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## International Symposium of Young Researchers in Children's Literature Books for changing the world

### Children's literature in primary education: Creative writing practices

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#### Introduction

From an early age, it is essential to promote the construction of the child's reading entity, through how the child's first contacts with books are organized, enabling them to develop critical thinking, imagination, curiosity and a sense of discovery. At the same time, literature is a vehicle that brings together a set of conditions that allow us to broaden our vision through a multiple and multifaceted view of the world, which requires a critical-reflexive sense on the part of the reader. In other words, it acts as a kind of "bridge", enabling us to explore the world and ourselves, allowing us to read and understand the self in these others. Having said that, the selection and enunciation of the problem, to which we intend to find an answer, assumes the following as the central questions of this investigation: 1. How can the development of the writing process in primary education foster creativity? / 2. How can the implementation of activities that promote creative writing increase a taste for it? In this continuity, the proposed objectives to be achieved are the following: to promote a taste for writing in a creative way; to enhance critical, reflective and creative thinking; to develop an aesthetic-literary sensibility and to foster co-operative and/or collaborative writing skills. In this investigation, one of the activities developed, along with the transformative role of books, was entitled "Do I love myself (nearly always)? My mirror, my mirror, what do I see?", driven by the reading of the book, in pop-up format: "I love you (nearly always)" by Anna Llenas (2020). This book alludes to the importance of welcoming and understanding difference to live in society. That said, "It is through our differences that we educate each other, and it is through our shared contexts that what we learn takes on meaning" (Comissão Internacional sobre os Futuros da Educação, UNESCO, 2022, p. 51). In this way, books prove to be essential tools for developing socio-emotional competences, not least because reading should be understood as nourishment (Cruz, 2021). Given this evidence, the teacher, as a mediator of reading and its enjoyment, must have good selection criteria when choosing books, favoring quality over quantity, if necessary, as well as the aesthetic-literary and iconographic dimension (combination of written and plastic code). In conclusion, this itinerary between reading and writing has highlighted the idea that words need to rub together and provoke strangeness, resulting in subsequent transformations because of reading and writing them.

#### Theoretical framework

The object-book in pop-up format has become increasingly relevant in children's literature, revealing itself to be an invaluable resource. The highlight this time is the use of the pop-up book, entitled "I love you (nearly always)" by Anna Llenas (2020). This book privileges "discovering how the spaces reconstructed on the double page instigate a ludic and creative multidimensionality that fosters empathy [...] in order to understand the acceptance of the Other, boosting the living experience of emotions that go towards reencountering practices of responsible and active citizenship" (Melão, 2022, pp. 3-4). In fact, this type of book was a "novelty" for most of the participants (Fig.1).



Figure 1 – Participants' curiosity when manipulating the pop-up book.

Nowadays, creativity is increasingly valued, and reading and writing lead us to discover the richness and plasticity of the (Portuguese) language.

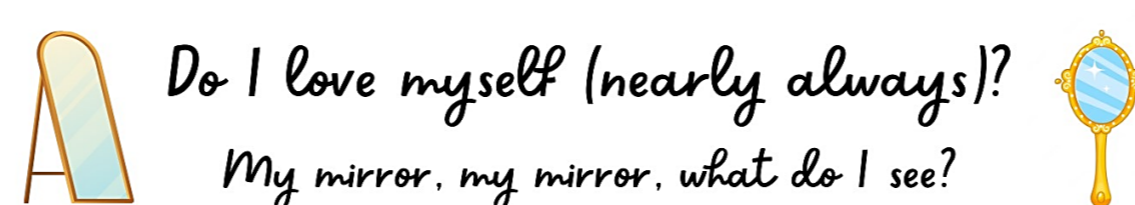
In turn, "creative writing has the power to communicate to everyone the seriousness of the game that realizes us humanly through the use of ludic and aesthetic intentions of language" (Vieira, 2001, p. 9). However, the ambition in this writing process is for talent to be refined through technique and work, because "without technique, talent is as useless as a fused light bulb" (Mancelos, 2013, p. 20).

#### Methodology

The methodological approach is qualitative in nature, with a case study as the methodological reference. The participants in this study were students from a 4th year primary education class, made up of 24 students, from a school located in the city of Viseu. The data collection techniques were questionnaire enquiry (invitation to reflect on writing), direct observation and data collection instruments, which included documents produced by the students, questionnaires and the researcher's logbook. The data was processed using content analysis, based on pre-defined categories of analysis derived from the literature review and the research questions and objectives.

#### Activities developed

The pop-up book "I love you (nearly always)" by Anna Llenas (2020) valorizes difference through Rita and Rui's friendship. That said, the following activity was designed to get them thinking about these questions from an early age, because it's often "easier" to look at others and see their faults and/or qualities than it is to look at ourselves. That's why it's equally important to look inwards and get to know ourselves. In this way, the challenge was to carry out an "interview" in pairs, where each person exposes themselves to their colleague through a set of questions, based on self-reflection: "Do I love myself (nearly always)? My mirror, my mirror, what do I see?" (Fig. 2). This was an activity that made it possible to understand how each student perceives themselves, as well as their fears and dreams.



1. When you look in the mirror, what do you like most about yourself physically (physical features)? And what do you like least about yourself?

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2. If you had a complaints/flaws book about yourself, what would you write in it?

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3. If you had a book of compliments/qualities about yourself, what would you write in it?

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4. What do you think makes you different from the others around you?

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5. What's your biggest dream?

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6. What's your biggest fear?

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7. Do you love yourself (nearly always)? Justify.

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Figure 2 – Support material provided to each student.

In addition, the next activity was creative writing, with the intention of writing a letter in pairs. This challenge resulted in them "bringing to life" a "new person", based on the answers they gave earlier (Fig. 2), fusing their different characteristics and then presenting it to the class.

When they create a new person by combining their characteristics, it helps them to look not only at themselves, but also at others, checking the qualities and characteristics they emphasize. In their letters they underlined the importance of respect, empathy, "not judging others by their appearance", acceptance (of ourselves and others), the importance of each person's heart and the fact that difference "is what makes us special".

#### Feedback on the route taken by the participants

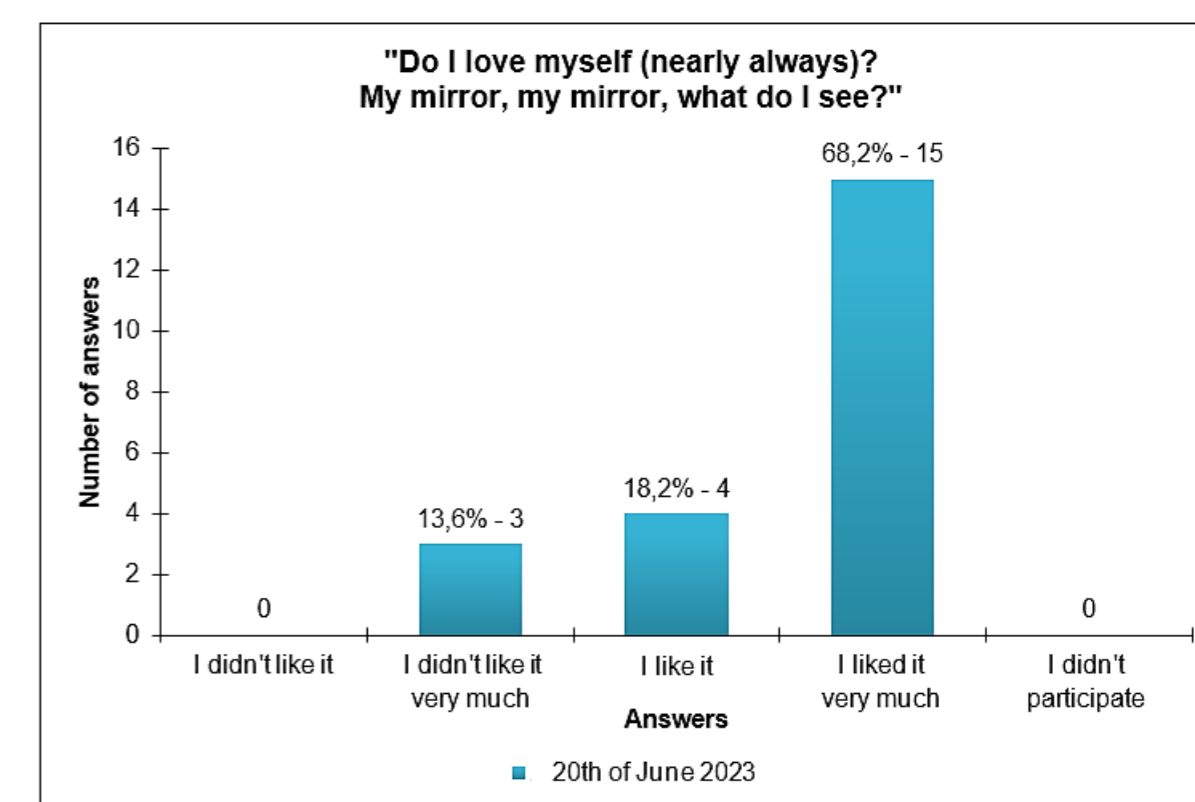


Figure 3 – Student feedback on activities.

Considering the feedback received by the 22 participants via an invitation to reflect on writing (questionnaire) (Fig. 3) and the subsequent content analysis, it emerged that three students (13.6%) ticked "I didn't like it very much" in relation to the activities carried out, explaining that this was due to the length of the activity, their dissatisfaction with sharing their opinion with others and carrying out the activity with a colleague. On the other side, 4 students (18.2%) ticked "I liked it" for the following reasons: opportunity for expression, opportunity for reflection, working methodology and appreciation of the writing context. From another perspective, 15 students (68.2%) ticked "I liked it very much" for the following reasons: appreciation of the writing context, the opportunity to let off steam and share (secrets and likes), appreciation of the aesthetic-literary dimension of the pop-up book, the opportunity to get to know colleagues better, understanding the characteristics of colleagues, without a reason (in particular), the working methodology and two students didn't give a reason.

#### Final remarks

The literary itinerary travelled, through the interlacing of reading and writing, helped to understand the importance of this type of activity as a way of getting to know and understand the students better. It was also an opportunity for the students to get to know themselves and each other better. From another perspective, the book also served as a vehicle for reflecting on the importance of difference, respecting it because it makes each of us unique. This whole journey has led us to rethink the role of the teachers in the various fields in which they work, not only in relation to the (scientific) knowledge they want their students to achieve, but also to value the dimension of "knowing how to be", through their feelings, emotions, attitudes and behaviour.

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