



PERCEPTIONS



Empathising with Migration
Themes through Booklet
Making: Little Migration Books



Location

Swansea City of Sanctuary's 'Home Away from Home' Exhibition, Grand Multicultural Hub, Swansea (21st March – 7th April 2022)



Contributors

Swansea University, Sara Holden



Audience

This activity involved over 250 children aged 8-11 from 4 Swansea schools, Hafod Primary School, Ysgol Gyfun Gwyr, Parkland Primary School and St Joseph's Cathedral Primary School. The outputs of the activity are shared online with the general public and will also be available to other users, including first-line practitioners, CSOs and migrant organisations.



Purpose/Aim

According to creative practitioner, Sara Holden, who designed the workshop, "the purpose of the activity was to use creative methods to reshape preconceived thought and dialogue patterns on the concept of migration. Referencing the PERCEPTIONS migrant interviews, the Little Migration Books activity explores the project topics of faith, hope, loss, uncertainty, disorientation and invisibility through the visual arts. As a universal language that everyone can understand, visual art has the power to achieve worldwide communication and this activity connects with all. It is a non-discriminatory visual-art activity that taps into emotional and creative faculties to encourage empathy, help reset preconceived ideas and prevent unfair or prejudicial distinctions on the subject of migration."



Description of the Activity

Using Sara's own 'little books' format as inspiration, the activity creatively engaged participants (children) with migration themes by encouraging them to create visualisations of themes that appeared in the PERCEPTIONS migrant interviews. The themes for each page were as follows: Page 1, Faith, Hope and Love; Page 2, Disorientation; Page 3, Uncertainty; Page 4, Invisibility; and Page 5, Loss. The outputs of the activity were personalised, paper booklets that provided visual representations of the participant's ideas regarding the themes.

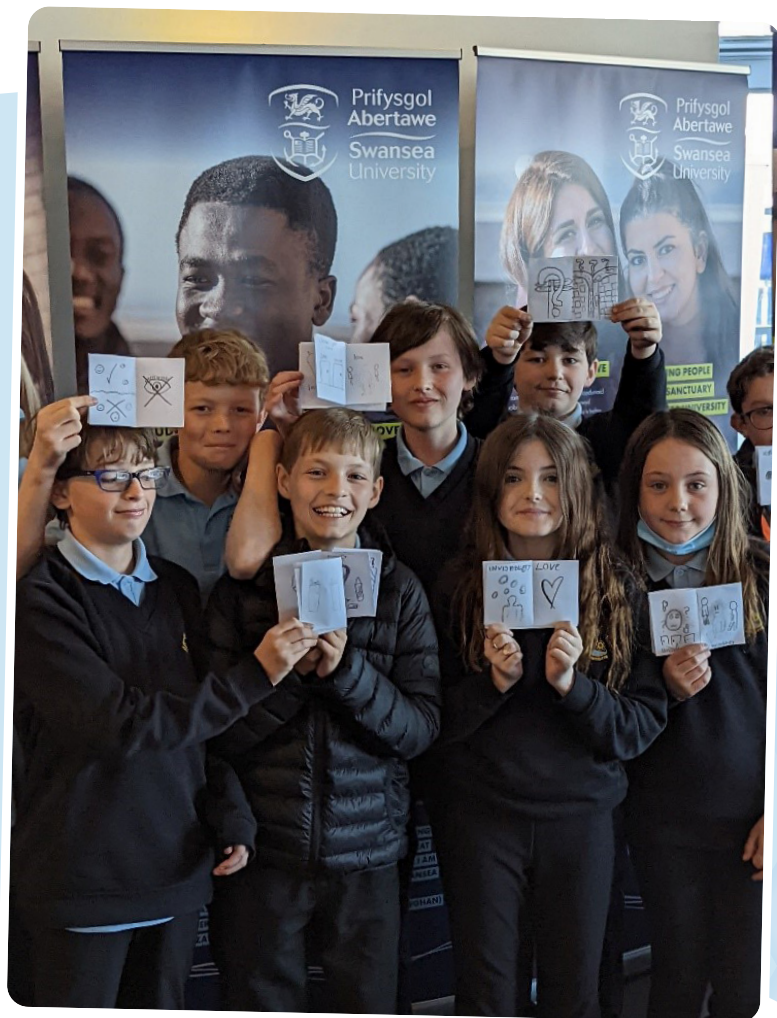
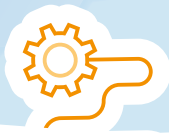


Figure 1: Children from Ysgol Gyfun Gwyr posing with their Little Migration Books



Techniques

The activity progresses in 2 stages:

Questions:

To begin with, the practitioner, Sara, asked the participants (children) about their perceptions of migrants and migration to gauge their knowledge and opinions before creating the Little Migration Books. Sara said "I don't know if it was their own beliefs, but they had this idea about migrants and that they were a certain way, that you should ignore them or not talk to them or whatever. So, I think now they might be more accepting of migrants in general really." The questions prepared the participants for the activity and encouraged them to think of the themes they would be tasked to draw.

Little Migration Books:

After being encouraged to explore their preconceptions of migrants and migration, the children were taught by Sara how to create small booklets out of A4 paper. Each page of the booklet coincided with one specific theme from the PERCEPTIONS migrant interviews. The practitioner chose the themes for the children because they "might be subjects they haven't visited before maybe in school. They're subjects that people usually avoid. Even in a family situation, people don't normally talk about those things. Especially with the war going on in Ukraine at the moment, people are looking at pictures of real-life situations, and experiencing and getting some sort of knowledge about the lives of migrants... It's great the things the children come up with to explain those themes." Before each page, Sara discussed the themes with the children and then tasked them with drawing their own visual representations of these themes.



Figure 2: Practitioner, Sara Holden, teaching children from Hafod Primary School how to create the Little Migration Books.



Figure 3: Two children from Parkland Primary School drawing on their Little Migration Books



Key Concepts

Manifesting Perceptions Through Drawing

Emotions tied to experiences persist in memory and impact long after the experience occurred. By empathising with migration themes that migrants expressed in the PERCEPTIONS interviews, the participants (children) were encouraged to think of migration as an experience with indeterminate beginnings and endings that transcends conceptual and physical borders, as opposed to operationalised, staged journeys with separated phases. The children's drawings mark the Little Migration Books with traces, creating a form of inscription, **reflecting the process of making and describing migration as a process** rather than a completed event. Similarly, Norman (2003) describes drawing as always existing in the present tense, reflecting ongoing, uncertain migration that is constantly pressing forward, challenging teleological or deterministic assumptions about migrant journeys. As such, the drawings are a candid depiction of the children's perceptions of migration concepts in that present time and milieu, with all intended marks **visible but with indecipherable meanings** exceeding the conceptual description, requiring inferences from their audience, engaging them further in the process of re-thinking migration concepts.

Drawing provides school-age children with the means to easily express their concerns and broadens their ability to convey complex concepts (Vygotsky, 2004). The action of drawing also **helps retention and emotional learning about forms of knowledge** that cannot be easily written down. Learning benefits are amplified by framing the workshop as a fun activity, a space where the children could be free from inhibitions and judgement where they felt safe to play around with the migration themes and convey them in a way that they personally empathise with (Berger & Berger, 2005).

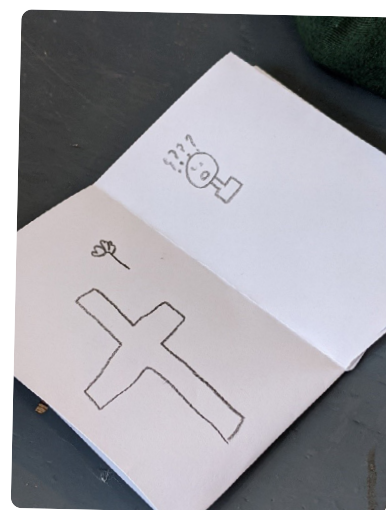


Figure 4: Little Migration Book example. Faith/Hope (left page) and Disorientation (right page)



Outcomes

Several books were created by the participants that visually represent their interpretation of themes that appeared in the PERCEPTIONS migrant interviews.

The workshop's outcomes (images, step by step guide, videos) have been shared with the general public on the PERCEPTIONS social media channels (See Figure 5) and will also be accessible on Swansea University's PERCEPTIONS webpage. In following this example, others (including migrant-facing practitioners) can imitate the workshop and engage participants with migration themes.

The workshop produced a visual and oral narrative passed by the children to their parents. The artist Sara Holden believes that children will "take [their booklets] home and tell the story of the migrants to their parents. Quite often parents will listen to their children, but they won't listen to other people". Therefore, children's learning experience can be translated into them teaching their parents about the migration themes they interacted with.

Re-organizing themes and metaphors of migrant stories into the forms of Little Migration Books helps to counter the negative perception of migratory processes. Through the PERCEPTIONS workshop feedback forms, the workshop contributed to 77% of participants believing their understanding of migrant experiences improved. One child wrote: "I enjoyed making the books and drawing the symbols, it was enjoyable and fun, but I would have liked extra time to finish."



Figure 5: scan the QR code to see the Social Media post (Twitter)

Impact



According to their feedback forms, the children were excited and engaged by the activity. When asked what their favourite activity of the day was, one child said: "The making of the migrant books, they were very fun and interesting, and I thought they were cool." As Tews, Michel and Noe (2017) suggest that enjoyment of the informal learning activity can have a positive effect on the learning process, the activity is proven to expand the worldview of participants by allowing them to empathetically explore the themes experienced by migrants.

By relating their personal experiences with the PERCEPTIONS migrant interview themes of hope, loss, uncertainty etc. the children understood the points of view of people that they may consider different to themselves, ensuring a positive and inclusive experience. Sara, the practitioner, had this to say about the children's understanding: "I think most of them arrived not really understanding what a migrant was, or what migration is. I think, having explored all those key themes, they will have a better understanding of what people might experience when they come to another country, for whatever reason. They might have better empathy and connect better with them, and not discriminate against them."

By enabling the children to try a new activity by creatively symbolising complex concepts, the workshop supported their personal progression by giving them the opportunity to artistically explore self-expression and self-discovery. Thus, enabling the release of tensions and unresolved feelings related to themes experienced and shared by migrants, creating a synthesis of empathy between participants and migrants and the participants' improved confidence in their artistic skills (Van Lith, Schofield, & Fenner, P., 2013).

Once they had been documented for the project, allowing the children to keep the physical creations they had made developed a sense of belonging and ownership in the children, where they are proud of the experience and output. The practitioner, Sara, further believes that by allowing them to take their creations home, the children would "tell the story of the migrants to their parents." Thus, further spreading the knowledge gained by the children from the activity.

Posting the process of conducting the activity and its outputs allowed other creative practitioners, including teachers, to emulate the activity. Therefore, the empathy for migrants and migration themes and other impacts gained by the participants for the original activity can create impact beyond the PERCEPTIONS project's end.



References:

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