emotion and fills himself with pink for he is in love with the little girl! The exercise instigates the separation and organisation of emotions as to better understand them. Each one writes or draws on the coloured papers which correspond to each of the emotions what is felt before each one, or what each one of those emotions makes us feel, and also in which situations do we feel that way. The jars start filling up and in the end we read aloud everything that was “bottled”.

yellow = happiness

blue = sadness and longing

green = calm

red = rage

black = fear

impressions:

After telling the story and commenting the theme a bit, we separated the colours into several jars and placed painted slices with the colours we had felt the most on that day. On papers of several colours we wrote what made us happier, sadder, calmer, with more rage and with more fear and placed the coloured papers on the respective jars. We tried for João to write, but he continued painting and cutting papers to put into jars and he kept seated and understanding what was being done. At some point I asked him what he was feeling and he pointed to GREEN-CALM. The jars started filling up and, happy, we noticed that YELLOW was winning in the quantity of papers filled with good things. Afterwards we read the papers of each jar, we especially enjoyed what was inside the yellow jar and we were questioning and finding what each one had placed on the other jars regarding the other emotions. In the end we realised that some emotions can be mixed up and even get confused amongst them for which we decided to build our COLOUR MONSTER. Each one, with the colours to which he relates the most, built his own monster filled with emotions and colour.

- STATUES



materials: material available in the room, chairs, tables and a wider space area.

synopsis: 1, 2, 3...statues! to stop in space, to maintain a position mastering (im)mobility, balance and body awareness; in which position am I? in which position do I want to be? how long can I stay motionless?

description:

the statue game can be developed in various scenarios and contexts. The basis is always the same: to stop in a fixed and expressive position when the music stops or when a watchword is given. It can be done as warm-up around the space, where the students dance freely to the sound of a song and, as soon as the song stops, they also stop in the position in which they were or create a new position. The stopping time grows as the exercise evolves and the students feel more comfortable with their body's immobility. It can also be developed in group. In a group, everyone tries to create a fixed image fitting on each other. The statues can be themes, that is, before the music stops a theme is presented (joy, awe, cold, Summer...) and the statues have to reproduce a position related with the theme or the intended emotion.

This game can still be done in a "sculptures" scenario. In turns, each one or each pair is going to sculpt the bodies of the colleagues creating a group image.

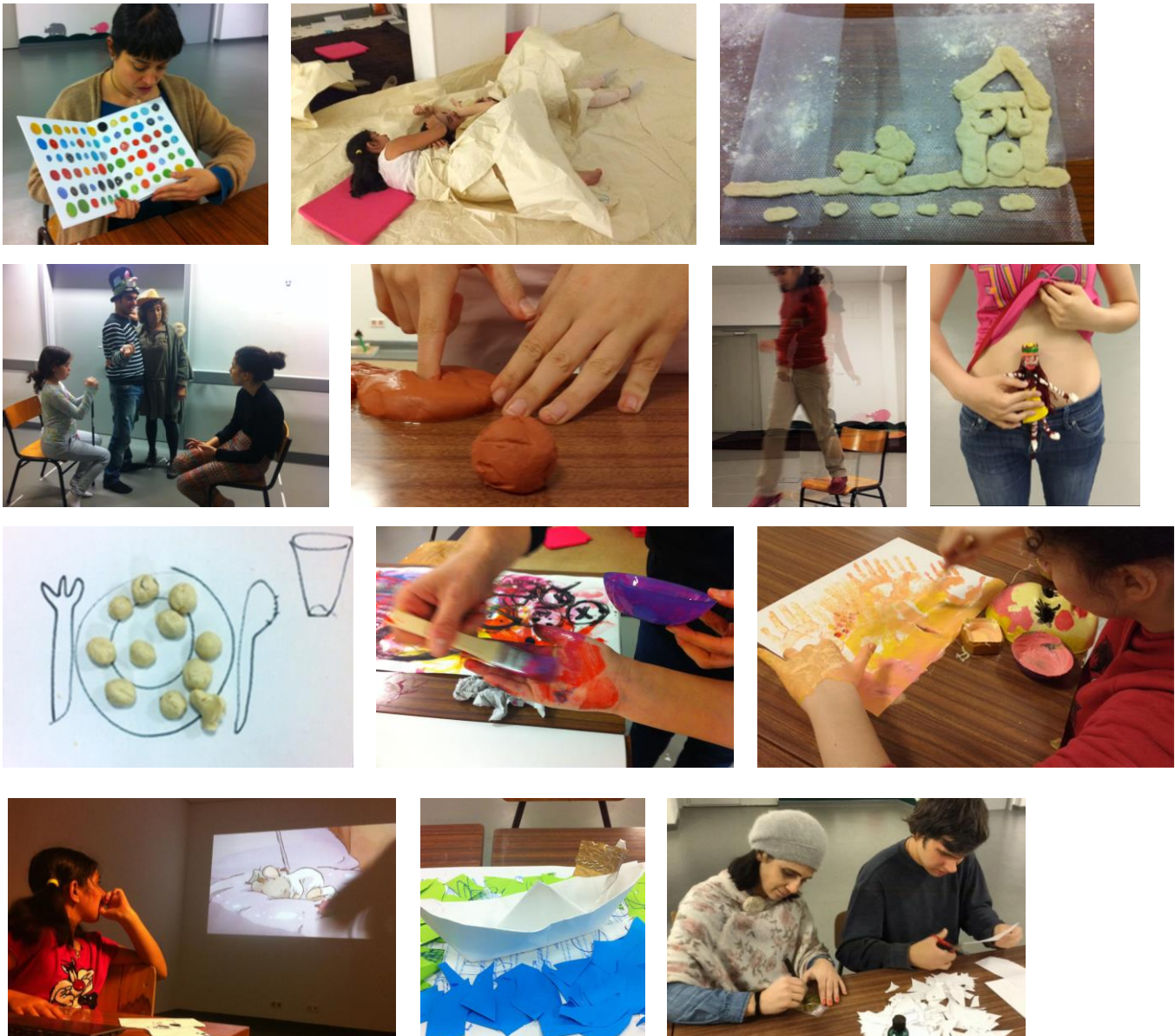
impressions:

For this session we took songs to dance to. Not random songs, but a careful selection of songs known to Carolina, corresponding to her motivations, and a set of songs with which we hoped to inspire João to dance. Carolina danced, first trying to reproduce the videoclips she knows very well, afterwards trying to find on her body expression a way of communicating what she was feeling at every moment. João doesn't dance a complete song yet, he has the need to stop or withdraw himself in order to release energies through his motor and sound stereotypes. He responds, although even briefly, to the musical stimuli in a way communicable to the group. At some point, João asked us to lower the music volume. When Ana stopped the music we stayed as statues.

We turned again to the statues. While we walked around the room in order to loosen up the body and relax, whenever the word STOP was heard each one would have to stop in an expressive statue for a while so that Inês and Teresa would draw the figures they were seeing. It was a good solution creating the representation through drawing since Teresa didn't want to do the exercise. It went very well. Carolina joined in perfectly creating statues of princesses, fairies and some real characters, João was able to remain as a statue for a long time and he appeared comfortable and happy, the drawings were becoming superb and were giving motivation to those who were "posing" as a statue. We evolved in the exercise, to group statues and ended up, in turns, moulding each other's bodies creating our own sculptures. We also did contact improvisation with the body, and Carolina and João also wanted to draw.

Teresa asked if she could go and get the golden frame to create images inside it. Few images were created because Carolina and Teresa quickly lost themselves creating a princesses' story. Meanwhile João sat down writing with his mother about the statue game: "The statue game: The bodies move and intertwine themselves around each other creating stories and images in the minds of those who look and walk by. I am a statue in an imprisoned body of rusty springs longing for life and writing a new story."

- other activities, materials and recurrent techniques



Books and, especially, **illustrated albums** are essential inducers to tell stories, to initiate a session, to introduce a theme, to raise a question; we can explore the story through very diverse activities, using inspiring materials (the simpler are always the most effective); we can improvise, perform, draw, construct and continue, or even reinvent the story: the characters are used to “play” and are the best opportunities to construct outfits and props or to create new scenarios for them; more than representing theatrically the stories told to us by the books, we are interested in using them as a mean to work ideas, emotions, sensations.

The **cutout** is a very effective technique for understanding the parts of the whole, for separating the whole in observable parts, for afterwards reconstructing in another way and in another direction; it became a very present activity in the sessions and a very effective way for communicating non-verbally; it is a quick way to act upon the material (paper, cardboard, tissue and even clay), which very quickly reproduces the effect of “doing” and transmits the immense pleasure and power of “transforming”.

Clay is the modelling element of choice; leading the focus towards the hands and fine motor skills, clay transmits earthly sensations – the soft touch, the natural smell, which calms and optimises an immersive, introspective moment, we can model with our hands or apply other natural elements, such as leaves and sticks, building wonderful landscapes.

Paints are a material necessarily present, they confer a much desired sensorial pleasure; the hands and the body quickly replace the brushes and, once again, the painting (just like the cutouts) has a very direct relationship with “acting”, “doing”, producing something; in the case of the paints, they relate in a very close, direct and even intimate way, the body and his gestures with the final product; we have verified that the pens and the waxes are often used for oral exploration (ending up in the mouth, being many times ingested), what makes the paints a more effective means because although dirtier, more exuberant in the doing, they do not leave as much free time to explore the object that mediates creation.

We use **paper** in the most various ways, in which writing, drawing or painting represents the smaller part; paper is a light material, safe and with a highly performative power when used in more radical scales (for example: sewing scenario sheets of paper until having a quilt which, besides covering the whole of the floor, can hide us in houses and caves); we can mould paper effectively with only our hands, we can pin it to our clothes making skirts and props, we can rip it, tear it and stretch and unite it again; incredibly versatile, white paper can be what our imagination desires.

Improvisation explores diverse and fundamental tools; creativity, interaction with the other and with the space; in improvisation we can create and invent freely; with only a few outside *inputs* we can create rules to direct a whole exercise of pure creative freedom; we can improvise from props, spaces, characters or stories. Time in improvisation is essential, we can use it as an important rule in an exercise, it may serve as a constraint that helps manage behaviours. When imagination starts flying it is hard making her stop, to end, and that is why it is important to establish the rules and time from the beginning. Time can be marked by an exterior voice who guides the exercise and warns that it will have to end soon. It may even be the exercise with the most rules or more constraints that delivers the biggest feeling of freedom.

5. Assessment and conclusions

The results of these Workshops on its year zero were assessed whether session by session – through group reflection, performed at the end of the work and complemented with the dialogue with the trainees' relatives, and through the reflection between the trainers -, whether continuously – through the analysis of the material produced in the sessions, its confrontation with the purposes outlined as well as the reformulation of the following sessions.

As we said before, a relevant part of what could have been the assessment of the impact of this initiative was not achievable on this first implementation of the Workshops. Nevertheless, it was possible to learn and to conclude much during the course of the 10 months of this pilot-experience, amongst all the little victories and the least successful moments, or everything which was left to experiment or to implement.

This first challenge left a great desire to continue, designing a second module of the Workshops which we intend to carry out very soon. For this design, the learnings and reflections gathered throughout this first experience were fundamental, which we share here also because we believe they are relevant for those who intend to develop a training in any way similar to this one.

- Pairs

Similarly to what we had already seen being pointed out in other experiences – like those studied by Blythe Corbett or those developed by Amelia Davies -, we ended this year zero persuaded that the existence of pairs, that is, non-autistic trainees, involved in a one-on-one partner relationship with each autistic trainee, would represent a considerable qualitative leap for the formation's impact.

Thus, in a second edition of the Workshops, it seems essential to us to bet on a training format that would open up to a mixed group, on which we would integrate pairs with particular interest in the assumptions and methodologies of the project – whether they are students (Psychology, Arts, or other relevant areas), young professionals or relatives interested in acquiring more competences for interacting with autistic children and young people.

- The age question

The age limits of the trainees integrating the Creative Workshops is a question that has been being debated practically since the beginning of this experience, and that should be quite pondered in the criteria definition for a second edition. It is a question of finding the suitable age ranges, so that a big variation does not undermine the adequacy of the proposed exercises – and does not introduce more “noise” in the behaviours and relationships from that which is already generated by the specificities of the autistic functioning itself -, yet also bearing into consideration that a classical age division is not necessarily useful in this context, in which maturity or abilities depend significantly on the degree of autism presented by the trainee.

- Initial and final assessment

As we have already mentioned, the implementation of an initial diagnostic assessment procedure – through a questionnaire with the essential parameters to inform of the interests, necessities and difficulties of each trainee - and a final one – which will be all the more useful considering a more diversified range of informants (parents, teachers, therapists) – seems fundamental to us for the validation of the possible impact of the project on its target audience. It is equally crucial so this initiative can be another contribution for the study and investigation of the potential therapeutic role of the arts, namely the visual and the performative.

- An outside look

Finally, and in the sequence of the previous point, it seems absolutely desirable to us that, in a future implementation experience of these Workshops, our personal look and assessment are complemented through the observation of an element outside of the team, ideally an investigator with particular interest in this area.

some conclusions/reflections (excerpts from the blog 2015/2016)

"There will always be adversities and unforeseen events. Always trying to fit another new element, we try to analyse the signs so that in a next time we are able to foresee an identical situation. Always learning, adapting, understanding and gathering knowledge."

"All the little steps of these sessions, which sometimes happen in mere seconds of this hour and a half, those are our great conquests."

"The challenge has been taking advantage of the motivations of each and every one to be able to explore other paths, essentially toying with the possibility of doing and "playing" with what they love most, at the end of the session, if during sessions they accept other work proposals. It is not always clear for them that the space where they work the way they like best and already feel so at ease is also a space with rules and concessions, where they are learning other motivations. So, now that the trust has been gained, we are introducing work positions more strictly, adapting to what they want to do. The proposal is presented, it is grasped and then each one flies to a unique universe; we sometimes disperse, yet the challenge is to return, to return to the proposal, to return to the theme. It has always been what we deem important doing and transmitting, together with what they like most to serve as motivation. At this moment we play with concession and adaptation, for both sides."

"At this moment the space is already theirs, it is already familiar and comfortable; I believe it will be the ideal moment for introducing some rules which will help them not to be so dispersed and with that being able to enjoy each exercise more, leading them to other discoveries, other motivations."

"Sessions have been calm. It is noticeable that, sometimes, the trainees miss the presence of motivating elements, yet we must not always stem from motivations or continue with the exercises until the end without leaving those elements. Whenever we notice stages of bigger dispersion or demotivation we go back to the motivations as a starting point, but serving only as a motto for the beginning of the activity so that, little by little, we may continue with the activity letting go of the "princesses", the "animals", the "skirts" and making them concentrate on the fulfilment of the proposed activity exploring other themes freely."

"All sessions are a surprise, we can prepare and take with us plan A and plan B, props, costumes, songs and a lot of resourcefulness, and still it is always unpredictable. Notwithstanding, it is with these factors that we got used to and prepare ourselves for working and accept, every day with less surprise, all the determinants."

"It was an intense journey, of constant learning. As trainers the investigation work previous to classes was important for knowing methods, other experiences and testimonies, yet, only when we met the group as well as each trainee did we dive into reality. We learned to adapt and construct on a day-to-day basis, in a constant state of resourcefulness. The classes were previously prepared, but as a basis and a starting point, everything else was built layer by layer before each situation or event we would come across. The complicity between the two was a key aspect so that, at any time or in adverse circumstances, we could immediately adapt and fit new elements and thus quickly change the direction of the boat. We have experimented, changed, altered and gave (gave us) time and space to also go with the flow, respecting the time of the group, and the time of each one. We can draw several plans and schemes for the sessions, but on top of that it is necessary to trigger or activate an enormous capacity for adapting or change in that instant. Throughout the experience we changed strategies several times in accordance with the group's necessities, and in time that fitting became easier, but it never stopped being unpredictable and intense."

The success of the whole class can happen in a minute, that minute in which we achieve the objective, we reach the focus and we leave with an overflowing heart, loaded with new emotions and ideas."

6. References and Support materials

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[In praise of slowness](#): Carl Honoré at TEDGlobal 2005

[The art of stillness](#): Pico Iyer at TEDxNewYork 2014

[Approaching autism theatrically](#): Stephen Volan at TEDxBloomington 2011

[The Autistic Brain: thinking across the spectrum](#): Temple Grandin at Colorado State University, Talks at Google 2014

[Autism Spectrum Disorder](#): Temple Grandin at TEDxLongBeachCalifornia 2010

[Young, Autistic & Stagestruck](#): Channel 4 documentary in 4 episodes 2010

7. Biographies

Ana Azevedo (trainer / theatre) Born in Vila Nova de Famalicão in 1979. Works in collaboration with *Visões Úteis/Useful Visions* since 2001 as Actress and Resident Instructor of the Educational Service. With a Degree from *Balletteatro* Professional Theatre School of Porto, she also attended the Graduation Course of Audiovisual Communication Technologies of the *Instituto Politécnico do Porto*, and concluded the specialisation on Dramatic Text of the Faculty of Letters of the University of Porto. She was a drama teacher on the Training Centre and at the Professional School of *Balletteatro* up until 2015. As an actress she worked with several directors: Luís Mestre, Roberto Merino, Nicolau Pais, Igor Gandra, amongst others. On cinema she records some brief passages as an actress with the directors Eduardo Condorcet and Edgar Pêra. Over the course of 15 years, as a trainer, she began developing a very personal teaching method, creating bridges between all of her experiences and working with very diverse groups and of different age ranges (theatre classes, community performance, workshops with children, adults and seniors).

Inês de Carvalho (trainer / visual arts) Born in Lisbon in 1977. Works in collaboration with *Visões Úteis/Useful Visions* since 2009 in the areas of set design, costume design and the visual arts. Since 2011 she also assumes projects management, namely those who involve communities. Scenographer and artist-educator. Master in Theatre Design by the Slade School of Fine Arts in University College London and and Bachelor in Theatre Design by the Lisbon School of Theatre and Film. She also attended the Masters in Visual Arts Intermedia in the University of Évora. She lectured in the Theatre Course of the University of Évora and in the Graduate and Master Degree in Education of Institute Piaget. She has also been developing several workshops and performances for young audiences. Her work aims at strengthening connections between practice, research and pedagogy in the performative and visual arts.

Visões Úteis/Useful Visions is an artistic project, originating from theatre, founded in Porto in 1994, and currently located at *Fábrica Social – Fundação Escultor José Rodrigues*. Up until July of 2018 *Visões Úteis/Useful Visions* created and produced 42 theatre performances, 8 Landscape Performance works, 2 Community Performances, 11 films and 5 festivals, in Portugal, Spain, France and Italy. *Visões Úteis/Useful Visions* is an artistic project, markedly an original author work, which produces itself, a multidisciplinary project, with a shared direction and based on collaborative work methodologies that summon a special participation of the whole artistic team. As signs of this identity, we can point out the successive experiences on Landscape Performance – articulated with travels, residencies, estate and memories – and the signature of original dramaturgies – the result of long creative processes that question, without mediation, not only our here and now, but also the audience's participation ways.

At *Visões Úteis/Useful Visions* the aesthetic project continues to grow in synch with a strong ethical motivation – we can even say political – in a constant reflection concerning the contemporary sense of making art and theatre, that daily marks the work options, heightens the social and political responsibility awareness towards the surrounding communities and forces the sharing of the reflection processes as well as the autonomy of contemporary art with the population in general, and in particular with all those who live on the outskirts, whether these are geographical, gender related, cultural or ethnical.

Visões Úteis/Useful Visions is a member of PLATEIA – *Associação de Profissionais das Artes Cénicas*, of IETM – International Network for Contemporary Performing Arts and of the Anna Lindh Foundation.

Its Artistic Directors are Ana Vitorino, Carlos Costa and João Martins.



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