

## Hand in Hand with Timor: Exchange Project Between Viana do Castelo Polytechnic and the Portuguese School of Dili – Celp – Ruy Cinatti

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### ABSTRACT

*Hand in hand with Timor* (De mãos dadas com Timor) is a project that explores cultural competencies, social interaction through the Arts and Communication which has promoted cognitive development and a systematic contact between participants from very diverse cultural contexts (Portuguese students in two classes of the 1st year Basic Education Teacher Training BA Degree at the Higher School of Education of Viana do Castelo Polytechnic [ESEVC-IPVC], attending the subject entitled *Theories and Practices of Visual and Performing Arts*, and Timor children, teachers and educators working in the Pre-School level of Education at the Portuguese School of Dili - CELP - Ruy Cinatti, Timor). This international exchange arose from contacts made between the teacher of Visual Arts at ESEVC-IPVC and Flor Gomes, former student of ESEVC-IPVC, with a BA degree in Visual and Technological Education and a Master in Art Education at ESEVC-IPVC, teacher in statutory mobility, currently working in Timor between 2020 and 2022. This article, written by two researchers from the Art Education area, addresses a Portuguese project which emphasised an action-research underpinned in an interdisciplinary approach, using comics as teaching strategy in developing cultural competencies of eighty Portuguese students ( $n^{\circ}=80$ ) of a Basic Education Course. The findings of such collaboration using video as the communication support for this international exchange, show the positive effects of such Project that promoted the overall cultural and artistic competencies of students involved, either in Portugal or in Timor. It is concluded that such curricular experiment had on students, on their motivation and awareness of how illustration and video can work together with popular literature, staging and illustrating it. It also highlights how imagination, creativity, dialogue and cultural competencies of children can promote a deeply collaborative work at local, regional, national and international levels, despite the fact that we are living in a period of pandemic and confinement.

**Keyword:** Heritage Education; Multicultural Art Education; International Exchange; Social interaction; Cultural Competencies

### INTRODUCTION

Like other European countries, Portugal is becoming highly multiracial. It is an evident fact that many of the non-European students and children of immigrants are marginalized and have not been successful in our education system. During the past 40 years, many other European

countries have been developing educational policies and practices, with the aim of increasing equal opportunities for members of ethnic minorities and developing awareness of cultural diversity. Curricular trends that favour uniformity and homogenization need to be corrected. Portuguese art educators feel the permanent need to study educational reform strategies, and critically assess their suitability for their own contexts. The investigations carried out by students and teachers, in the last three decades, on curricular guidelines, in Portugal and other countries, were important, because they addressed theories and practices of inter / multicultural education that work as tools for the analysis of empirical work and educational practice, in terms of reducing prejudices in terms of education in general and artistic education, in particular, and allowed the clarification of existing concepts.

Training for the audiovisual (Bazalgette, 1991) has been considered equally fundamental, relating to the critical understanding of the various media (television, video, etc.), valuing issues related to its functioning in terms of the production of meanings, their organization and the audiences that give them meaning. From the historical analysis of literature, so-called erudite art, as well as mass art, or popular art, made by men or women, is worthy of a place in any cultural manifestation. So, any cultural manifestation needs to be more thoroughly examined, explored and interpreted, in order to reduce prejudices and stereotypes. We have to face these issues because we have to accept that creating art is an increasingly interventionist activity, which needs to be read and interpreted critically.

Heritage education has been considered an important component of the national curriculum since the democratic revolution, when schools were transformed into places of critical response to their geographical contexts and surrounding communities. In 1974, education became a social development tool aimed at developing students' critical thinking and decision-making skills, preparing them for daily life and developing their personal and social skills (Ministry of Education, 1975). Regarding the context of the Escola Superior de Educação, of the Polytechnic Institute of Viana do Castelo (ESE-IPVC), enormous importance has been attached and the conditions that facilitate the access of students and since the beginning of its operation teachers have been promoted cultural events and the recognition of cultural heritage, based on curricular activities and extracurricular initiatives that facilitate the understanding of cultural values.

How concepts of culture, heritage, legend, human values were introduced at the Higher Education in a Basic Education course, through art education?

At ESEVC, it has been our constant concern to understand whether and how education in general, and artistic education in particular, can contribute to improving students' cultural skills. This is a controversial issue, which has involved many debates and reflections that aim to contribute to a greater awareness of teachers and students for the knowledge and understanding of the role that art occupies in the lives of people and society, as an indispensable means for understanding the other, and for the interaction between individuals and the world in which they live. The adoption of reflective and critical pedagogies and new technologies expand the opportunities for students to explore their multicultural and multi technological visual worlds, helping them to better understand culture and art as areas of knowledge. On the other hand, teachers continue to look to the culture all around. Whether it is urban or rural, it is understood with potential and as a meaningful learning resource, where teaching learning methods can start from the students' own living experiences.

The fact that we are a peripheral zone is no longer felt as an obstacle, as technologies eliminate distances. Prior research (Moura, 1993) leads us to conclude that the introduction of artistic appreciation activities in the Portuguese curriculum could help students and teachers to deal with heritage education and improve students' abilities to observe and understand art and culture, culture of the past and the present. Language is also an essential tool for exploring concepts and improving perceptual skills, but art educators have largely neglected this aspect (Moura, 1993). Learning is a result of the students' activity in a social and cultural context, but what place does the local, national and international community have in the students' cognitive development?

Even when art educators are engaged in image analysis with their students, the images they use appear divorced from the country's cultural and social reality and art criticism as it exists in this country, has developed fundamentally, from the practical teaching experiences, so it was concluded that the reassessment of artistic education was necessary for inter / multicultural reasons. It is concluded that the models of the past to develop patrimonial education must be re-examined since the practice has shown that they do not respond to the present needs to provide human and professional guidance to young people. They do not facilitate the exchange of ideas with other regional, national and international contexts, an essential factor to enable Portugal to learn from its strengths and weaknesses, and to experiment and adapt its resources. Language is also an essential tool for exploring concepts and improving perceptual skills, but art educators have largely neglected this aspect (Moura, 1993).

### **METHODOLOGY**

The present educational situation in Portugal suggested the use of qualitative methods, as quantitative methods of research had not yet reduced the educational problems identified. A decision was taken in this curriculum intervention that a predominantly qualitative approach would be more suitable to respond to our need for professional development of our student teachers, with regard to curriculum innovation. We elected to experiment with a method that would involve collaborative work with students and teachers on common needs and problems. It had to be the kind of research method that would contribute, above all, to deeper understanding of specific competencies and contents, pertaining to culture and heritage.

For the reasons explained here, we opted for a qualitative and democratic approach to data collection and curriculum development to increase our knowledge and understand about culture and heritage education. Other reasons for selecting a qualitative method were that is best suited to in-depth and multifaceted reflection (Kemmis, 1988), enables on-going dialogue, and formative evaluation of processes (Stenhouse, 1987), and allows corrections to be made in the course of the research.

Action research was considered more appropriate than other qualitative methods because of its emphasis on solving educational problems diagnosed in specific situations; also because of its potential for contributing to our personal and practical knowledge and understanding; and because it was compatible with our profession as teacher trainers in Higher Education. Moreover, the analysis of the literature on the topic made it clear that this method sets out to improve educational practice and that its objects of study are situated in a specific place and time.

## Participant Schools

We decided to select two schools:

The Higher School of Education, of Viana do Castelo Polytechnic, at Norther Portugal and the Portuguese School of Dili - CELP - Ruy Cinatti, East Timor.

## Participant Teachers and Students

This exchange arose from contacts made between the TEOGRA Visual Art teacher and a former Polytechnic student, holding a Visual and Technological Education BA Diploma and an Art Education MA Diploma at ESEVC-IPVC, working between 2020 and 2022 in Timor.

The research involved sixty-one students ( $n^o = 61$ ) of two classes of the 1st year of the Basic Education BA course at the Higher School of Education of Viana do Castelo Polytechnic, Portugal, attending the subject of Theories and Practices of Visual and Performing Arts (TPVPA) and their art teacher, and sixty ( $n^o = 60$ ) children enrolled in the nursery school level, one art teacher and two educators from the Portuguese School of Dili - CELP - Ruy Cinatti, East Timor (Table 1).

**Table 1 Participants in the Action**

| <b>Portugal</b>                                                                 | <b>East Timor</b>                          |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| 1 art teacher & 2 non- participant observers                                    | 1 art teacher & 2 nursery school educators |
| 61 student teachers – enrolled in the 1st year of the Basic Education BA course | 60 children enrolled in the nursery school |
| Total: 64 participants                                                          | Total: 63 participants                     |

## School Intervention

This project explored democratic access to cultural heritage through the Arts and has promoted constant contact between participants from a European and a non-European context. The project ran for seven weeks in Portugal and Timor, between December and February and aimed to alert to the need to know and disseminate oral heritage and value education such as friendship, respect, love, charity, wisdom, loyalty, courage, human rights, using strip cartoons.

## Key Questions

The key questions that were addressed in the design of the action research were (i) How can the concepts of culture, heritage, legend, human values be introduced at the Higher Education in a Basic Education course, through art education? (ii) What kind of strategies were used to communicate between the participant schools? (iii) What was the impact of the use of image in such project in a pandemic era?

## Data Collection Methods and Techniques

It was necessary to determine an appropriate means of recording the action research. This was done by observation using zoom platform, video recordings, photographs, written records of structured and unstructured talks with the teachers, and student question and answer sheets.

Authors such as Lopes (2015) highlight the importance of assessing literacy skills, Monteiro, Moreira & Almeida (2012) evoke the importance of pedagogy, learning in digital platforms and Lima and Capitão (2013) warn that the content in e-learning has its own specificities, at the

level of tools and production, and that the e-contents in this model must be adequate, well-structured in order to create greater and better learning (pp15-16.). Likewise, Pestana & Lamas (2021, p. 10) argue the following:

With access to current media, ICT, devices, resources, and intensive consumption of products by students/educators, online (confinement); We defend that accessing this type of themes, with greater complexity, will imply the reformulation of new teaching/learning strategies, either through the informational access available online, or by promoting the research of current (in)formative themes and consequent potential for joint reflection. These themes will allow for varied narratives and iconographies and will be of great interest and impact when addressed at an early age.

So, we summarized research procedures, based on Moura (2003, p. 39) action research steps, such as identification of the problem, selection of research questions and data collection tools, using digital environments. We were aware that the promotion of digital projects, hybrid systems (b-learning), physical displays or video records, encourage new problematic and exploratory thematic research in different latitudes. On the other hand, multiculturalism was understood, in both educational contexts (Portugal and Timor), as an alternative and means to acknowledge and celebrate cultural diversity.

By focusing on multiculturalism, whether through the exchange of sociocultural messages, or through inter-creative experiences developed in different environments, these joint projects combined new artistic knowledge and current research on the social and economic realities, where these communities are located.

A glossary of key concepts was constructed from the zoom meetings and *whatsapp* discussions, text and image analyses and group tasks. The Portuguese team had to devise a range of questions relevant to evaluate the project. It is important to remind that this project was developed during COVID pandemic, but although we were confined to telework in our places, this was not an obstacle for us.

### **Description of Research Implementation**

What kind of strategies were used to communicate between the participant schools?

The strategies introduced in this project involved were exchange of materials via internet, and two videos sent to Timor, in which several legends in cartoons can be observed (Fig.1).



**Fig.1 Portuguese Legend by MC, 1<sup>st</sup> year Higher Education Student of Basic Education**

Theoretical/practical lessons included activities of drawing, strip cartoons, cultural and art traditions in European and Non-European contexts (Figs. 2, 3 & 4).



**Fig.2 'Taís' weaver, Timor**



**Fig.3 Traditional colours of 'Taís', Timor**



**Fig.4 Weaving 'taís' and traditional dresses, Timor**

This last activity was developed by two students from the Higher Professional Course on Arts and Technologies (CTESP Art and Technology), at that time doing their internship at the Cultural Centre of Alto Minho, in Viana do Castelo. The undergraduate students from ESEVC also received a video made by East Timorese participants, with illustrations made by children of world legends (Fig. 5).



**Fig. 5 Children' drawings from Timor**

### **FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS**

The findings of such collaboration using video as the communication support for this international exchange, show the positive effects of such Project that promoted the overall cultural and artistic skills of the students involved, either in Portugal or in Timor. In 2009, Nóvoa stated that he considered education to be the key to the future, and warned:

Schools, as we know them, will cease to exist. In its place, there will be learning centres that will operate seven days a week, 24 hours a day. Students will have access to their teachers, but at a distance. The classrooms will now be inside the computer (p.5).

Eleven years later, ESE-IPVC and the Portuguese School of Dili, Timor, communicate weekly, sharing remotely, via mobile phones, computers, drawings, paintings, videos, within the scope of the “Hand in Hand with Timor” Project Hand in hand with Timor, 2021. This interinstitutional experience was mentioned in “Revista Tempo”, or Time Journal, by Portuguese School of Dili, launched in February in a celebration that included the presence of individuals such as Ramos Horta, the Portuguese ambassador and the Timorese consul (Fig.6).



**Fig.6 Flor Gomes and Ramos Horta celebrating culture**

What was the impact of the use of image in such project in a pandemic era? Drawing and painting allowed the students to develop their skills of graphic presentation, thus achieving one of the objectives of the project. Other concepts, such as heritage, cultural diversity were introduced by the means of videos and photos about non-western and western traditions and art forms. The activity of researching other cultures focused on the formal and cultural aspects of art. Researching books and mass media images, learning from the contacts via *whatsapp* with the Timor group, and the interdisciplinary approach, promoted critical thinking and contributed to the improvement of students' cultural competencies.

Efland *et al*, (1996, p. 73) states that postmodern perspective of art education '*enable students to understand the social and cultural worlds they inhabit. These worlds are representations created with the aesthetic qualities of art media. To understand how these qualities function to create meaning, students need to encounter these in their own experience with media*'. Thus, the use of image in such project has:

- promoted the inclusion and extension of creative project and research in different latitudes, new formal and informal learning, scaled to the local and global, interdisciplinary and partnership;
- encouraged the dissemination / promotion of new ephemeral or fixed artistic and artisanal experiences, in diversified spaces and supports, through video recordings, still images and texts;
- encouraged artistic residencies, in person or online, or subsequently published, simultaneously, as a means of exchanging forms and ideas;
- promoted the management of arts and heritage education, sharing of culture and educational initiatives implemented in communities;
- activated the participatory and critical, joint, and continuous online assessment and validation of students and teachers' activities, based on the pedagogical and didactic resources available;
- exchange of communication formats and content management, techniques and strategies adopted.

It is concluded that such curricular experiment had an impact on students, on their motivation and awareness of how illustration and video can work together with popular literature, staging and illustrating it.

It also highlights how imagination, creativity and cultural skills of young students can promote a deeply collaborative work at local, regional, national and international levels, despite the fact that we are living in a period of pandemic and confinement. Discussions helped to agree that the visibility of '*the other*' (Figs. 7 & 8) has never been as great as it is today; and that technology, which is at the heart of internationalisation, is assertively transcultural and is one way of ensuring our future.



**Fig.7 Local artefacts related to food containers**



**Fig.8 Local celebration**

The teaching-learning strategies were varied, and care was taken to avoid the monotonous and boring lecture type presentations typically used in training courses. According to Lynch (1989, p. 26) visual, linguistic, aesthetic, and other creative skills are needed in curriculum planning to enable dialogue and discourse within and across different cultures.

By doing this, non - art Higher Education students attending this art subject were able to respond to the obstacles that Covid raised all over the world to the educational contexts and began to recognise the value of communication media and their impact in the dissemination of heritage, leading to the subsequent strengthening of their own cultural identity (Fig.9). Moreover, all the participants understood that teacher training courses shall contribute to the professional development of a research attitude and competencies in teachers, so that they are not only able to face the systematic difficulties and needs they meet while exercising their professions, but also carry out their own research and relate it to their teaching.



**Fig. 9 Construction of “Lulik” sacred houses**

Finally, this project helped all the participants to become aware of cross-cultural elements in different cultures, societies and education systems and it has also shown that multicultural education underpinned in the new technologies is a powerful strategy in the implementation and establishment of educational objectives and promoting understanding and harmony between groups and positive relationships between students and their communities around. The findings of this small scale project indicate that perhaps a more comprehensive study into the use of mobiles and computers in relation to the interdisciplinary teaching of technology throughout the curriculum should be undertaken.

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