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The art educator Aglaé Fontes at the Centro de Criatividade (1985–2006): experiments and discoveries

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Abstract: This article analyzes the role of Professor Aglaé d'Ávila Fontes as a director and art educator at the *Centro de Criatividade*, a place located in the capital city of Aracaju, State of Sergipe, from 1985 to 2006, highlighting her contribution to art education in a public cultural space. Founded in 1985, the *Centro* aimed to spark interest in art among children, adolescents, and adults, offering workshops in music, theater, visual arts, and literature, as well as cultural presentations and art education seminars. Therefore, this study examines the meanings attributed to the space, its architectural design, its interaction with the community, the profile of the audience served, and the activities promoted. The methodology combined documentary analysis of textual and iconographic sources gathered from public and private collections, including Aglaé Fontes' personal archive and the collection of the *Núcleo de Documentação e Memória do Centro de Criatividade*, along with oral history interviews conducted specifically for the study. The results emphasize the role of the *Centro de Criatividade* as a dynamic space for artistic and cultural formation during Aglaé d'Ávila Fontes' administration, focusing her contribution to the preservation of Sergipe's popular culture and the expansion of the art access and education.

Keywords: Aglaé Fontes; art education; *Centro de Criatividade*; popular culture; History of Education.

1 Introduction

This article analyzes the work of Professor Aglaé d'Ávila Fontes as a director and art educator at the Center for Creativity, a public cultural space located in Aracaju, Sergipe, from 1985 to 2006. The study discusses the meaning of “place” and architectural space, the relationships established with the surrounding community, and the art education proposals implemented under her management. The research is part of the field of History of Education, as it explores the interface between educational processes, knowledge, and non-school experiences (Albuquerque, Buecke, 2019), as well as investigations into the work of intellectuals in educational projects in cultural



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and educational institutions (Alves, 2023; Bontempi Junior, 2020; Conceição; Santos, 2019).

Aglaé d'Ávila Fontes, born on November 2, 1934, in the municipality of Lagarto, Sergipe, stood out as an intellectual and educator. The eldest daughter of Teófilo Fontes de Almeida, a federal civil servant, and Mariêta d'Ávila Fontes, a housewife, she spent her childhood moving from city to city due to her father's profession, a tax collector. In her early years, she received her education in public and private schools; her higher education was at the Catholic Faculty of Philosophy of Sergipe. Aglaé's career encompassed the founding of a music school for children, teaching at the Federal University of Sergipe, active participation in government institutions and agencies dedicated to education and culture, as well as notable involvement in radio, theater, and initiatives to promote popular culture in Sergipe. She also distinguished herself as a writer, producing diverse and significant literary work. (Monteiro, 2021).

In 1984, Professor Aglaé Fontes was invited by the then governor of the state of Sergipe, João Alves Filho, to participate in the implementation and management of an art school in the Getúlio Vargas neighborhood, in the northern part of the capital Aracaju. The new cultural space, which would be built in Saturnino de Brito Square, on the land occupied by an old and deactivated water tank that had once supplied the city with water, was created with the purpose of offering free artistic and cultural activities to the community. With her accumulated experience in the areas of education, art and management, Aglaé Fontes accepted the challenge and joined the project to create the Creativity Center (Fontes, 2018).

To understand the role of the intellectual Aglaé Fontes in the creation and operation of the Creativity Center, the research established 1985—the year the Center was founded—as its starting point, and 2006—the year Professor Fontes concluded her work there—as its endpoint. In this spatiotemporal context, the documentary research involved collecting, assembling, and transforming into sources various textual, iconographic, and audiovisual documents identified in public and private collections. These included materials from the documentary archive of the Documentation and Memory Center of the Creativity Center, as well as personal collections—particularly those of Aglaé Fontes herself, Professor Maria das Graças Costa Souza de Menéndez, and Maria Fonseca Menezes Oliveira, who served as the

administrative coordinator of the Creativity Center, as well as a director from 1993 to 1994. In addition, there was a production of oral sources, or “memories of oral expression” (Meihy; Seawright, 2020), collected through interviews¹.

Regarding the understanding of the meaning of art education, a notion that was present and supported the projects and activities of Professor Aglaé Fontes at the Center for Creativity, the research used, among other contributions, the studies of Ana Mae Barbosa. For her, art education is conscious work that develops the relationship of audiences (children, communities, senior citizens) with art. The educator argues that teaching art contributes to learning, as it expands the possibility of interpretation, a skill that will be useful in any area of life (Barbosa, 2018, 2009).

Aglaé Fontes outlined what she called the House’s “philosophy of action,” a founding milestone that would define the line of action and pedagogical planning of the Creativity Center. The proposal was based primarily on two principles: experimentation and discovery.

It is a place to experiment and discover. The Center will offer themes, tasks of interest, problems to be highlighted, but it does not want to massify the answers and intends to avoid models and predeterminisms in a frightening way. **Experimenting and discovering, dreaming, trying, making mistakes, perceiving and mainly doing constitute the expressive objective of the Creativity Center.** [...] It is important, however, to clarify the idea that the expressive objective is not unrelated to organization, study and research. [...] **Education, culture and art, in their most varied forms of expression, constitute the Center's greatest concern. The Creativity Center will not teach anyone to create! It will, instead, offer the opportunity for each person to discover what they are capable of, using their creative freedom** (Fontes, 1985, p. 6, emphasis added).

In order to understand the Creativity Center through the work of Professor Aglaé Fontes, this article², in addition to this introduction, is structured in four parts. The first, entitled “The location of the Creativity Center and its relations with the surrounding community”, outlines issues related to the “place” where the Creativity Center was installed and presents aspects about the architectural project and construction of the Center, as well as an understanding of the public and the relations with the local community. The second, entitled “The pedagogy of the 'art workshops':

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popular culture in evidence”, establishes an analysis of the workshops pedagogy promoted by the Creativity Center; the third, entitled “Cultural presentations and art-education journeys”, highlights the theater performances and music festivals that took place at the Center, as well as the Center's contribution to the training of professionals from the perspective of art education; finally, in the last part, the final considerations are presented.

2 The location of the Creativity Center and relations with the community

In Aracaju, in the 1980s, in the Getúlio Vargas neighborhood and surrounding areas, where the Creativity Center was installed, there were figures from Sergipe's popular culture, such as Mestre Euclides, Guerreiro Treme-Terra, João da Cruz, the Arranca Unha camp and José dos Santos, the leader of the *quadrilha junina*. The place was marked by the existence of hills, slopes, children playing in the street, the tradition of "giving the caruru of Cosme and Damião", an obligation of followers of religions of African origin, and a heterogeneous group of artists, which brought together rockers, forró singers and lovers of new rhythms.

The neighborhood also housed the Maloca, a community recognized as a remnant of a quilombo by the Palmares Cultural Foundation (FCP) in 2007 and by the Ministry of Culture in 2008. The first inhabitants of the place, descendants of enslaved black people from the Sergipe municipality of Riachuelo, began arriving in Aracaju at the beginning of the 20th century in search of work. Others soon arrived from various parts of the state, attracted by the possibilities of finding work and housing. The region of the former Morro do Cruzeiro was then occupied by the newcomers, who built their malocas there (Santos, 2017, 2021; Espírito Santo, 2011).

Born in the neighborhood's surroundings, the singer and composer Irmão³, in his participation in the television program *Aperipê Memória*, from the documentary “Caixa d'Água: Qui-lombo é esse?”, reported some brands and/or cultural movements of the region such as “Chegança, by João do Pão; by Guerreiro de Euclides [...]; we

³ Irmão was the stage name of Wellington dos Santos (1949-2010). Black, tall, with his unmistakable deep voice, he drew attention for his musical talent, calmness, elegance and kindness in dealing with everyone. Irmão was a keen observer of political and social issues. His compositions ranged from samba, reggae, forró and rock with a regional touch. Irmão circulated well among politicians, authorities, the press, artists from Sergipe and the community of Maloca and its surroundings. See Oliveira (2019) and Lisboa (2019).

had Candomblé by Dona Isabel [...], Candomblé by Mr. Lê [...], the *samba de roda*, the *samba de coco* by Mr. Enoque. So, I think I come from a very rich region [...]" (Caixa D'Água: qui-lombo é esse?, 2013).

In 1984, the state governor, João Alves Filho, received three suggestions from the committee responsible for preparing the government's cultural plan, composed of professors Fernando Lins de Carvalho (Undersecretary of State for Culture and Art), Clodoaldo Alencar Filho (professor at the Federal University of Sergipe) and Luiz Fernando Ribeiro Soutelo (member of the State Council for Culture), for using the area occupied by the old and deactivated water tank in the Getúlio Vargas neighborhood: one, was the construction of a hospital; the other one, a school; or a school of fine arts. The governor decided to implement a "free art school", which would be called the Creativity Center (Sergipe, 1987).

The project was commissioned by the architect and urban planner from Curitiba, Jaime Lerner, who at the time already enjoyed national and international prestige. Lerner was also a politician and, in his first term as mayor of Curitiba (1971-1975), he designed the Paiol Theater, built on the site of an old gunpowder arsenal. During the same administration, the Curitiba Creativity Center was built on the former premises of an old glue and leather processing factory (Kawahara, 2021; Sharon, 2017).

The Creativity Center would occupy almost 12,000 m² of area, of which approximately 2,300 m² would be built-up area, respecting the geographical relief of the location and taking advantage of the structure of the old Water Tank (Silva, 2010). The project followed a trend in contemporary architecture, which is to give new uses, preferably cultural ones, to old buildings in urban spaces. This "urban requalification" (Alves, 2016) occurs when the initial function intended for the building no longer has any meaning and/or usefulness. Instead of abandoning or demolishing the building, architecture can promote reuse, maintaining symbolic historical and cultural elements of the space. This reuse employs new technologies and makes the space attractive without, however, changing its character (Padovan; Boas, 2017).

The idea of cultural spaces, especially cultural centers, spread in France from the 1950s onwards. In Brazil, cultural centers became more widespread from the 1980s onwards. These facilities are characterized by bringing together various cultural activities in a single location and the ability to attract a large audience (Silva, 2010).

The figure below shows an aerial view of the Creativity Center and the region in which it was built. Aesthetically, the result of the work was striking due to its size, shape, strong colors highlighted on the roof (red, orange) and modern features; something beautiful to see.

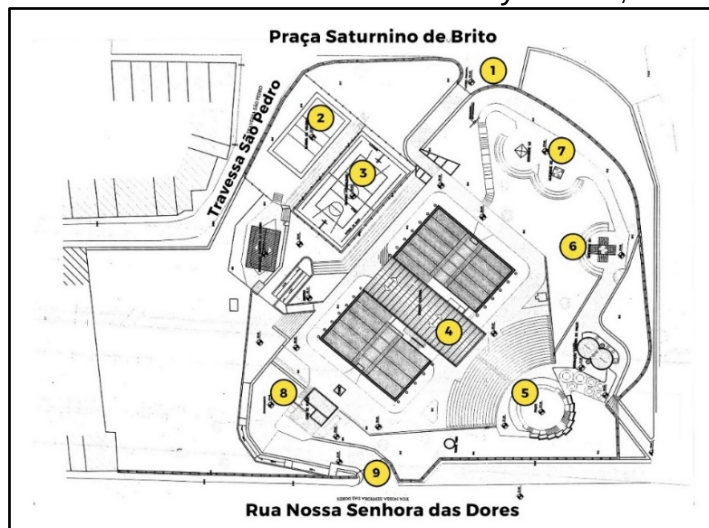
Figure 1 – Aerial view of the Creativity Center and surroundings (1980s)



Source: Collection of the Documentation and Memory Center of the Creativity Center.

The figure below provides an overview of the built area of the Creativity Center. The plan includes the space for the rooms, the acoustic shell and other areas. The figure identifies the main access to the Creativity Center, via Saturnino de Brito Square (1); volleyball and multi-sports courts (2 and 3); cultural space and administrative area (4); acoustic shell and grandstand (5); kiosks, where the community sold typical foods on festive occasions (6 and 7); parking (8); and a second access to the Center, via Nossa Senhora das Dores Street (9).

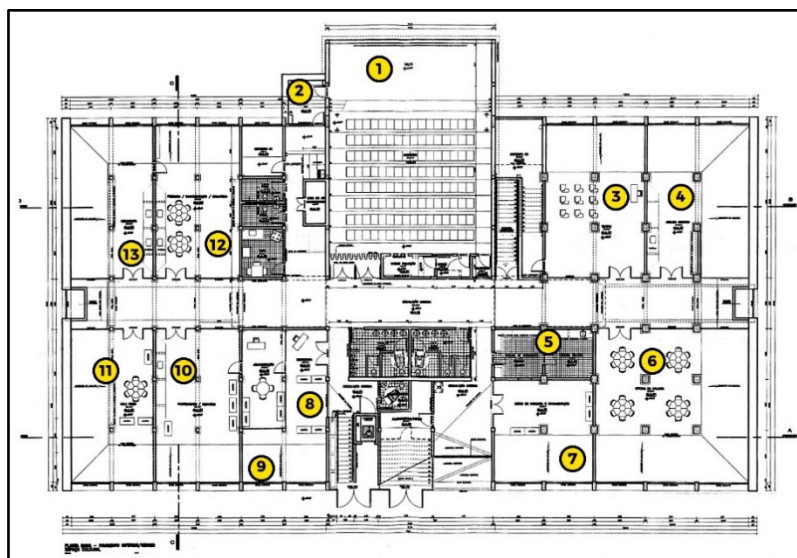
Figure 2 – Plan of the built area of the Creativity Center, Aracaju/SE (1984)



Source: Documentation and Memory Center of the Creativity Center.

Figure 3 below shows the floor plan of the lower floor of the cultural space. On this floor, exactly where the water reservoir had been, the rooms for workshops, an administrative area, and other facilities were built. The figure identifies the auditorium, with a capacity for 118 seats, which functioned as a mini theater, a place for showing films, and a theater initiation workshop (1); dressing room (2); rooms for the music initiation workshop (3); batik workshop and graphic studio (4); photography and camera obscura workshop (5); word workshop (6); and the research, documentation, and library sector (7). On the left side of the auditorium are the rooms for the secretary (8), administration (9), puppet theater workshop (10), active music workshop (11), *Criar Crescer* workshop (12), a popular toy workshop, and, occasionally, the woodcut workshop (13).

Figure 3 – Floor plan of the “Cultural Space” of the Creativity Center, Aracaju/SE (1984)



Source: Collection of the Documentation and Memory Center of the Creativity Center.

The rooms, which were open on different shifts, could be used for more than one workshop or for other activities, such as Community Action meetings. On the first floor of the building, there was the restaurant of the Creativity Center, with a privileged view of the city, but it was open for a short time. On the mezzanine floor, the Olívio Mathias Room was installed, a space intended for educational displays and photography exhibitions.

The day before the inauguration, the press visited the Center and heard explanations about the construction and operation of the space from Aglaé Fontes, director of the Center, and Fernando Lins, CEO of the State Foundation for Culture

(FUNDESC), the agency to which the Creativity Center was administratively linked. A video, entitled “Community Speaks”, with interviews with residents of the neighborhood telling the history of the place, was shown to the guests (Imprensa visitou ..., 1985; Centro de Criatividade ..., 1985).

In the days following the inauguration, the press continued to report on the event and communicate on enrollments for the art school's courses and workshops. The media's positive reception of the arrival of the new cultural facility extended to the Center's management. The editorial of *Gazeta de Sergipe* emphasized that the Center for Creativity seemed to have been created with a commitment to “all the things from Sergipe” and to serve “all levels of art and culture, without prejudice or Manichaeism”. In fact, the presence of Professor Aglaé de Alencar as the Center's director is a guarantee that there will be no privileges for the arts and artists. Everyone will have opportunities [...]” (O Centro de Criatividade, 1985, p. 3). *Jornal da Cidade* emphasized that “the handover of the Center's management to a personality who is from the area – Professor Aglaé Fontes de Alencar – guarantees the full functioning of the new entity without any false intellectualism” (Governo e cultura, 1985, p. 5).

Regarding the public served by the Creativity Center and its relations with the surrounding community, in the survey carried out by the Creativity Center team to learn about the characteristics of the neighborhood and the community's expectations regarding the arrival of the art school, it was noted that a large part of the region's residents were receptive to the construction of a cultural facility on the site of the old water tank. In addition to the cultural options that would be offered, the region would be valued, and residents would be free from “undesirable visitors” (Silva, 2021). However, it was also noticeable that, even with the publicity about the implementation of the Creativity Center in the press, many residents did not know exactly how the institution would work (Sergipe, 1987).

As soon as the Center was established, the art workshops and activities on the sports courts began to attract children and teenagers from the local community. Children from other neighborhoods often participated in workshops brought by parents, schools, associations or charitable institutions. Adults, in turn, were especially interested in music workshops and activities that offered professional training, such as photography and pyrography. In addition to this audience focused on recreation and

artistic training, the Center also welcomed teachers seeking qualifications in art education.

However, the climate of integration between the Creativity Center and the local community was not always harmonious. Many residents felt that their space was being invaded and criticized the apparent contradiction of a free art school that preached freedom but imposed rules and limits. After all, they saw themselves as “the owners of the house”. Furthermore, although many children and adolescents showed interest in the activities offered, they resisted following schedules or maintaining regular attendance (Sergipe, 1987).

While some residents of the Getúlio Vargas neighborhood supported the construction of the art school, others were against it. Some local artists argued that the old water tank, which had been deactivated in 1972, should be transformed into a cultural center with warehouses managed by the local artists, where they could produce and generate income from their skills (Santos, 2015). The musician Antônio Passos Souza, a resident of the neighborhood at the time and a participant in these discussions, recalled that many shared the idea of using the cultural facility for rehearsals and even for creating a studio where musicians from Sergipe could record their works (Souza, 2020). Cícero Farias, a singer and musician from the neighborhood, who would later become a guitar and music teacher at the Center for Creativity, stated in the Center's periodical, entitled *Expressão*⁴, that he initially rejected the arrival of the art school because he felt as if the water tank had been taken away from the residents. Over time, however, their stance changed, giving way to gradual acceptance (FALA comunidade, 1994).

During the first year of operation of the Creativity Center, disrespectful attitudes toward the school staff were common: “Some teenagers not only ridiculed the teachers and their activity proposals, but also disturbed the performances of shows and movie screenings by shouting and swearing” (Sergipe, 1987, p. 5). Living with the community required constant attention, since peaceful weeks alternated with turbulent periods. As reported by Aglaé Fontes: “We were always taking some steps forward and others back in winning over the community. The situation often became discouraging [...]”.

⁴ Institutional periodical produced over almost a decade at the Center for Creativity. The newspaper *Expressão* was created in 1986, with the aim of publicizing the actions of the Center for Creativity to diverse audiences and strengthening the link between the community and the art school. The creator, editor and writer of much of the content was the director of the Center, Aglaé Fontes. See Monteiro (2021)

Sports performances were interrupted by fights, which even led to exchanges of aggression [...]” (Sergipe, 1987, p. 7).

Experienced in management, teacher Aglaé devised strategies to attract dissatisfied residents and integrate them into the Creativity Center. One of these strategies was the creation of the “Community Action”, as the educator explained: “[...] I wanted an exchange with the community [...] to win over the people who lived there [...]. And so, we created the Community Action” (Fontes, 2018). The “Community Action” was made up of a social worker and two teachers and had the collaboration of residents of the neighborhood. Together, they began a work of raising awareness about what the Center was, its origin and the importance of community participation. “The ideas of owning, caring for, helping, were worked on intensely [...] we also understood that many of the aggressions came as a reaction to the occupation of that space [...]” (Sergipe, 1987, p. 8).

Conducting a survey of local residents was another strategy adopted to understand the community's perceptions of the Creativity Center. The goal was to identify what they liked, what they disapproved of, which workshop activities attracted the most interest and, above all, to welcome suggestions that could strengthen the relationship between the Center and the community.

When responding to the questionnaire, community residents suggested several activities, such as the creation of a sports school, a capoeira group and soccer teams. Some of these proposals were incorporated into the Center's programming, including the implementation of a capoeira school. The image below illustrates a capoeira class at the school, involving children and teenagers from the surrounding community.

Figure 4 – Capoeira school. Creativity Center (198?)



Source: Documentation and Research Center of the Creativity Center. Author: Marcel Nauer.

Although there are records of conflicts with the community, most interviewees who attended the Creativity Center between 1985 and 2006 did not emphasize the initial difficulties in establishing mutual understanding between the art school and some residents of Getúlio Vargas and the surrounding areas. João Carlos de Jesus reported:

I studied in the morning and did activities [at the Center] in the afternoon. [...] On Sundays there was the cinema and several activities like jumping rope. Real leisure. Football, treasure hunts [...] The community formed teams, and the Creativity Center organized the treasure hunts, and we went with the maps looking for clues that they gave us to find various prizes around the Center's grounds [...]. Teacher Aglaé always liked the community to participate in the activities. She was extraordinary. Very calm, always with a smile on her face, wanting to please the community [...] I believe that the Center was a turning point for the children of my time [...] I get emotional, because today there is nothing left like we used to do (Jesus, 2018).

Memories, shaped by selective and constitutive processes, primarily preserved “good memories.” José Carlos de Jesus, “Joãozinho,” as he was called when he ran around the Center, shared details about the places, people, and events that left their mark on his memory (Pollak, 1989). Representations of childhood intertwine with the perspective of today, evoking a nostalgic reflection: the past seemed better. These memories, continually updated, are incorporated into interpretations of the present, offering new readings of what has already been experienced.

Singer and composer Luiz Fontineli de Souza highlighted the importance of his experience as a student in the guitar workshop at the Creativity Center, taught by professor Cícero Farias. Fontineli stated: “With him, I learned to appreciate quality, refined, and well-produced music. [...]. The Creativity Center was the biggest supporter of my career. It was there where I really learned to love music” (Souza, 2018).

3 The pedagogy of “art workshops”: popular culture in evidence

The permanent and temporary art workshops – the latter lasting three months – were the first activities offered by the Creativity Center. They were aimed at children, teenagers and adults. Elderly people were also allowed to participate, but they rarely attended the space. The table below presents the main workshops developed in the first three years of the Center, from different expressive areas.

Table 1 – Workshops and courses at the Creativity Center (from 1985 to 1987)

Artistic areas	Workshops
Visual arts	Photography Initiation Level I Photography Development Level II
Plastic Expression	Batik, Pyrography, Ceramics, Handmade Paper, <i>Chegou, entrou</i> , Introduction to Drawing, Screen Printing, Drawing
Literature	Word Workshop
Active Music	Musical Initiation, Recorder (instrument), Guitar, Electric Organ, Choir
Integrated Workshops	Create/Grow, from Nature, Free Studio
Theater	Introduction to Theatrical Language, Puppet Theater
Theater for Art Educators Popular Culture	Theater in Education, Puppet Theater and the Classroom, Dramatic Play Popular Toy, Folk Dance

Source: Sergipe (1987); *Expressão* (1986, 1987, 1988); Menendez (2020).

Even with the outreach work done before the inauguration with residents of the Getúlio Vargas neighborhood, the adhesion of the community around Caixa d'Água to the Center was not immediate, as reported by the former teacher of the Creativity Center, Joana Gonçalves da Silva: “It was a real ant-like work. We went after them, face to face, calling the children, talking to the families. It was a work of earning their trust” (Silva, 2021).

The practices in the workshops followed the “philosophy of action” (Fontes, 1985), which, according to Professor Aglaé, in addition to encouraging experimentation, defended respect for creation, as well as advocating for maintaining the link with popular culture, through appreciation and recording. Students were encouraged to question and suggest. Teachers at the Creativity Center were encouraged to reflect and evaluate methods, make necessary adaptations, correct inadequate proposals, be bold and avoid “pedagogicalisms”. In the music workshop, for example, Professor Aglaé Fontes proposed reflections on the objectives of the activity and offered suggestions on how to develop the work, as indicated below:

What is it for? [...] Open to experimentation, the workshop aims not to discover '**talents**', '**graduate scholars**' or to do purely mechanical work, but above all, to affirm sensitivity; to develop new languages [...]

How to do it? Develop activities that work on: integration of the body scheme; mastery in perceptive education; encouragement of musical practice; encouragement of individual study and group action; developing musical activity; vocal and instrumental practice; developing the practice of adaptation and readaptation of musical facts, as a response to ones' needs; understanding music as an open, gestural and corporal, integrative function; organizing samples of experiences (Fontes, 1985, p. 14).

Once the workshops, which lasted an average of one semester, were completed, participants would present themselves in so-called “didactic samplings” at the Creativity Center itself. For Aglaé Fontes, monitoring the students’ development and allowing them to publicly share their discoveries and learning was “a pedagogical commitment” (Fontes, 2018). The figure below shows a record of the educator’s work in one of the music workshops with creations from the neighborhood of the Creativity Center.

Figure 5 – Professor Aglaé Fontes with children during the teaching of Musical Initiation Workshop. Creativity Center (1985)



Source: Documentation and Research Center of the Creativity Center. Author: Marcel Nauer.

The musical initiation, recorded in the photograph presented above (Figure 5), was carried out through active practices that stimulated sensory perceptions. This approach leads to the discovery of the world of sound without attachment to formalisms and rigid models, respecting the child's development stages and valuing their creative capacity. These practices, advocated by the Belgian musician Edgar Willems and known by Professor Aglaé Fontes through the Free Music Seminars at the Federal University of Bahia, were adopted in the musical initiation workshops of the Center for Creativity (Alencar, 1997; Fontes, 2021).

In the figure shown below, two moments of the release of the book “My Stories”, written by students of the *Oficina da Palavra*. Initially, the workshop was not fully comprehended, as the children thought they would write “like in school”; later, the

proposal was well accepted, as the words were written, sung, drawn, and dramatized. The expressive objective was to communicate ideas (Tavares, 2020).

Figure 6 – Release of the book written by students of the *Oficina da Palavra*. Creativity Center (1987)



Source: Documentation and Memory Center of the Creativity Center.

The Puppet Theater Workshop attracted the interest of teenagers. With Augusto Barreto Doria, director of the puppet theater group *Mamulengo de Cheiroso*, students learned about acting, prosody, puppet manipulation techniques, sound design, and carpentry to produce stage elements. In addition to working with theater as an artistic expression, this workshop aimed to train puppeteers, who are the creators and actors of puppets. Under the guidance of Augusto Barreto, students made puppets, clothes, and props, wrote texts, prepared soundtracks, and performed at the end of the workshop in the mini theater of the Creativity Center (Sergipe, 1987; Silva, 2021; Doria, 2021). The figure below shows a record of one of these performances.

Figure 7 – Presentation of the show “The hallucinated widow” with students from the Puppet Theater Workshop. Creativity Center (1985)



Source: Documentation and Research Center of the Creativity Center. Author: Marcel Nauer.

Regional themes and texts by authors from the Northeast were constantly explored in puppet theater workshops, with the aim of valuing popular culture. In the previous recording (Figure 7), the audience was mainly composed of children. On these occasions, the Center promoted the formation of audiences, one of the possibilities of art education. In addition to providing entertainment, these presentations could awaken the audience's interest in art and encourage them to participate in the workshops offered by the Center.

Olga Rebervel⁵ (1989) states that, among verbal expression activities, puppet theater “is the best resource for developing verbal language. When a child has a puppet in his hands and is hidden by a curtain, they feel free to speak and invent the most diverse types of dialogue or monologue” (Reverbel, 1989, p. 66). In the hands of art educators, says professor Aglaé Fontes, puppet theater can be an instrument to stimulate students and pass on knowledge in the areas of mathematics, history, literature, among others (Alencar, 1998).

The popular toy workshop was one of the most popular among children, both from the community and from other neighborhoods. The idea behind the workshop was to give them the opportunity to create their own toys without rigid models. The teacher was responsible for supervising the experiments and providing guidance if requested, but without interfering in the making or directing the production. As a result, boxes, cans and other scrap materials were transformed into toys.

Figure 8 – Popular Toy Workshop at the Creativity Center (1986)



Source: Altair Oliveira Trindade Collection. Author: Edinah Mary.

⁵ Olga Garcia Reverbel (1917-2008) was one of those responsible for shaping the teaching of theater in schools in Brazil. She wrote textbooks on theater teaching. For more information, see Varela (2017).

In the previous photograph (Figure 8), it is possible to see students engaged in making their toys, under the attentive guidance of teacher Altair Trindade. The scene captures a moment of creativity, in which the children manipulate simple materials, such as wood, fabric and string, transforming them into handmade toys full of meaning. The folk toy workshop, initially proposed as a fun and optional activity within the “Always on Sundays” project, quickly gained prominence due to the enthusiasm of the participants. The interest shown by the students not only in the construction, but also in the preservation of these traditions, led to the activity being reevaluated and, later, incorporated as a permanent workshop. This decision reinforced the project’s commitment to valuing folk culture, in addition to stimulating the children’s autonomy and inventive capacity.

4 Cultural presentations and art education days

The acoustic shell and/or sports courts of the Creativity Center also served as a stage for theatrical performances. In the following recording, the Imbuanga Group performs, in one of the courts, the play “Matuto com Balaio de Maxixe”, a text by the popular poet from Alagoas José Pacheco da Rocha, adapted by Antônio do Amaral. The text was part of the show “Teatro Chamado Cordel” (Amaral Filho, 2021). In the scene recorded, actors Dino Santos (on the left) and Mariano Antônio Ferreira (on the right) are seen. The latter was an art scholarship holder at UFS/Funarte in the 1980s, when Aglaé Fontes worked at the Center for Culture and Art at the Federal University of Sergipe (UFS), and was a theater workshop teacher, later directing the Center for Creativity for a short period in 1995. The Imbuanga Group was directed by Lindolfo Amaral, who was also an art scholarship holder at UFS and developed research supervised by Professor Aglaé Fontes in the late 1970s.

Figure 9 – Presentation of the play “Matuto com balaio de Maxixe”, by the Imbuaça Group. Creativity Center. (198?)



Source: Collection of Joana Gonçalves da Silva.

The Creativity Center was also the venue for the Student's Music Festival *Novo Canto*⁶, a cultural initiative of the Government of Sergipe, held through the *Fundação Estadual de Cultura* from 1984 onwards. This festival had the acoustic shell of the Creativity Center as its stage from its second edition, in 1985⁷.

Figure 10 – End of the Novo Canto Music Festival at the Creativity Center (1985)



Source: Documentation and Research Center of the Creativity Center. Author: Marcel Nauer (1985).

⁶ *Novo Canto* involved students from both public and private schools. Until the 1990s, the festival was held successfully and revealed several names in music in Sergipe. See Monteiro (2021).

⁷ The first edition was held at the Lourival Batista Auditorium in 1984, under the coordination of Jorge Lins. From the second edition onwards, the festival was coordinated by Irineu Fontes. *Novo Canto* took place until 1989. Afterwards, some editions were held in the 1990s and 2000s. See Santos Júnior (2020).

For residents of the Getúlio Vargas neighborhood and surrounding area, it was a source of pride that such a significant musical event for the city was being held there. This feeling was reinforced by seeing residents of the neighborhood themselves, such as Marco Odara and Antônio Passos, among the event participants. Eduardo Oliveira, a musician who frequented the Creativity Center, recalled the hustle and bustle of events held there: “[...] I remember the parties there, the music festivals, square dance performances, at all the events, it was packed [...]. There were lines of cars all the way to Pedro Calazans Avenue, it mobilized the city” (Oliveira, 2020).

As it can be seen, the Creativity Center, a free art-education school that aimed to offer possibilities for experimentation and discovery of various artistic languages, provided space for diverse manifestations of popular culture, by and for audiences and artists from Sergipe. In addition to the editions of the Novo Canto Festival, the Center's acoustic shell also featured the Sergipe Symphony Orchestra, bands, choirs, dance shows, circus performances, folk and parafolk groups, among others.

The appreciation of Sergipe's popular culture also occurred through the encouragement of cultural events in the Getúlio Vargas community and surrounding areas. In this sense, the Creativity Center developed actions to strengthen the neighborhood's June and Christmas festivities by creating the “João da Cruz Project”, coordinated by the art school's “Community Action”. Aglaé Fontes followed everything closely, providing support and promoting the mediation of the neighborhood's cultural events with various audiences.

The June festivities had been a source of pride for the residents of the Cirurgia and Getúlio Vargas neighborhoods. Country weddings, square dances, traditional foods and forró were part of the program led in the past by “seu” João da Cruz, creator of the *Arranca Unha* festival, which, between the 1950s and 1960s, enlivened the community around Caixa d'Água. The *Arranca Unha* festival was rescued and installed in June 1985 in the acoustic shell of the Creativity Center. A square dance competition was also established, and the “João da Cruz Trophy” was created to honor square dancers, markers and musicians. Below is a record of the June square dance competition at the Creativity Center.

Figure 11 – Presentation of the *Arrasta-Pé* June square dance at the *Arraial do Arranca Unha*, in the Acoustic Shell of the Creativity Center (198?)



Source: Documentation and Research Center of the Creativity Center. Author: Marcel Nauer.

Also included in the “João da Cruz Project” program was the Christmas cycle, which, among other activities, promoted a nativity scene competition and presentations of Christmas plays⁸. On these occasions, one can perceive the presence of Aglaé Fontes as a cultural mediator, developing actions to preserve a tradition and circulating knowledge and values, placing “[...] cultural assets in contact with broader social groups, forming audiences, ‘creating’ new cultural products or new forms of communication and approximation of known cultural products [...]” (Gomes; Hansen, 2016, p. 17). The nativity scene competitions held by the Creativity Center mainly involved residents of the surrounding area.

The arrival of the Creativity Center also represented an opportunity for training and/or updating art educators in the state. The workshops, lectures, conferences, pedagogical conferences and other activities held at the art school were offered free of charge to teachers from public and private schools. The Center’s staff itself needed training to act in accordance with the “philosophy of action” of that art school. Pedagogues, actors, musicians, photographers, designers, and graduates in History, Literature, Geography and Chemistry were part of the Creativity Center team. Most of these teachers had experience in the artistic field.

⁸ Auto is a theatrical form of popular plot with dances and songs that addresses religious or secular themes, represented during the Christmas cycles (December and January). Since the 16th century, the Jesuits used religious autos as an element of catechesis. See Cascudo (1988).

All teachers were selected by Aglaé Fontes, who had already worked with many of them. Some participated in the *Bolsa Trabalho Arte/UFS* program during the period in which she worked at the Center for Culture and Art of the Federal University of Sergipe (CULTART/UFS). Many of the teachers on the team were members of the State Department of Education and were seconded to the Center for Creativity, while others were hired by the State Foundation for Culture (FUNDESC) (Trindade, 2020).

The Creativity Center was open to the public from Tuesday to Sunday and reserved Mondays for updating its staff. Regarding these meetings, Professor Aglaé recalled: “On Mondays, we had 'pedagogical meetings' or 'study afternoons'. Since the Center was a pioneer of art education in the state, it was necessary for the actions to be well-founded; nothing should be done randomly” (Fontes, 2020). The appreciation of thought as a stimulating source for action can be seen in the reception of Dewey in the pedagogical practices defended by Aglaé Fontes. It was necessary to instill in the team the habit of thinking reflectively (Dewey, 2010; Westbrook; Teixeira, 2010).

During the meetings, texts were worked on and then shared in the “Thinking and Doing Workshop” section of the newspaper *Expressão*, so that other teachers who read the Center’s periodical could have access to the material. Each text was introduced with a “stimulating idea,” followed by an invitation to think and do. Suggestions for work were also presented, which could combine different expressive languages in an activity or use one language in different activities.

Regarding the pedagogical meetings, Maria das Graças Costa Souza de Menéndez, responsible for the Batik Workshop, recalled: “Professor Aglaé always brought a text for us all to work on. Each person in their area would see what they could use from that theme in their workshop. She made us think, and the afternoons of study were very good” (Menéndez, 2019).

The workshops sought to work in an integrated manner on several areas of expression. In addition to the written words, body language, music, visual arts and theater included in the planning, they also aimed to offer students the experience of visiting newspapers in the capital and producing a newspaper. The presentation of reports and plans during the meetings was designed to monitor the teachers' practices and the children's development in the workshops.

On September 10, 1990, with the signing of State Decree No. 11,793, the Creativity Center was officially named an “Art Education Unit to develop activities for

updating and/or specializing teachers in the area” (Sergipe, 1990). From this phase, some formative experiences can be highlighted, such as the Art Education Conferences and the pilot art education experience involving the Dr. Manoel Luiz Elementary School.

From May 1988 to March 1991, Aglaé Fontes headed the State Secretariat for Culture and the Environment; in 1992, she took over the State Secretariat for Education; and, from 1993 to 1994, she was special secretary of Culture in the state government. Despite her departure to occupy these positions, Aglaé Fontes remained involved in the activities of the art school. As State Secretary, Aglaé Fontes streamlined and implemented actions involving the Creativity Center. Between 1990 and 1993, seven Art Education Conferences were held at that art school. Regarding the conferences, teacher Aglaé Fontes recalled: “[...] the experience that was lived at the Center was not only for that community. The Art Education Conferences were for all teachers who wanted to. There was no charge, and the teachers participated” (Fontes, 2019).

The workshops lasted an average of one week, during which lectures and discussions were held in the morning and art workshops in the afternoon. The speakers at the workshops were experts in Art Education, such as Miriam Celeste Martins⁹, Lais Aderne¹⁰, Walburga Arns¹¹ and Aglaé Fontes (Amaral Filho, 2018). Teachers from the Creativity Center also taught workshops during their working days. The following figure shows a record of one of the activities of the IV Art Education Workshop, held in 1992, which had the theme “Challenge to Creation”.

⁹ Miriam Celeste Martins is an art educator, writer, cultural mediator, graduated in Drawing and Fine Arts and a specialist in Art History. She is a member of the World Council of Insea/Latin America (International Society of Education Through) and a professor in the Postgraduate Program: Education, Art and History of Culture at Universidade Presbiteriana Mackenzie. Information from the newspaper *Expressão* (1991) and Martins (2021).

¹⁰ Lais Fontoura Aderne Faria Neves (1937-2007) was born in Diamantina - MG. She was a painter, engraver, art educator and curator. With information from: <http://www.ufrgs.br/acervoartes/artistas/a/aderne-lais> ; <https://museucerrado.com.br/ecomuseu-do-cerrado/lais-aderne/>

¹¹ Walburga Arns da Silva is a writer, visual artist and retired professor at UFS. See Monteiro (2021).

Figure 12 – IV Art Education Conference of the Creativity Center (1992)



Source: Documentation and Research Center of the Creativity Center.

In the previous figure (Figure 12), on the stage of the Center's mini-theater, there is a record of an exercise in artistic-visual production based on a live model. The idea was not to discover artists, but to confirm that everyone could create, each within their possibilities. Experimenting and discovering, principles defended in the "philosophy of action" of the Creativity Center, were also valid for the participants of the Art-Education Conferences.

Regarding the Art Education Conferences, writer Mirian Celeste, a speaker at all editions of the meetings, recalled the participation of teachers and the atmosphere of interaction encouraged by Aglaé Fontes. When reviewing photographs of workshops and dynamics held on stage with participants at one of the Art Education Conferences, Mirian Celeste recalled the period and observed: "The place was incredible [...] and Aglaé was a master in the sense of putting us together with the teachers. Not in the sense of giving lectures and having everyone listen, clap, and ask questions. It was something of being together, talking about it [...]" (Martins, 2021)

5 Final considerations

Invited by state governor João Alves Filho in 1984 to participate in the implementation and direct the Creativity Center, Aglaé Fontes took a leave of absence

from UFS and dedicated herself entirely to the project. She brought her experience in art and education, accumulated over 30 years of working in formal and informal spaces, to the city's new cultural space. The professor also incorporated her experiences in theater, music, radio, management and research into the Center. At the Creativity Center, Aglaé Fontes also worked on training art educators and promoted actions aimed at expanding popular culture in Sergipe, as well as expanding her projects as a cultural mediator.

To operate the Creativity Center, which opened in May 1985, Aglaé Fontes used educational concepts based on the idea of “experimenting and discovering.” Freedom of creation and expression was advocated, but nothing should be done randomly; there was a commitment to art education, an education that starts from the expression of feelings and emotions, as well as from the cultural values of the community and research. Thought should be the source of stimulation for doing.

In this sense, it was possible to identify principles of active pedagogy in Professor Aglaé's ongoing encouragement of processes of experimentation, discovery and reflection experienced in the Center's daily life. The value of experience and of “thinking in order to do” are highlighted by the professor in texts published in the newspaper *Expressão*, the Center's periodical, and in the workshops and training courses for art educators offered by the Creativity Center.

Through the educational project developed by the educator, which considered the cultural values and specificities of the neighborhood and the area surrounding the Creativity Center, workshops were created about music, theater, photography, literature, and folk toys, among other activities that provided access to art, with emphasis on productions from Sergipe. Children, young people, and adults from the Getúlio Vargas community and surrounding areas, as well as from other neighborhoods in the city, attended the activities developed at the art school. The Creativity Center did not intend to train artists, but some actors and musicians emerged from its workshops and courses. Director Aglaé Fontes was also involved in the workshops and courses, teaching introductory music classes and training art educators.

The Center also offered other activities, such as sports, educational exhibitions, film sessions, theater shows, photography exhibitions and musical concerts held in its acoustic shell. Cultural events involving people from various

neighborhoods of the city were held there, among which the *Novo Canto* Music Festival and the annual square dance competition held at the *Arranca Unha* festival stand out.

The Creativity Center, the “house of experimentation and discovery”, as Professor Aglaé referred to the Center, had the purpose of spreading cultural manifestations – plastic, performing and visual arts – by offering courses, art workshops and providing spaces for performances by folk groups and local artists from different cultural genres. In Aglaé Fontes’ educational actions and projects, the emphasis on education through art was noted, and in this proposal, the intellectual prioritized the popular culture of Sergipe. In this sense, the Creativity Center was responsible for training human resources for education and culture and for supporting projects and/or actions in favor of strengthening the cultural identity of Sergipe.

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