

Young People Can Transform Favela into a Place Inhabited by Building of Dreams through Weaving the Imaginary

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Abstract The present article results of research performed by Cultural Center Cartola, entity that makes use of material and incorporeal conditions, as collection about the history of the samba, with prominence for the musician and composer Cartola. Owner of the same characteristics of the members from the favela Mangueira, for being from humble origin, this consecrated samba performer became a symbol of social cause. The objective of the research in the workshops literary production: to weave the imaginary were to analyze how the literary texts intervene, positively, in the trajectory of individuals who are in situation of social vulnerability. The proposal aimed at to stimulate the creation and the reading of fictional texts, making possible that the narrative was a vector of reconstruction of the individual and the collective. The research, structuralized on operative bases and action could detect possibilities where the imaginary presents itself. The interaction by means of speaking, writing and drawing stimulates the imagination and the reflection, influencing the collective and the individual on their own construction and world. The research in the CCCartola, an excluded community of Afro-Brazilian origin, shows that samba is the largest "host agent", where individuals develop potential through socio-educational activities.

Keywords Imaginary, Literary Workshops, Youth, Favela

1. Summary

The study investigated how the production of literary texts written by children and adolescents in situations of extreme social vulnerability can affect and anticipate the trajectory of their social and psychological development. I chose the Cartola Cultural Center (CCCartola) [1], located in Rio de Janeiro city, in Favela of Mangueira, due to the

legacy of the samba artist that inspired it, the musician "Cartola". This art icon lived there and has become a symbol of social cause. The work with young people in the Literary Production "Tecer o Imaginário" (To Weave the Imaginary) workshops provided elements for the analysis of their imaginative capacity and symbolic representations in the context of their environment - the Favela [1]ⁱ of Mangueira.

The results showed that stimulating the imaginary or imagination was positive because symbolic representations accelerated the cognitive-emotional development, probably by dealing with sociocultural aspects of their reality.

2. Introduction

The Literary Production project: Tecer o Imaginário (To Weave the Imaginary) objected to research how the literature produced by children and adolescents who attended the CCCartola[1], located in the Favela of Mangueira in Rio de Janeiro could help them articulate their desires. The work is part of a larger project, called "Citizenship Development - Self Care and Health". The targeted population is the youngsters of the CCCartola[1], subject of research, master dissertations and doctoral theses. The project is coordinated by the researcher and professor Dr. Regina Glória Nunes Andrade, of the Social Psychology Graduate Program, University of Rio de Janeiro. The CCCartola [1], a non-governmental (NGO), non-profit organization, was founded in 2001, to preserve the work of Cartola. The CCCartola [1] aims to offer the necessary tools to promote cultural identity, social inclusion and development of self-esteem, by means of preserving traditions. The CCCartola [1] promotes pedagogic-cultural education through the sociocultural history of an excluded community of Afro-Brazilian origin. It is supported by private and governmental initiatives and

serves as a "host agent" for its partners. (www.cartola.org.br 18/11/2008).

I borrowed from Antoine Compagnon [2] the title of his lecture at the amphitheater at Collège de France in 2006: "What is Literature for?" The answer to this question is found in practice, where it can be a powerful tool by giving voice to children and young people who, when summoned to the work of reading and writing, can break barriers through the imaginary and reveal their cultural experience, previously concealed. The study reflects on how the created narratives can 'weave' (Tecer) rather than be 'woven' (Tecida). Here, the verb Tecer is imperative, when it is spoken or reported to the imaginary, based on the production 'woven by threads' created from affective and figurative memory proceeds. Thus, the demand that comes from this consistency for the individual is "to weave" his or her existential impressions. "To Weave the Imaginary" was inserted in a peripheral community, characterized by conditions of extreme vulnerability. The space created was not of confinement, but of hospitality, care, and recognition of their citizenship. We investigated the extent to which the daily lives of those children under extreme poverty conditions could obstacles them from engaging the imaginative universe and whether the "weaving" of the imaginary through experiences with literature could lead them to build a cultural identity.

The CCCartola [1] provides favorable conditions for such experiences with children and young people, through contemporary pedagogic-cultural practices: dance, violin orchestra, music, capoeiraⁱⁱ, judo, ballet and literary workshops for reading and writing composition. The activities are essential for social and individual development, which allows them to effectively exercise subjectivity. The positive influence of the "Master Cartola", a renowned samba composer and singer who used to live in Favela da Mangueira, is a powerful source of pride for individuals to engage in the wider society by developing their autonomy, freedom, singularity and, above all, citizenship. Also, as a component of their social reality, it generates representative events that point out opportunities.

The practice of writing aims to develop the imaginary through readings, exchanges of experiences and reflections on the daily life. Another objective of this project is to also improve aesthetic practices of written expression, so that everyone can conquer, from the beginning of the schooling process, the ability of dealing with the written and spoken words.

3. Procedures

The research was initially presented by the team responsible for each sector, in a meeting with the CCCartola [1] President Dr. Nilcemar Nogueira. Each researcher introduced him or herself and presented their

teamwork objectives. Ethical issues were also discussed as the targeted population was children and adolescents. Drug trafficking is a fact in the Favela, as well as the "law of silence". A reserved approach was recommended on comments regarding the drug issue. The CCCartola [1] has become a research center, both for Brazilian researchers and for other interested countries. We took part in this project via a partner, the Social Psychology Graduate Program, Rio de Janeiro State University. Other participating government agencies are: the Rio de Janeiro State Education Department (SEERJ), and the Rio de Janeiro State Social Assistance and Human Rights Department (SEASDH).

Along the first three months, preliminary interviews were conducted with children and their parents/guardians. An observation work schedule was prepared considering the ongoing daily activities of the participating children.

1. We established workshop operations three times a week, taking into account their school hours and other activities so as to ensure their continuous presence in the workshop sessions.
2. Individual interviews were conducted with parents and guardians, to understand the families' dynamics, and their needs addressed by the CCCartola [1]. A short family record was also prepared along with information on their schooling degree and recurring complaints regarding their living conditions.
3. Parental complaints about the dangers faced in the Favela and the impossibility of going to the CCCartola [1], when the Police were confronting the drug traffickers.
4. During this period, we also assessed the work in progress, as well as the data collection on each child.
5. The data collected from each child was used to organise the groups by age – 7 to 10 years and from 11 to 14 years. We considered the cognitive development of each, even those who had not mastered writing. Some adaptations were also made throughout the research.

The first field contacts were from March 2011 to June 2011. By that time it was possible to get acquainted with the people involved in CCCartola [1] operation. The proposal of our intervention was drawn from the field of exploratory research, as expressed by Tripp [4] (2005), "Made by practice, adapted to the (formal) requirements of academic works" related to action research - similar to the social research method which establishes a collective, participatory and active structure at the level of information gathering - which requires the participant involvement in the investigated problem. To implement this proposal, several techniques were added in the first stages of the work. It was suggested that each participant should create their own stories after becoming familiar with the presented objects - a starting point to the imaginary

dynamics, which goes beyond the images already perceived and learned.

In preparing their texts, children showed great interest in presenting them to the group. Each topic was discussed with the group as a whole, and individual conversations took place with specific questions - this participatory approach fomented the individual contributions. The workshops, thus, enabled young people to examine their condition and, with the working progress, to build worlds inhabited by dreams - through the histories created by means of the available material.

Many of them were not functionally literate to express themselves through writing. This was overcome by alternative approaches, such as offering colored pencils to encourage them to express through drawings, the only way to tell their story. Literate participants were offered other materials, such as books, stories, objects, words, letters, photographs, rubber and clothing brought from northeastern Brazil. These artefacts were used as devices to incite their imagination. The sessions were structured on a participatory basis where they were offered relevant objects to stimulate the transforming intervention - dolls, musical instruments, soldiers, castles, leather and clay objects typical from northeastern Brazil. They imagined their stories searching for their roots as migrants, or descendants' children from that region with very low HDI.

4. Study Presentation and Execution

10/07/2011 - The first workshop was held. I made a simple presentation about literature - highlighting the differences between a story that is totally invented and one based on current events or objects. The children themselves tried to give examples related to the city and the local news. I brought up stories of well-known writers to discussion, how they wrote, how they constructed their characters, and named them, what they may have thought about their characters, and what might have been their inspiration. I asked them to come up with a first-person story, as a self-story. This time, I did not provide them with any objects such as bugs or dolls, but I asked them to imagine what a forest would it be like and how would they feel being transported to it. I found it interesting to take the students to a library to create intimacy with the books that were scattered around the various shelves, and to point out how more comfortable it was to write on the available tables. They flipped through a few books, read short excerpts from stories, and talked about their preferences. After some time, I presented them with objects, urging them to insert that material into their imagination; the objects, from the CCCartola [1], - e.g. robots, monkeys, princesses used in Samba school parades to provoke laughter.

07/19/2011 - It was the first time I considered the idea of always taking a snack to offer them. From this day on, they started to look forward to the break time - and the treats. Upon reviewing my diary notes, I was struck by how they experienced exchanges - memories of school lunch time, the lack of food at home and dishes made by their grandmothers. I also realized how frequent it was that, when I used coffee, which was meant just for employees and adult visitors, they would sneak up to me and speak with their hand over their mouth, next to my ear: "Can you give some of your coffee to me?"; and I would say, "Coffee is for adults. Children drink juice!"; to which they would reply: " You are mistaken! In my house I only drink coffee."

Our relationship had gone beyond the scope of that research. We discussed tastes and other shared experiences. I came to realize that in exchanging of experiences other relevant data can be inserted.

07/25/2011 - The stories that had been made up until this point were loaded of their everyday experiences of their community - violence, difficulties, sadness, fears and destruction. Traces of joy hope and love were rare. I registered this phenomenon and decided to see whether there is a structure to take them to other places that did not have to be necessarily physical, but imaginary. I also became aware of another dimension of their lives. When I left the room to the office I was informed about the bureaucracy involved in taking them on an excursion: bus use, the role of the Juvenile Court, the authorization of relatives, among other obstacles.

Then, I decided to present them with a world map. I asked them to copy the names of islands, countries and continents (Africa, Europe, Americas, and Asia). I then discussed with each the respective customs, climate, and culture. I spoke about the Brazilian Amazon and asked them to write a story related to their chosen place names. The connection some of them made with Africa was very interesting, probably stimulated by their African cultural origins which includes Candomblé, a religion of African origin.

07/29/2011 - I presented a new idea: to build a story having the "Mail Pigeon" as the central character, a character I had found intriguing when writing my own novel. In one of the chapters, I used a mail pigeon to trigger a plot composed of a series of episodes. To gain knowledge, I contacted a person who had raised these wonderful birds in the State of São Paulo to be able to talk about them, their behaviour, travel patterns, and mechanisms of orientation. Predictably, the children were intrigued by the fact that a bird flew so far and back without getting lost! I asked them to use their imagination, as to how they might use their sensors to make such a round trip. The stories were of excellent quality.

We had to suspend the meetings for some time, due to the frequent clashes between the Police and drug traffickers; it was a particularly delicate situation as Mangueira had

recently received a Pacifying Police Unit Post (UPP). After some time, I could carry on the research. I went to the CCCartola [1] and communicated my return and the resumption of the workshop activities.

09/16/2011 - I noticed, when I returned, that the number of children had doubled, making it difficult to provide them with individual attention. New working strategies were adopted. I divided the class into groups of two and three. This time, I asked them to write chapters, which proved to be a difficult task. Only two children out of ten were able to continue the same story in the following session. Some children delivered their finished or unfinished writings, while others complemented theirs with drawings. All this was registered and returned to theories on development of children in cognitive terms. At that meeting we had the episode of the hat, when I presented a child with a new traditional tanned leather hat from the Northeast Brazil, commonly worn by their cowboys. The reaction was: "It's new but it has a nasty smell!" The twelve-year-old boy immediately snorted, indignantly addressing me: "I don't want this; it smells like poverty!" The end of the workshop was very agitated and cheerful at the same time because we had the beginning of the children's violin lessons - they came to see the gifts their friends had received.

09/20/2011 - Six children attended and two were absent. The reasons may have been little time, or perhaps no one could bring them, or they had a school homework or test. Sometimes I had to make unsatisfactory activity choices. On this particular day I ended up playing hide-and-seek with them. Their favorite places to hide were under the skirts of Mangueira Samba School costumes on exhibition in the CCCartola [1], as in a museum.

09/27/2011 - I tried to make them continue their stories by stimulating them with ideas and images. I asked them to think of a whale out of the water on an avenue trying to "walk", to crawl, for example. Perplexed, they asked, "Isn't this the same thing as bugs that speak?" I said: yes! What a story that was, to turn the impossible into possible situations! Once again, I couldn't get them to create stories with abstract visualizations - imagined scenes. They still needed to be shown images, or tangible visual material. However, such strategy still had no effect. I concluded that the formulation of abstract concepts was still difficult for them! I left resolutely committed to continue the work of stimulating their imaginary with the use of objects and images, which were still necessary for the creation of texts.

5. Methodology

The descriptive qualitative technical approach has the characteristic of going beyond the facts and the objective factors; from this starting point, it is possible to obtain results of the phenomena that happen beyond the researcher's observations. It was necessary to incorporate into the research analysis model, procedures to stimulate

the children to get in contact with their subjective world to overcome difficult experiences witnessed in the Favela, objectively disastrous in its nature. To do this, I needed to evaluate the social forces at stake, in order to understand which facts should be valued among so many. Finally, I focused on observing the material sense of the research and the factors that could contribute to the subjective, immaterial collection of the work with them. Thiollent [3] (1987, p. 31) "considers as research action" the intimate association with an action or with the resolution of a collective problem in which researchers and participants representing the situation or problem are involved in a cooperative or participatory way. On the other hand Bakhtin [5], considers the meaning as a central category to make sense; "Meaning comes from answers to questions. What does not answer any question has no meaning for us. That, which responds nothing seems meaningless to us, far from dialogue." (Bakhtin [5], 2001, p.381)

In this sense, life in the Favela produces individuals who have no answers at all: their questions do not resonate, making dialogue impossible. "To Weave the Imaginary" placed its participants in positions that required an exit, a response, a choice, beyond reflection about the concept of the word or the object itself. The children who composed the CCCartola's literary workshops were thrown into great adventures through the "imaginary warm-up" that took them from canoeing in rapids to hang gliding flights. It was a journey of imagined ideas. Minayo [6] contributed with the understanding of technique, "method is the very process of the development of things". Lenin teaches us that method is not the outer form; it is the very soul of content because it makes the relation between thought and existence and vice-versa" (MINAYO [6], 1992, p. 22).

5.1. Instruments

Unstructured qualitative research has moments of observation, from which one seeks results by aesthetic means and possibly by "(...) a technique of data collection to obtain information and use the senses in obtaining certain aspects of reality. It is not just watching and listening, but also examining facts or phenomena that you want to study" (Marconi & Lakatos [7], 2003, 190). All the observation was focused on detecting the extent to which Cartola, the artist, exerted influence that remains in the imagery of the Mangueira community, as revealed in the characters woven into their stories, and ultimately influencing the construction of their own identity. Observations also addressed aspects related to the daily experiences of a split community; on one hand, the influence of samba, music and art, on the other hand, the presence of contravention, poverty, drug traffic and death. To all these observations we obtained answers from the content of their writing production, interviews, and conversations where they presented multiple subjects chosen, sometimes in an arbitrary way and sometimes

through consensus. This facilitated the development of their repertoires and provided greater familiarity with the group work and the research development. Qualitative data analysis is a recent phenomenon that is characterized by being an inductive process that focuses on fidelity to the daily life universe of the subjects based on the same presuppositions of the so-called qualitative research.

5.2. Unstructured Interviews

From the initial model, the laboratory idea was adopted and resulted in the organization of workshops that were conduits through which a wide variety of objects were presented to all participants. Exposed to these objects, each child chose those that his or her preference. Interested in discovering its meaning and utility, we observed the different characterizations given by them to each object. This dynamic I named the "imaginary warming up". For example, a collection of different stones was shown in one of these workshops and explanations were given about their geological formations. Then, a question was brought up by two boys: "How can these stones grow inside a cave?" An explanation was given on scientific basis: water droplets mix with limestone etc. Then, the silence hovered for a moment until the first questions came up and then the second, and more: "Hey "Auntie" - are these stones made into jewelry? Do they make jewels? How should the cave be? Aren't thieves going to steal them? Would they have to climb like they do on the Corcovado?" Such questions showed me that they could not tell the difference between a bijou and a jewelry. Thus, the word STONE took on many meanings, was metaphorized, seen as something precious, where jewels are stored, where words are written, a place of mystery and beauty, accessible only by *rappel*.

"It's cold as death!" said one of them.

What sprang from their minds were words like "stealing", "death", and "hunger" - related to recurrent facts in their daily life of war between gangs, shortage of food and news about thefts inside and outside the Favela. Another technique was to present words and ask them to choose from up to five at the most, and from their choices, to invent their stories. Some of them started their stories by drawing, some presented them orally, and others by writing. They were all able to focus on the objects offered. Through a succession of sessions, it was possible to create stories based on a single word, indicating progress in re-defining choices, that is, children created meaning for a single four, five, or more words, and used them interchangeably. This was a key step to enlarge their symbolic world and the "imaginary warm up". From this practice would emerge a text and a subject which the base to raise a multitude of creative idea was.

5.3. Content Analysis (Observations)

Social research focuses on observing community

relationships and social structures. In the case of a Rio de Janeiro Favela of high socio-economic-cultural complexity, this approach is pertinent. According to Oliveira[8] (2008), content analysis has different useful techniques, which he used to observe and analyze the behavior of children brought up in Favelas, as well as seeking answers on their lifestyles in that environment, and what their lives in Favela means to them. Their texts, speeches, complaints, as well as their dreams revealed during our interactions, were instrumental for the analysis and understanding of what kind of relationship was kept with the object of study.

Throughout the practice of reading, children and adolescents separated their imagination, through the experiences lived by their characters and their actions represented symbolically by the author's imagination. Along the practice of writing it was as if they were training their imaginary to seek, to capture, and to entangle the objects and even smells. The sensations, the speeches heard in their childhood and often hidden and dormant in their unconscious, multiply in geometrical proportions the signifiers. Finally, the sign, as psychic impressions will be transmitted by "material sound, the word". Therefore, the effort that both the reader and the writer took to get immersed in the imaginary universe and to be represented by the symbolic universe, on the other hand, evoked the effort in the pleasure of a solitary and playful journey.

6. Results

The research work with the fictional literature aimed to be pertinent to the rehabilitation of the participants. The process of inciting the imaginary facilitated the incorporation of a symbolic system, as a social function of communication and as a representation of something that had already been experienced. The use of pre-established imagery provided them with forms to express their sociocultural roots. All the themes carried out in their writings revealed the need of deconstructing the oppressive nature of the Favela lifestyle: "Give the ability to produce meanings" (Scholl, 1992: 103), in addition to those already given, and to think about the conception of new realities.

The children development was demonstrated in writing practice, text manipulation, and storytelling - whether written or drawn. It was also possible to observe that their content gradually moved away from expressions of need, hunger, violence and complaints. The same occurred with the constant fear of living in a Favela. It also emerged a more promising and supportive world where hopeful beings reigned, and the witch became a princess. An example of this was the story told by Luiz Paulo, a nine-year-old boy: "I climbed up the tree and I killed the jaguar, then I came down and I collected lots of fruits to eat and to take home".

With this study we deepen our understanding about the

violent nature of the current social system and consider how important the creation of the imaginary values in the life of Favela children is. The text production along the workshops revealed that the stimulus to produce literature in the periphery through reading, writing and orality can promote and motivate creativity and socialization. Artistic-literary expression has shown to be a vector of social inclusion and development of self-esteem. Hence, the importance of the CCCartola [1] in intermediating dialogues among groups that aim both the research and the proposal of daily practice.

The primary objective was to investigate how the experience of writing and reading could enrich the imaginary, and have multiplier functions on a symbolic representation in a peripheral culture where young people live within an environment of social and cultural exclusion. A pedagogical technique was applied in order to stimulate children through sensorial elements, the imaginary itself. Every use of the senses in an experience remains forever unchanged, while the use of only images can become fragmentary and, over time, disappear from the conscious. It was analyzed how the children's individual stories were filled in with new images and new meanings throughout their participation in CCCartola [1] activities.

It was necessary to understand the experience of children in such a social setting and that it is possible to build social and cultural bonds that in situations of vulnerability would be impossible. The real notion of the imaginary, in fact, is not the image itself, but rather the relation between the object and the sensation through emotion (esthesia).

7. Discussion

Interviews based on a questionnaire did not meet our expectations, due to the inadequate understanding of those involved in the meaning of the questions. Cognitive deficiencies and difficulty in expressing themselves depicted their limitations.

In this sense, the proposal of the "TECER O IMAGINÁRIO" was to work the symbolic and imaginary functions, in order to make it more coherent - less frightening - with a worldview of the one who identifies with it.

The investigation in fictional literary texts manifests the symbolic representations that characterize the state in which the individuals are. The cultural, psychic-pedagogical stimulus contained in the workshops at the CCCartola [1] proved to be effective and necessary to set the history of the individuals and his or her experiences in a favela.

Based on this principle, the literary production groups of the CCCartola [1] shared readings and enabled children to narrate their stories. The project is a mediator between the world of reading and the far-away social realities of these

subjects that gets them to put the thought in movement to build the symbols that make up meaning to their stories. It is very significant the perceived and evaluated progress between the stories that follow. Throughout the activities, it was possible to perceive that the act of reading and writing was developing towards the flow of words and linguistic expression. However, literary experience builds possible worlds from impossibility.

It is pertinent to say that the production of texts met the methodological paradigms having literature as method. The social life outlined on its contours was put on display. The way the expression fits the actions without deforming them. It is not a matter of interpreting, but of apprehending the multiplicity of meanings of the same object, its varied rhythms (Ibid., 125) and its connections with the great structuring forms of the social setting. From this point, the work started effectively. The interaction that facilitates participatory work of the social actors and the researchers favours the understanding of the role played by the CCCartola [1] as an institution. The meaning of Mestre Cartola as an entity that represents positive values coupled with the sociocultural practices applied there, were vectors that triggered individual and collective constructions, roots of autonomy, freedom and singularity - characteristics that will always arise through the bias of inter-subjectivity that is so necessary for the subject construction.

8. Conclusions

All the work has visibly resulted in improvement to the psycho-cognitive and affective-emotional development of the children who live in constant stress.

At the end of the research the texts produced by them demonstrated progress in a symbolic instance that multiplied and made them richer, manifesting positive aspects. The characters they started to present were more hopeful, projecting on "when I grow up, I want to be...". A future of possibilities identifies themselves with successful people or characters. In place of the shootings noises, dreams were projected on the sounds and rhythms of the violins. Their characters changed their clothes and assumed more humanized actions. They no longer used the drawing of a child or an adult with guns crossed on the chest as a warning sign. Finally, the characters, in the written stories, drawn or orally depicted, were characterized through objects linked to samba, as well as those that represented the Afro-Brazilian culture. True inhabited worlds stood in their words, where it was possible to name, love, hate and rest safely. Words became play-like toys that raised images and memories that fit together in one or another piece of the scenery. A symbolic elaboration of their experiences was possible, even when they lacked them. They no longer approached me to listen to stories, but looking for affection. Then, they wrote a story where the witch becomes a "good mother."

From the collected data and findings of the referred research, the indication that the condition of extreme vulnerability, the impossibility of accessing cultural and social goods as healthy ways of socialization, produce imaginative poverty, critical blunting and sense of belonging. And they are not explained by means of official parameters based on quantitative final results. Literature has proven its surprising power not only as a method as well as a supportive provider for adversities within the scope of Social Psychology. The stories, the comics, the chronicles and the fables promoted imaginary and real exchange as they put the thought in movement and facilitated the access to symbolic representations, leading them towards the once unspeakable.

Finally, sharing the readings and creating stories can change the relationship with the world. To experience the feeling of belonging to humanity implies in opening up to the other, feeling closer. It is to give name and meaning to existential experiences; psychological, cultural and ideological, obtaining satisfactory results when the theme is inclusion.

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ⁱ Favela is a very resistant plant native to the Northeast Brazil that grows in arid soils and gave name to a village of shanty houses on a hill in the sertão baiano (backwoods of arid climate on Baía), 1887-1888 during the War of Canudos. The combatants left that place towards Rio de Janeiro and settled down on the Morro da Providência, and gave the name of Favela. Since then any occupation on the hills of Rio de Janeiro took the name Favela.

ⁱⁱ Capoeira is an Afro-Brazilian cultural activity with elements of martial arts, dance, and music.