



Brazilian House Museum and EMEI Dona Leopoldina

São Paulo, SP - Brazil

November 27th, 2017

The Tree House and the Birdwatching Platform:

Pause, House, Sings and Wings

EMEI Dona Leopoldina is an early childhood education public school based in São Paulo, that attends around 200 children of four to five years old. One of the first public schools directed for children of this age in São Paulo, EMEI Dona Leopoldina was founded on the basis idealized by Mario de Andrade, a modernist poet that was the secretary of culture of the city of São Paulo between 1935 and 1938. The educational concept of this “childhood parks” (as those childhood services were called at the time) characterized themselves by stressing the importance of childhood in a cultural way that was pioneer to its time, aiming to attend the sons and daughters of the working class that used to live in those neighborhoods.

Passed this first moment, the school has gone through several changes in its management and pedagogical proposals until it got to the actual team, which got together around four years ago. This change has brought a different pedagogical perspective regarding some more progressive and sensible concepts about early childhood education, based on the work and thought of Paulo Freire and Loris Malaguzzi. The proposal initiated then was based in three aspects: artistical languages, environmental education and play, including two councils that contribute day-to-day to the school project, one made of parents and the other made of children.

The “Museu da Casa Brasileira” (Brazilian House Museum), by its turn, characterized its research and practice in education in a broad comprehension of what constitutes the Brazilian house and, more deeply, what is the proper meaning of inhabiting. We aim in our projects, workshops and researches to use different artistical languages, moving away from a content based education in direction to an approach based on listening and experiencing.

The partnership established between EMEI Dona Leopoldina and the Museum of the Brazilian House took place around three years ago, in 2015. Its objective was to propose significant encounters between the museum educators, the schoolteachers and students, addressing themes that characterized the museum vocation through a broad esthetical approach.

The dream of building a tree house was born inside the school community in 2016, in a child council encounter in which the construction was suggested to enhance the quality of the school Yard. That dream, was heard and taken seriously by the school board, and was incorporated in the several different encounters between the museum and the children and schoolteachers,

which occur every two weeks. Since then, the end of 2016, we've made several encounters with children, teachers and the school community. We hereby describe the most significant ones.

We started first with the schoolteachers, aiming to contaminate the staff with the children's dream. Lots of those teachers were afraid that a tree house in the school might cause accidents, so nothing more natural than starting by choosing the trees that could be built and climbed on safely, activating the ancestry memory of childhood climbing trees, remembering the importance of intimacy and secrecy that a tree house can proportionate to children.

On March 15th, 2017, we started to project tree houses with the children. The initial idea was to get different concepts and thoughts together that could be useful to comprehend how children understand the concept of a tree house, as well as produce material that could be incorporated in the tree house. All of that was filmed for future use and different drawings were done by the children, revealing a broad spectrum of ideas. In the beginning, they demonstrated a concern with the possibility that a tree house could stay in fact in a high place, and how it would be possible to stay there. One of the kids brought the idea that we should "get a plane" to fix it on the tree house so it could stay in the air. After all, isn't a plane something heavy that sustains itself in the air, and isn't that the same condition of a tree house? After that we all made a circle and talked about those drawings, and each kid presented his/her ideas about doors, windows, stairs, etc. Some of the ideas that came up were more concrete, but lots of them were more related to the imaginative thinking of children, sharks in wells that should be under the stairs, and even a tree-building, with several floors. On that day, the idea of building a birdwatching platform together with the tree house came up, so that the children could be closer to the singing birds that inhabit the tree.

In another significant encounter, on April 26th, 2017, we made different studies of stairs, windows and roofs, to proportionate a more particularized look to different parts of a house. On that day, we found out some very different cultural repertoire about houses among the children, which is a very common situation in a Brazilian public school.

The next step, after all that projecting, was to take all this material to the architect who works in the museum designing the exhibitions, Frederico Teixeira, so that he could draw a house inspired on the children's contributions. The project that resulted was a plant that articulated a house on a tree with the Bird watching platform, on trees that were close to each other. Some elements of different Brazilian houses were incorporated in the project, as the Puçá (a net that is traditionally utilized for fishing and that got incorporated in the Brazilian design) and a particular way of building houses suspended through some pillars, which is characteristic of the "ribeirinhas" houses (houses that exist nearby some rivers in Brazil that are suspended because of the full tide in rivers – those houses were part of an exhibition in the museum and some of its photos are present in the museum collection).

Once it was finished, the project was presented by Frederico to both councils of parents and children reunited together, where they could make their contributions. A very significant day in which several kinds of knowledge, those of parents, children and professionals were brought up to the conversation.

Afterwards, in a next encounter in the school, we proposed a workshop in which children should draw upon an amplified project of the tree house, incorporating colors and transforming the project according to their own needs and points of view.

Passed the time of projecting, we started to get the means to build the tree house. Here we have to make a brief comment: the Brazilian Public Schools have been suffering from a severe lack of resources, situation that has been aggravated in the last two years with the economic crisis. That said, neither the school nor the museum had the means to execute the project as it was established. The school, then, started to mobilize the community of parents, through its council, and tried to get the means to make that dream viable. Some parties were made to raise funds, and volunteers, who have worked in other projects in school, were mobilized to help in the construction. After some time in that process, a student's grandpa, owner of an outdoor company, donated his company's team labor to add up to the funds that had already been gathered. After a few months, we managed to build it, with the proper changes in the project that were necessary for attending the budget restrictions.

The tree house and the Bird observatory inaugurated with a big party on November 11th, 2017. Now we're are planning to start a new phase of this project: to inhabit it and incorporate several of the children's ideas, as some adding some pulleys to take material up and down, and different furniture for the place.