



Animation and Childhood: Participation of Children in the creation of Narratives for Animation

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Abstract

The contributions of child and pre-teen audiences for the creation of their own contents allows their voice to be heard and their opinions to be considered. In view of understanding the younger generations participatory methods and the making of narrative, it is necessary to consider the nature of their creative processes as it englobes different fields and strategies, such as drawing and music. *Gosma!* is a project focused in the production of an animated short film by a group of master students at Instituto Politécnico do Cávado e do Ave, whose narrative creation involved children's participation through interactive strategies. This article will reflect upon the participatory and ludic methods focused on the narrative construction for animation, observing their impact on the script construction for the animation short film *Gosma!*.

1. Introduction

1.1. Objectives – Gosma!

The featured research is part of a master project called *Gosma!*, which aims to develop an animation short film with a team of five elements⁴, oriented for children aged 8-11. Due to the choice of young audiences, it's intended to research the creative universe of children within this age group and build with them a script for animation, in school context. The narrative was shaped through participatory methods, thus making it a participatory narrative.

Storytelling is the object of study of narrative, be it verbal, written or visual. As Sunwolf (2001) refers, a method to deconstruct narrative is through division by questions: the content and language of the story (form); the motivation to tell the story (why); methods of telling the story (how); the impact of the story (effects). Sunwolf (2001) argues that the public should have an active role in storytelling, taking into account how the narrative becomes a collaborative work between storytellers and receivers. The prevalence of narrative in culture places us in a position where the cognitive processes organized through narrative methods are indispensable. Therefore, the narrative intelligence – the ability to organ-

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ize human experiences into narrative forms – is essential to perceive and understand a variety of experiences, from entertainment to education (Riedl, 2013) considering the prospect of participatory narrative one of the most prominent forms of narrative intelligence.

We understand participatory narrative as way for the audience to directly influence and create paths in storytelling, using strategies that allow them to play character roles and/or manage the narrative universe. The main objective of participatory narrative is to actively involve participants and future observers in the creation of the action world, so that they become fundamental pieces for the plot development, as their choices hold significant consequences (Sunwolf, 2001).

We understand interactive narrative as way for the audience to directly influence and create paths in storytelling, using strategies that allow them to play character roles and/or manage the narrative's universe. The main objective of interactive narrative is to actively involve participants and future observers in the action's worldbuilding, so that they become fundamental pieces for the plot development, as their choices hold significant consequences (Sunwolf, 2001). But to what extent are the audiences participants in media that they consume?

Naturally, there's a distinction between playing a creative role in environments made by an outer author and having the authorship of these environments. Although the audiences become interveners, there's a limit to their interventions; they can only act accordingly to the possibilities the author has made available (Murray, 1997). This is a type of authorship that implies the delimitation of rules for the interveners. The author provides not only a set of scenes and conditions, but also a universe of narrative possibilities. Murray (1997) tells us that the participant, even if he/she takes part as a protagonist, a navigator or an explorer, still uses this repertoire of possibilities to create a specific story within the possible stories provided; if so, we need to distinguish this derivative work from the originating authorship of the system itself.

However, according to Jenkins (2006), these are not just derivative creations, but rather an assertion of authorship. Through these creative works the public acquires the right to expand, adapt and control a narrative, making these methods participatory. This form of authorship, which Jenkins calls participatory, is defined when there is active and creative participation of members of an audience, developing, expanding and adapting another's narrative (Meyers, 2014).

But how is participatory narrative and its methods important in view of today's children's audiences and in which ways is it advantageous for the child?

Within the framework of current sociology of childhood, children are considered in its own category apart from other stages of social development; the term childhood is used as an integrated structure in society, built in comparison with other social structures. Thus, one of the objectives of sociology of childhood is to remove a persistent image of the child as a being devoid of self-worth, that is only a mere object of socialization (Sar-amago, 2001). Children's identity evolves through the worlds they inhabit,

as well as through interaction between their peers. Thence, we realize that each child is a part of a complex universe as an object of analysis. In this way, it's indispensable to assign a role of protagonism to their actions as a form of building identity.

Until recently research with children was treated as a collection of data "in transit" that, in a progressive sense, would culminate when children achieve adult cognitive and moral stages (Soares & Sarmiento & Tomás, 2005). The adult-centric focus, as it doesn't consider the child's voice, contribute to the exclusion of children in the childhood research, causing negative effects and erroneous knowledge about the society. Thus, listening to the child's discourse would be listening to the adult's interpretation of it.

Every contemporary individual needs to develop participatory skills to be included in society. Brian Milne says that "(participation) is not a political campaign that puts children first, as children's liberation proposed, but a process of creating a society that is inclusive of young citizens" (Milne, 1996). Participatory research with children has a political component, as it contributes to the construction of a place of child citizenship, a place where the child's action is valid (Santana & Fernandes, 2011). Child participation is based on considering children as a subject with rights playing a central role in the research. It seeks to eliminate the child's invisibility on the research and give a prominent place to their opinions and shouldn't be focused on the adult researcher, but on the partnership between adults and children, making the younger not only the object of study but also assuming roles as researchers (Hart, 1992). So, valuing children's perspectives allows them to intervene with autonomy and significance in their daily lives.

Contrary to what many authors say, the diversity of views on what surrounds us does not equal disorder or superficiality, but rather a multidimensional expression of our world (Soares & Sarmiento & Tomás, 2005).

The diversity of elements that children show us when assuming an active role constructing their knowledge, from verbal to visual, make it possible to register meaningful results (Santana & Fernandes, 2011). When using participatory and ludic strategies, researchers often obtain unexpected results, as was the case in this study, allowing children to reveal skills that are often overlooked, which required a proper environment provided by researchers. In the context of the narrative authoring, the understanding of participatory methods contributes to the creation of multidimensional narratives made through complex network of elements. These methods use visual, verbal and ludic resources based on the script foundations prearranged by the {five} authors of this project. With these foundations, various materials were designed in order to be appealing to children and used as a starting point to develop another animation elements, such as characters and backgrounds. This article serves to present the sessions held in schools and the analysis of these results, reflecting upon how these processes may contribute to the authorship of the animation narratives, valuing the children's opinions and their creative skills.

1.2. Materials Conception – From Idea to Game

Since the activities were planned to children of different ages the differences were considered and the sessions had slight variations in each class. We planned two ludic sessions per class: the first one, more expositive as it focuses on the understanding of animation concepts, followed by the conception of key elements (backgrounds, characters); the second one was focused on the narrative creation and based on the previous elements. It should be noted that the sessions planning was very important, not only in aspects such as time and resources, but also as an effective way of presenting and explaining the world of animation to the younger, so that they could, in the best way, contribute to the short film narrative.

The tools and materials used in the sessions were also a teamwork. Since the characters were already designed, we sought a way to give freedom to children to contribute to its redesign. Therefore, a table with information about the five protagonists was planned: Aida, Ferrinhos, Márcia, Neves and Dani (Fig 1). Based on this information the characters design were left to the children's criteria, with some constraints proposed by the authors who drew up an elaborated sheet for drawing the character details that remembers the dress up games, with a character silhouette and an *assemblage* of elements like clothes and hairstyles, based on the concept art⁵ design authored by the researchers. This object was named silhouette sheet (Fig 2).

AIDA	FERRINHOS	MÁRCIA	NEVES	DANI
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 11 anos - Espírito de líder - Impõe ordem - Impulsiva - Protetora dos amigos - Gosta de correr - Mette-se em sarilhos - Gosta de doces 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 11 anos - Tem aparelho nos dentes - Tem um telemóvel antigo - Timido com desconhecidos - Gosta de videogames e desporto - Curioso 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 11 anos - Gosta de tirar fotografias - Gosta de aventura - Simpática com toda a gente - Conta histórias assustadoras aos amigos - Extrovertida 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 13 anos - Faz-se de duro - Desconfiado - Não está interessado nos outros - Fica irritado facilmente - Protetor do/da Dani 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 8 anos - Ninguém sabe se é um menino ou uma menina - Criança tímida - Fala pouco - Sempre atrás do irmão - Tem medo das histórias da Márcia



Fig. 1. Information about the characters: Aida, Ferrinhos, Márcia, Neves and Dani;

Fig. 2. Silhouette sheet.

In the next step, each member of the team has drawn a background (Fig 3-7) of the narrative environment to help the children to understand the narrative and characters that inhabit it. The main part of the action takes place in a magical forest, where trees have eyes, plants light up and go covers the ground. Since we aimed for something fun and captivating for children, the backgrounds were turned into animated gifs, with some small details with movement to surprise the viewer.

For a better understanding of the narrative's fixed elements and the perception of its characters and backgrounds, a short *animatic*⁶ that shows the first part of the plot – a bus leaves the school taking children back home – was developed. After leaving most of the children, the bus goes through a forestry area with the last five. However, the driver encounters

⁵ Concept art refers to visual objects drawn as tools of character making and/or worldbuilding, commonly used on animation. (Mortensen, 2017).

⁶ Animatic is a preliminary version of a film, produced by shooting successive sections of a storyboard and adding a soundtrack (Oxford Dictionary).



Fig. 3, 4, 5, 6 & 7.
Background drawings
by Lina Dantas, Sara
Covelo, Adriana Bica,
Sara Costa and Sara
Bairinhas.

leave the vehicle to investigate the event. While examining the back of the bus, he notices that there's ivy wrapped around one of the rear wheels. The driver moves to the front to inspect further, while the ivy goes back to the land, releasing the bus that moves on its own with the children inside, making the driver distressed. The bus goes on at an uncontrollable speed and the children panic. It ends up colliding with a tree, but the children don't suffer injuries and they leave the bus, finding themselves stunned and lost in the forest.

Even though the character design is already finished, they're represented in the animatic with simple silhouettes, lacking distinctive features, emphasizing only their facial expressions. It's a justified decision since one of the challenges proposed to the children was to draw the characters according to their features, avoiding to give visual references, being the only reference the silhouette sheet (Fig 2).



Fig. 8. Animatic
frames.

As the animatic ends when the bus crashes, all the remaining narrative is open and free for children to explore. Aiming to use participatory and ludic methods, we created a board game as a tool of narrative creation. The game starts when the five children get off the bus and their goal is to find the way back to school. The board, which measurements are 120 cm by 70 cm, also works as a map of the forest (Fig 9). It also has eight tabs that,

Fig. 9. Board game and
forest map;

Fig. 10. Tabs and
respective symbols;





Fig. 11. Game cards;

Fig. 12. Mushrooms.

when raised, reveal symbols that signal game events (Fig. 10). The players had the chance to interpret the symbols as they wished since they're rather ambiguous, and they can use them to proceed in the narrative.

In addition, other objects were designed that helped to make the game more dynamic. Some of these were the cards (Fig. 11) given as a reward to the children when they made decisions as a team. The three cards serve as shortcuts, allowing players to jump to houses that conduct them to the finishing point and to the end of the game. Objects were also designed in case the players fell in a trap house; one of these were the mushrooms (Fig. 12) that we stuck to the players arms to convey the idea of being "infected".

In the 5th grade class some elements were changed: we have chosen to use dice instead of the cards.

2. The Sessions

2.1. Characterization of the Classes – Who?

The research was conducted on three classes of three different schools. One was a 4th grade class from Escola Básica de 1.º Ciclo de Oliveirainha and another a 3rd grade class from Básica de 1.º Ciclo de São Bernardo, both located on the Aveiro district. The third one was a 5th grade class from Agrupamento de Escolas de Redondo, located on the Évora district.

As for the constitution of the selected classes, the 3rd grade class from Básica de 1.º Ciclo de São Bernardo, consists of 26 students of which 14 are male and 12 are female, aged between 7 and 10 years; the 4th grade class from Escola Básica de 1.º Ciclo de Oliveirainha consists of 26 students of which 11 are male and 15 are female, aged between 8 and 11 years; lastly, the 5th grade class from Agrupamento de Escolas de Redondo, consists of 21 students of which 14 are male and 7 are female, aged between 10 and 12 years. The sessions were held in Visual and Technological Education classes.

In total, considering the 26 students in both 3rd and 4th grade classes and 21 in the 5th grade class, 73 children participated in this research, of which 39 are males and 34 females.

2.2. First Session: bringing drawings to life

2.2.1. Concepts and Preferences – My favorite cartoon!

The first session consisted of three phases: presentation of contents, scenario and character development. We asked children if they know what is animation, animator and how to do animation.

We concluded that 60% of the children had a close idea of what animation is, although some confused animation with sociocultural animation. As an example, some of their answers:

“Animation is cheering people up.”; “Animation is making people happy, cheerful.”; “Animation is a way to bring drawings to life.”

As we matched animation with cartoons, children quickly understood the concept. Children defined the word animator as “Someone who makes cartoons as a profession” and some spoke about relatives or acquaintances who work with animation, mainly in the publicity field.

Afterwards, the children’s favorite cartoons were discussed. While they knew and watched featured films produced by studios like Disney, none of the children mentioned these kinds of productions as their favorite types of animation and, instead, they rather see animated series. They pointed out some of the favorite TV channels that feature animated series such as *Panda Biggs*, *Sic K*, *Nickelodeon* and *Cartoon Network*. As favorite animations some of the most popular among them are *Teen Titans GO*, *The Amazing World of Gumball*, *Uncle Grandpa*, *Phineas and Ferb*; as for the older children, they prefer *Family Guy*, *South Park* and *Simpsons*. There were also some children who mentioned series of Japanese animation (popularly known as *anime*) such as *Dragon Ball* and *Naruto* but, because these are non-western animations, there were doubts whether these examples should be considered as animation or not. Another peculiarity was that in all three classes several children pointed out live action series for children and pre-teens, such as *Henry Danger* and *KC Undercover*. This confusion arises mainly due to the contents of the TV channels aimed for younger generations, which programming consists of cartoons interleaved with live-action with teenage actors.

After discussing these media preferences we propose a last question: how is animation made? In this case, the children were more reluctant to explain the process. Some of them, more familiar with the methods, were able to present a succinct explanation about the animation process:

“Doing a lot of drawings and making them move.”; “Flipping sheets very fast.”

Some children suggested devices and tools such as projectors, computers, light tables and montage as a way to animate, even though they couldn’t explain how these elements work. In the 3rd and 4th grade classes several individuals were interested in sound design, mentioning that they would like to “make cartoon voices”. In this point, the 5th grade class turned to be more closed, as opposed to the younger classes that showed a lot of enthusiasm during the group discussions.

We displayed an excerpt of a Paramount Pictures newsreel called *Popular Science*, which explains the process of animation at Fleischer Studios during the 1930s. All of the classes quickly understood these older animation methods and tools such as storyboard.⁷ Surprisingly, a small percentage of children knew what a storyboard was even before the investigators presented and explained the concept.

⁷ Storyboard is a sequence of drawings, typically with some directions and dialogue, representing the shots planned for a film or television production (Oxford Dictionary).

Since most of the children only knew commercial animation, such as the Disney featured films and animated series on Portuguese television, they weren't familiar with author animation. Therefore, we showed two short animated films produced by students. To the 3rd and 4th grade classes the films chosen were: *Après la pluie* (Fig 13), directed by Louis Tardivier, Charles-André Lefebvre, Sébastien Vovau, Emmanuelle Walker and Manuel Thanon-Tchi in 2008, at Ecole de l'image Gobelins; and *Kagemono* (Fig 14), directed by Sabrina Cotugno in 2012, at CalArts. Reactions were similar in both groups. As for *Après la Pluie*, children mentioned how it reminded them of videogames such as *Overwatch*, due to the action' speed and also Super Mario, due to the "floors" the character runs through, which bears some resemblance to the platform games⁸. As for *Kagemono*, most children stated that the characters were "cuter" and the narrative more complex. In both classes, around 80% of the children preferred *Kagemono* to *Après la Pluie*. We present some given reasons:

"It's cuter because they ended up as friends."; "There's some mystery about who's good and who's bad."

Children that preferred *Après la Pluie* answered that it was due to gags and the magical giant animal:

"It was funnier."; "I like action things."



Fig. 13, 14, 15 & 16: *Après la Pluie*, *Kagemono*, *Tsunami* and *Afternoon Class* screenshots.

For the 5th grade class, as they're older and frequenting the next study cycle, we choose different short animated films. These were *Tsunami*, directed by Sofie Kampmark in 2015 at Animation Workshop; and *Afternoon Class*, directed Seoro Oh in 2015 at South Korea's Chungkang College of Cultural Industries.

Although they were paying attention during both films, the children didn't want to discuss opinions at this stage. As for *Tsunami*, children were in doubt if it was 2D or 3D animation; once we explained that it was a mix of 2D and 3D, they were curious about the technique.

⁸ A platform game is a type of videogame originated on the 1980s which main objective is getting to the finish line while jumping on platforms, floors, stairs or other objects (Klappenbach, 2018).

We verified that most of the children preferred *Afternoon Class*, as it was “funnier” and the theme relatable with their lives (being sleepy during classes); some said it was due to “special effects and illusions” – metamorphosis.

Now understanding this animation type, children easily perceived the film’s format that we wanted to develop. Showing the animatic, children got the gist of the narrative to build.

2.2.2. Activities – But I don’t know how to draw!

The first proposed activity was dedicated to the construction of narrative environments. Using the backgrounds drawn by the researchers as a guide to the action’ space, we asked children to develop scenery elements that could take part of our environments. Thus, the children were split into groups of 4-6 elements each to create graphic exquisite corpses (cadaver exquis)⁹. Using the exquisite corpse method, children drew plants and trees that could take part of our forest. We present some of the results: Even with the scenery backgrounds made by the researchers as examples,

Fig. 17, 18, 19 & 20:
Exquisite corpses/
cadaver exquis.



the children were encouraged to draw what they wanted to build these “trees”, since each one had their own interpretation of a “strange tree”. We noticed children faced different levels of difficulty in each class. In the 4th grade class there was some reluctance to start the exquisite corpses. Some participants were confused as to how they should begin and pointed out that they didn’t possess the ability to draw it:

Child: “Do I need to draw the plant on the projector?”; **Researcher:** “No, it’s just an example! You can draw whatever you want, what you find most weird.” **Child:** “But I’m bad at drawing! I’m not good as you!” **Researcher:** “You don’t need to draw like us! Do you like drawing?”; **Child:** “Yes!”; **Researcher:** “Then, anything you draw for this activity will be a good drawing! No need to worry about making it look pretty.”

Fig. 21, 22 & 23.
Making of exquisite
corpses and
character design.



⁹ Exquisite corpse (cadaver exquis) is a concept created by surrealists during the 1920s to name the game in which the first player writes a phrase in a piece of paper, covers it partially and passes it to another player to continue the phrase (Brenton, 1930).

Naturally, most of the children found easier to continue the drawing than starting without any referents. In one case, one of the children felt uncomfortable with the task so the researchers started the exquisite corpse, which made the child feel more at ease to keep drawing. The 3rd grade class was the fastest to adapt to this game. Several children mentioned having ideas of what to draw even before we started the activity.

Child A: “I love to make weird things! (...) I know what I’m going to draw! A snake-tree!” **Child B:** “Shh! Don’t say it or you’ll spoil the surprise!”; **Child A:** “(whispering to the researcher) I’m going to draw a mix of a frog and a boar.”

This class tried to play by the rules of the game (continuing the lines left by the previous player and not letting the next player see the drawing, to maintain the randomness) drawing the most at ease and least afraid to make mistakes. Although in this class the activity developed with more fluidity than in the 4th grade class, there were still some insecurities, especially at times when children compared themselves with each other.

Researcher: “Everything is going ok?”; **Child A:** “I’ve finished, finally! My tree looks so weird!” **Child B:** “Mine too! (...) But I don’t know how to draw trees (like Child A) ...”; **Researcher:** “You don’t need to draw trees.”

Such as the previous class, for the 5th grade class the activity was also easy to start and the children seemed much more interested than during the expository part of the session.

When the activity ended all classes were very eager to see their team’s result, as well the ones made by other teams, comparing which ones were the “most weird”. Although some considered their exercise failed (for example, a 4th grade child drew their part in a different orientation from the rest of the group; as so, this group asked the researchers to not show the result to anyone else), most teams were excited and satisfied with their creations. What followed was a short discussion between 5th grade individuals:

Child C: “(laughs) This one is from (child D)’s drawing?”; **Child D:** “Yeah, it’s mine!”; **Child E:** “Wow (child D)! It’s so crazy!”; **Child C:** “It’s (the drawing) alive!”; **Child D:** “I’ve drawn a kind of a tree and then I’ve drawn something like a net and at the end two carnivorous plants.”; **Child E:** “Mine is like the inside of an eye and I added smoke to the trees.”; **Child D:** “(...) That’s my favorite.”

Summing up, the exquisite corpse freed the children from some pre-formatted drawing practices, (for example, many had in mind a standard way to draw a tree that they should stick to). Since there was no right way to draw, children felt more confident in the next activity.

The last activity of the first session focused on the characters. We presented the information table (Fig. 1), as a way to familiarize the chil-

dren with the characters. It served not only to explain character traits but also to understand their relationships; Neves and Dani are siblings, while Aida, Ferrinhos and Márcia are best friends, dividing the characters in two groups. It was also important to help thinking about Dani's appearance, as the character is androgynous. In this case, it led to the children interpreting as "looking like a boy or a girl".

Each child was responsible for drawing a random character using the silhouette sheet (Fig 2). We noticed that most of 3rd and 4th grade boys would like to draw Neves, because it's the oldest character, therefore the most intelligent, strongest and the others protector. In contrast, Ferrinhos is shy, likes videogames and wears braces, the children categorize him as a "nerd" and, consequently, less "cool". Concerning girls, most of the children preferred Márcia because is the one that looks more feminine; or Aida because the character acts as a leader. Some wanted to draw Dani, because they wanted to draw someone androgynous. As for 5th grade, most boys preferred Ferrinhos, as some of his aspects were relatable, such as liking sports and videogames, being curious and even wearing braces. There was also a significant number of boys who wanted to draw female characters, especially Márcia, for "being the funniest". Girls, in this case, preferred Aida for her acting as a leader and also Dani, as it's the character freer for interpretation.

Fig. 24. Character designs by the children.

Then the drawings made by the children, next to the researchers designs:



This activity mechanics were considerably simpler; on the silhouette sheet (Fig. 2) the children marked the clothing and hairstyle elements that they consider fitting for the character; if the children didn't want any of the existing elements, they were free to create their own. Afterwards, considering the chosen elements, the classes drew their characters over the silhouette located on the upper left corner, in a way that conveys the characters personality.

Curiously, in all classes there were children who choose clothing and hairstyle similar to the original designs. We will now examine all character results, starting with Aida. Most children drew Aida with typically feminine elements (blonde long hair, sometimes tied up, wearing a skirt and shades of pink or purple). However, because of Aida's sense of leadership, some children drew her as a tomboy. In Dani's case, the majority opted for a representation either feminine or masculine, rather than a more androgynous portrayal. As so, in the 3rd grade class we have many

Dani designs with a more masculine look, while the drawings from both 4th and 5th grade classes, are mostly feminine. However, there's some examples considerably androgynous in the 4rd grade class. The following character, Ferrinhos, was often drawn wearing glasses, probably because of the "nerd" stereotype for children who enjoy playing videogames. It should be noted that the 5th grade children were more detailed with this character, including elements such as the old cellphone, the question marks in clothing (as Ferrinhos is a curious child) and the braces. Regarding Márcia, as the female character that likes to take pictures, both three classes elaborated more feminine representations. We noticed that a majority of children assumed Márcia would be the character more concerned with looks, as it was usually drawn with long hair and accessories such as bracelets and hair pins. And she was always drawn smiling, probably because sympathy is one of the characters attributes. In contrast, Neves was drawn by children with an "annoyed" expression, due to the character's irritability. There's some original examples; a 5th grade child has drawn Neves without a leg, with dark clothing and tattoos, emphasizing his "tough guy" features. Generally speaking, we noted that there's few examples of drawn characters of color, that is, characters of another ethnicity.

These character designs elaborated by the children were used as important pieces for the board game, played in the following session.

2.3. Second Session – I want to go that way!

The third and last activity of this research was the board game (Fig 9), using the first session results as the creative tools for narrative creation. Children were split in groups of five elements and each one of the researchers acted as a game mediator. The character designs they created in the previous session served as game pieces and each child represented one of the five characters.

Fig. 25, 26 & 27:
Character designs by
the children.



The objective of the game was to find a way from the bus to the school. All decisions should be made together. For 3rd and 4th grade classes, if one of the group members got separated from the others, they could use one of the cards (Fig 11).

The players come across with several paths, so the moderators asked which way they will choose; after opting for a direction, they're faced with other options but, this time, for just one character; the player chooses between the two tabs that are indicated. For example, when choosing the mushroom path (Fig. 25), the one playing as Márcia must pick "take a picture" or "pee", thus raising one of the tabs. Truly, all tabs are trap houses

that the children aren't aware of. Most trap houses take the player to the lake's bottom, taking him/her out of the game, while the others keep the player in game, but with a consequence. For example, the mushrooms that grow on Marcia's arm. If a character ends up missing, the players can use one of the cards that take them to the bottom of the lake (Fig. 27). The only way to end the game is going under the lake, as it's the only way of exiting.

After the first time playing the game we gave more freedom of choice to the children; we allowed choosing who and how characters act; and mutual aid methods. Since the 5th grade class didn't use the cards, these free methods were of great importance to move the narrative forward, making children think more carefully about what to do. In alternative to the cards, the children proposed their own resolutions for given problems using dice to verify the effectiveness of their choices.

With the multiplicity of choices and, naturally, the differences between children there were no equal games. Below we present reactions of the two different groups: first, the 4th grade class:

Researcher: "Neves wants to stay in the bus. Anyone has a different opinion? Anyone wants to try changing his mind?"; **Dani:** "I'm staying with my brother."; **Neves:** "You can't mess with my sister!"; **Márcia:** "Oh, but you don't know if they're a girl or a boy."; **Researcher:** "No one knows. Not even us (researchers)."; **Neves:** "Ok but we have to stay in the bus."; **Aida:** "Yeah, we can get ourselves in trouble!"; **Ferrinhos:** "But Aida, you have to come with us!" **Márcia:** "I'm sure that way is better!" (Ferrinhos and Márcia separate themselves from Aida, so she stays with Neves and Dani); **Dani:** (opens the bus tab, sees tentacles) "Big bro, let's go after them! (Neves and Dani catch up with Ferrinhos and Márcia, leaving Aida behind); **Researcher:** "Are you going to leave Aida behind?"; **Ferrinhos:** "Whatever!"

In the 5th grade class case:

Dani: "Who's the first in line?"; **Aida:** "First is Aida."; **Márcia:** "Don't forget that Dani has to be behind Neves!"; **Researcher:** "You don't have to be in line. Why did you choose this order?"; **Neves:** "We want it like this! It's cooler!"; **Aida:** "Dani should be in the middle because he's the youngest."; **Neves:** "Who votes on splitting up?"; **Dani:** "All together!"; (Dani is left behind, and Neves goes on with the others) **Researcher:** "Will you leave your sibling behind?" **Neves:** "No!" (The siblings split up with the others); **Researcher:** "Do you want to stay in the bus or go somewhere?"; **Neves:** "Stay in the bus. (to Ferrinhos) Goodbye friend, I'll miss you."

Despite the easy adhesion to the game there were cases of children less interested, what was not directly correlated to their age differences; for example, one child of the 4th grade class dominated the game completely, blocking the interaction between characters. This caused loss of interest in the activity on the remaining children.

At the end of the session some children mentioned the game as their favorite activity and said they would like the researchers to incorporate their stories in the animation narrative.

This exercise worked as the culmination of all the previous activities. The children interpreted the characters, but these ended up different from the researchers' versions; the characters were completely new, born from the game. The child reformulated the character in addition to their redesigning. As an intermediary of the character, the child molded it to their own model, giving possibility of action to the character. McCloud speaks of Man as an egocentric creature, who looks for himself on what he sees (McCloud, 1993). By providing the children with only a silhouette and some attributes, they developed the character as they wanted and used it to act out their own reaction as if themselves were in the narrative.

In a similar way, the background and scenery elements have dictated the narrative's environment and influenced children's decisions, avoiding dangerous places or picking the interesting ones. Since there was no written text, the only reference for the plot was the map, which caused great excitement in the children who were very excited to explore and make their own narratives.

The contributions of these young individuals were not directly featured in our animation script, but strongly influenced its development. While portraying these characters, children were not afraid to take decisions that in real life would be impossible but makes their reactions realistic in the world of the narrative, as they took them as if they were themselves in the situation. That kind of reaction was what was missing in our initial script. Furthermore, these sessions were important to the researchers to distance themselves from the established work for a short while, bringing the children's voice and returning with new perspectives. The script was enriched with elements provided by our target audience. Therefore, we consider this process of participatory narrative essential to this project's development.

3. Conclusions

While conducting a research with children, using participatory methods as a process to create narratives is as important as the results. Since children's responses to the challenges were unexpected, researchers often had to modify strategies to better accommodate children and their needs – one example was during the board game, when some children guessed solutions before the problems were given. This was a constant challenge as each session was quite different from the others, despite a similar planning. But, simultaneously, it was also a catalyst of ideas for both classes and researchers. To the creation of narrative, it was essential not only the children's drawings and opinions as also parallel conversations amongst themselves and with researchers, that even if not directly relevant to the animation plot, improved our work in unpredictable ways, such as characters relationships and young age dynamics. The immense amount of information generated during these activities was beneficial to both parts involved with the study as we got to know what our target audience would like to see and let them contribute to. Children got the chance to share their views in a different way, discovering creative and participatory methods often overlooked in school context.

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