

THE BOOK AND COLOURS DESIGNED FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD

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ABSTRACT

This brief study aims to reflect on the importance of early contact with books, particularly educational books centred on the theme of colours, designed for early childhood reading. The selection of the corpus sought to omit publications whose imagery is redundant and simplistic, in other words, whose discourse is impoverishing, prioritizing books whose relationship between text and image is apt for the construction and association of new aesthetic points of view. With the reading proposal, centred essentially on the graphic-visual

dimension, based on the collection «Des petits pop-up pour les petits mains», by Aurore Petit, the book *Rouge* (2018), by Marc Pouyet, and finally the book *Bleu comme une banane* (2023), by Delphine Chedru, the aim is to suggest a course of mediation with pre-readers or young readers that is particularly motivating for an attentive and analytical look at everyday life, which is essential for future critical thinking and for any process of sensitising the eye or educating for the image.

KEYWORDS: Children's Literature, Information Books, Imagery, Colours, Early Childhood.

O LIVRO E AS CORES PENSADOS PARA A PRIMEIRA INFÂNCIA

RESUMO

Este breve estudo visa a reflexão em torno da relevância do contacto precoce com o livro, em particular, o livro formativo centrado na temática das cores, projetado para uma leitura na primeira infância. A seleção do corpus procurou omitir publicações cuja dimensão imagética se apresente redundante e simplista, ou seja, cujo discurso seja empobrecedor, privilegiando-se obras cuja relação entre texto e imagem se mostra apta à construção e à associação de novos pontos de vista estéticos. Com a proposta de leitura, centrada essencialmente na

dimensão gráfico-visual, avançada a partir da coleção «Des petits pop-up pour les petits mains», de Aurore Petit, do volume *Rouge* (2018), de Marc Pouyet, e, finalmente, do livro *Bleu comme une banane* (2023), de Delphine Chedru, procura-se, assim, preconizar um percurso de mediação com os mais pequenos especialmente motivador de um olhar atento e analítico do dia-a-dia, essencial ao futuro pensamento crítico e em qualquer processo de sensibilização do olhar ou de educação para a imagem.

Palavras chave: Literatura para a Infância, Livro Informativo, Imagiários, Cores, Primeira Infância.

1 INTRODUCTION

Assiduous, diverse and regular affective and playful stimuli, throughout, for example, metaphor and poetic language, should be part of the child's day-to-day life in early childhood. During the first months of life, both the family (or primary caregivers) and the infant are engaged in a reciprocal process of interpreting and understanding one another, as María Emilia López emphasises

we know that very young children do not yet understand the meaning of all words, but we also know that there are rhythms, expressions, musicalities, forms of speech that are immediately perceived and the child responds to them. This baggage of human gestures with which we receive them, when it is charged with sensitivity and affection, constitutes a "sound bath" for the baby. The sound bath functions as an envelope that sustains mentally and physically through words and their rhythm, through reciprocal interest, through play, through empathy based on affectivity (2018, p. 26).

Simultaneously, from the very first day of this bonding relationship, the caregiver is compelled to learn how to interpret the infant's language, as the same scholar argues, because

(...) it is not only the baby who has to learn a new language, who alone has a language to discover. The child is also a mysterious being for the adult, who must learn to "read" a cry, a difficulty in sleeping, a game that repeats itself, a demand that is not understood, the very short attention span of a toddler, a face of apathy, a gesture of incessant movement. A baby's behaviour is its language (2018, p. 27).

These inaugural, fortuitous and recurring exchanges, during moments of care and/or play «(...) are acts of language that begin to order the world and feed the child's appetite for communication» (López, 2018, p. 35). Thus, from an early age, babies are sensitive to the playfulness and affection of gestures, caresses, expressions on their mother's face (or another figure close to them), the musicality of words and vocal intonations¹ that often coincide with routines, care and the first interactions between adults and children, which are essential for their full development. These are, therefore, the first poetic-lyrical experiences that often come from the oral tradition, according to María Emilia López (2018), which turn the act of caring for and providing for the baby's vital needs into a game permeated by touch and bodily gesture, but also by the human voice. Ana Margarida Ramos and Sara Reis da Silva (2014) emphasise the relevance of early contact with nursery rhymes in these first few months, given that

from a very young age, even before they learn to speak, children already enjoy clapping games, songs with gestures, rhymes and short stories. It is the oral,

¹ In this regard, it's important to remember that «the child's sensitivity to the human voice goes back to intrauterine life» (Vauclair, 2008, p. 243).

rhythmic and melodic component of texts that first attracts them and it is important that this early connection is stimulated from a very early age (2014, p. 156).

Maria José Costa (1992) also highlights the importance of contact with this «forgotten poetic continent» right from the cradle. Thus, the first adult mediators must nurture these bonds and affective connections through a repertoire of sounds, visuals (if we think of the relevance of the adult's fingers and face, for example) and play, because

the melodic bath (the human voice and that of the father, his songs, the music of his own intonations) provides the baby with a first sound mirror) which he uses first by shouting (that is what he is capable of producing voluntarily, and which the beloved voice soothes in response), then with his gurgles and finally with his language games) (López, 2018, p. 42).

Bearing in mind the importance of the adult figure's verbal actions and body movements, as well as their visual reactions to the child, it becomes clear that, at this early stage, «(...) the word has little meaning without the action that accompanies it» (p. 87), as Irene Lézine (1985) emphasises. Still on this subject, and in order to clarify the type of these first dialogic circuits, she takes the opportunity to recall the words of J. de Ajuriaguerra (1953),

the child lives in a sound world, but also in a visual world in which the other is an actor, it is in the other that they seek confirmation of what they think they understand, and it is in their body that they experience the satisfaction of dialogue. The child's body is always present somewhere, in relation to their interlocutor who is also located somewhere. The other person's words are theirs as soon as they say them. The mimogestual expression of the other is already a language, the attitude of the child's body is already reception (as cited in Lézine, 1985, p. 87).

The adult's genuine interest, willingness to listen, respond and involve the baby through sound stimuli, but also motor stimuli and manipulation with objects, at informal times such as mealtimes, bath time, dressing, among others, foster the child's verbal development. As such, it seems vital to us that, as the author of *Primeira Infância [First Childhood]*, «both in the family and in children's groups, everything must be done to favour the child's verbal contact with the adult, and this mainly at the level of daily routines» (Lézine, 1985, p. 107).

From the point of view of developmental psychology, we can say that until the end of the sensorimotor period, we are dealing with exclamatory, emotional and mimogestual pre-language, according to Irène Lézine (1985). Therefore, Jacques Vauclair, in *Desenvolvimento da Criança: do nascimento aos dois anos [Child's Development: from birth until two years old]* (2008), considers that

speech production begins from the age of 3 months with babbling, which is now considered a linguistic production in its own right. This activity takes on more and more complex forms to reach the production of the first words at around 12 months on average. The lexicon can then develop, first slowly, then through a phase

of acceleration, called a lexical explosion, at around 18-20 months. During this period, the use of words mainly concerns names. However, the child's vocabulary changes significantly after 20 months, when they have already acquired a hundred words. The nature of their vocabulary changes and predicates (verbs and adjectives) increase and then, a little later, relational terms (tool words) (p. 243).

The approach to books, as food for the imagination and an activity that generates family well-being (Barros, 2022), but also as an opportunity to get to know the conventions of printed materials, informally learn basic knowledge and acquire vocabulary. From the first months of life, this process should be governed by the principle of pleasure, seduction and playful freedom (alluding to motivation, affection and emotion) and guided by the baby's rhythm, taste and temperament (Moreira & Ribeiro, 2008). The intimacy and affection of family relationships should shape informal reading practices with baby, which are seen as moments of warm affection and close physical contact, in which all members (such as other children) can spontaneously participate. It is therefore important that the adult's behaviour is not intransigent or rigid on these occasions, so that the child doesn't think that his/her ideas, perceptions or reactions to reading are devalued. In a setting where there are no impositions or constraints that could lead to fear of making mistakes or frustration on the part of the child, it is easy for a baby who is first invited, on the adult's lap, to turn the pages of this artefact to take the initiative and take control of this activity, as María Emilia López argues since «(...) the problem is not theirs but that of the adults who try to impose some guidelines beyond the idiosyncrasies of the baby» (López, 2018, p. 112). These special moments of family interaction, mediated by books, therefore do not involve a single reading methodology, as pointed out by Maria da Fátima Moreira and Iolanda Ribeiro

(...) It can involve purely handling and looking at books, simple reading or reading guided by questions. This type of attitude is close to one of exploration and experimentation, in which the child gradually realises that the book is an object that is different from a toy, to which they become attached. (2008, p. 56).

Ana Margarida Ramos and Sara Reis da Silva (2014) take a similar view in the abovementioned article, «Leitura do Berço ao Recreio – Estratégias de Promoção da Leitura com Bebés» [«Reading from the Cradle to the Playground - Strategies for Promoting Reading with Babies»], admitting that regardless of the level of cognitive complexity, these reading practices «(...) they may only be focused on decoding signs and confirming expectations, or they may involve making inferences. Aesthetic evaluation or critical questioning are other possible approaches» (Ramos e Silva, 2014, p. 152). The most important aspect of these initial contacts with this cultural object is the establishment of pleasant routines that ultimately promote affection and esteem,

(...) the idea is that the external motivations for reading (the attention of adults, the play situation, the affective reinforcements from parents) become internal motivations (the pleasure of reading for the sake of reading), helping to build [what is recognised as gradual, slow and demanding] autonomous readers (Ramos and Silva, 2014, p. 151).

However, it is perhaps worth remembering that the issue of babies as potential recipients will see a more significant development, especially since the 1990s, according to Sophie Van der Linden, given that «before that, the public had not yet been fully convinced of the benefits of reading to babies» (2021, p. 188). Today, however, the affective, intellectual and harmonious psychological development of mediated reading and the autonomous handling of books that are freely accessible to babies while they are still in their cots is recognised as important, in order to «(...) setting up a ritual of reading in the evening before bedtime, all these gestures will make a decisive contribution to the well-being of newborns (...)» (Linden, 2021, p. 188).

2 FIRST FORMATIVE READINGS: COLOUR FOR PRE-READERS

The wide formal and thematic variety of contemporary children's literature aimed at early childhood is one of the aspects highlighted by María Emilia López in the volume we have just quoted, i.e. in *Un pájaro de aire: la formación de los bibliotecarios y la lectura en la primera infancia*, study which also highlights the difficulties that rigid attempts at categorisation can cause

(...) knowing that the distinction between genres is never pure, that there will always be crossovers between them: informative books are also aesthetic and in many cases with more than interesting artistic treatments (so are they art books?) (...) there are also books that defy all genres and we call them “the unclassifiable”. The children I work with on a daily basis construct their own classifications, which disrupt even the canons of children’s literature. In any case, the most important thing to point out is that in this variety lies part of the richness of a collection (2018, p. 91).

With regard to the eminently objective edition, which includes the books we have chosen to analyse, designed for the assimilation of the first concepts and learning, Sara Reis da Silva highlights, in the chapter entitled «Livros Formativos para Pré-leitores: Palavras (e)numeradas, Palavras Contadas» [«Formative Books for Pre-readers: Numbered Words, Counted Words»], the potential arising from their exploitation, seeing them as

fundamental from the point of view of the development of oral language, the development of perception and the relationship between images and words, and even knowledge of the world, the books on which we have centred this study will be all the more formative, in many ways, the more they are placed together and alongside others that are verbally, visually or graphically distinct (2014, p. 52).

But the terminological hesitation pointed out by María Emilia López is also underlined in this study by Sara Reis da Silva (2014), where, for example, the term «imagiários» is used again. Initially put forward by Teresa Duran (2002) in *Leer antes de saber Leer* about the picture books on offer for children aged 0 to 6, «libros de imágenes» are characterised by Amàlia Ramoneda (2019) as

(...) books in which the child recognises objects or actions (clothes, food, etc.), familiar or close situations (family members or visits to the doctor, among others)

and affective elements (toys, animals, dummy, etc.). This typology broadens semantic fields and vocabulary, as it shows images of a reality that the child identifies with his or her daily life. There is no narration, only a word or a verb defining the action or naming the highlighted element (...) (p. 69).

For Denise Escarpit (2008), «l’imagier» can be considered a pre-documentary book that introduce the child to reading the world through the visual dimension, emphasising the static and precise dimension of these first illustrations of shapes and objects close to the baby’s daily life. Even so, poetry and humour can be defining attributes of these volumes, despite the fact that a contained, objective or synthetic approach is also valid for publications that combine an efferent reading with an artistic or aesthetic nature (Linden, 2021). In any case, it’s important, as the aforementioned scholar mentions, to remember that

(...) there are limits to this highly personal expression by artists: they must take account of the child’s ability to «decode the image», to «read» its characteristic semantic features; and this depends on the child’s referents, which vary according to the family or environmental environment. (Escarpit, 2008, p. 336).

Thus, in these first volumes, we can find formal and thematic connections, as we have said, and a certain hybridism between publications with different terminologies, with the common use of designations such as non-fiction books, documentary books or informative books, the latter defined by Amàlia Ramoneda (2019) as

(...) the first books of knowledge, informative or documentary: those that tell us about the way things are and the world around us. In this section we can find books of concepts, for example, spatial, or of visual perception (...) number books (...) (p. 74).

In these knowledge books designed for the appropriation of knowledge through their segmentation or categorisation over a contained number of pages, with a carefully ordered graphic distribution devoid of irrelevant elements, pictorial discourse occupies a primordial place, as Ana Garralón (2013) points out. As a result, reading them does not often require an invariable sequenced look-up, since «As there is no continuous order, the double page allows us to jump from one page to another, as if we were zapping. Visually, they produce a very exciting effect (...)». (Garralón, 2013, p. 162). But it’s important to remember, as Denise Escarpit (2008) notes, that documentary books provide an informative look at reality through a dialogical approach with the reader’s previously acquired knowledge, within a certain spatial and/or temporal context, with a view to cultural apprehension and the awakening of curiosity. The pictorial discourse made up of easy-to-read illustrations or photographs and the competent and serious graphic and formal organisation of these volumes make knowledge clear and intelligible and help the reader to find their way around, while at the same time not closing the door to imagination and the presentation of perspectives that may be unfamiliar to them. In this way, the discourse of images is laid out gradually and can be grasped at each reader’s own pace, allowing time to identify and understand the concepts of the universe close

to the child, in a less intricate and chaotic way, as the outside world is often presented to the baby's eyes (Colomer, 2005). Denise Escarpit also recognises the primacy of the pragmatism of these first photographic images or illustrations designed for babies, explaining that

the first stage in learning to use images, the symbolic representation of the world, is through picture books, which present separate images in a «realistic» style, made up of a single element with no link between them, each corresponding to a word. In general, in picture books, a single signifier corresponds to a single signified; there is a desire for denotation, because children who have no cultural references other than those acquired in their immediate environment need to be able to find references in their everyday environment. It is therefore from the immediate environment (family, home, nursery, street, garden) that themes must emerge (Escarpit, 2008, p. 327).

However, for María Emilia López, the assumption that children are naturally attracted to realistic and figurative illustrations (they are less affected by the absence or small presence of words in many of these books than many adult mediators), in her opinion, cannot ignore the fact that «young children are naturally surrealistic, they have the capacity to establish alternative logics from the freedom with which their mental images and associations circulate». (López, 2018, p. 96) The exploration of intertextual relationships, as well as the presentation of metaphorical images and less stereotyped visual statements, should therefore be part of the collection that children have access to, in the author's view, since

their own thinking is strongly intertextual, which is why what some adults read as a "chaotic image" or overloaded with information, for children is a reading that is not only possible but much simpler than we imagine from our ways of thinking and reading images, already much more organised and sometimes very perceptually formatted (López, 2018, p. 96).

Although, in many cases, in these first baby books, the photographs do not employ techniques such as photomontage or other imagery strategies that encourage a rather open or subjective interpretation, in other more one-off publications, curiosity, the sensitivity of observation, surprise and aesthetic and imaginative expression are ingredients that set the volumes in question apart from the rest of the editorial offer (Garraón, 2013). In this respect, it is worth highlighting the pioneering spirit, originality and disconcerting gaze of the legacy for children left by the American photographer Tana Hoban (1917-2006), with the volumes *Red, Blue, Yellow Shoe Board Book* (1986); *Colors Everywhere* (1995); *Of Colors and Things* (8th ed.; 1996) or *White on Black* (1993), all published by Greenwillow Books (New York), as well as *Black on White* (1993), published by Harper Collins Publishers (New York). It therefore seems essential to us that the creators of this type of book dedicated to the dissemination of factual knowledge, in addition to an admirable ability to synthesise knowledge that is sometimes specialised or scientific, do not disregard their imaginative skills, as Ana Garraón claims, since

(...) the imaginative effort that a scientist needs is more or less the same that a child needs when opening a book: he is going to learn about something he has never seen before, and he is going to need to connect it with the previous information he had on the subject. For a reader to be successful with a text, he or she must be sensitive to the context in which the author proposes his or her text (Garraón, 2013, p. 172).

Colours are one of the most common types of content in children's books of an instructional nature, so we'll make a few comments on this subject below and then move on to analyse a sample *corpus*.

As we have shown in another context (Martins & Silva, 2021), the basic syntax of the image has colour as its most expressive visual element. The phenomenon of colour is a subjective cultural creation, only attested to by the interaction between light, an object receiving the light radiation and an observer (decoding entity) (St Clair, 2016). As such, objects don't actually have colour, as they absorb or reflect different wavelengths, which our brain interprets through our eyes as a particular hue. This has been demonstrated by several colour scholars, including Kassia St Clair, «(...) the colour we perceive an object to be is precisely the colour *it isn't*: that is, the segment of the spectrum that is being reflet away». (2016, p. 13).

Not all of us are the same in terms of our ability to see colours. Changing from individual to individual, colour, as a visual and psychological perception, involves biological reactions and/or unconscious behaviours experienced physically, transversal or heterogeneous responses between geographically and chronologically distinct societies, momentary tendencies, personal or gender preferences or even those that can be shaped by age group, among others, which are difficult to quantify or objectify.

Colour can be immaterial (colour-light) or material (colour-pigment), the former referring to the additive system and the latter to subtractive synthesis. Thus, any reflection on this subject, as well as a conscious application of colour in visual communication, and in this particular case in the book object, requires an initial knowledge of the physical properties of colour, since in the absence of light the whole process of deciphering and identifying colours is called into question. As Victoria Finlay (2013) explains,

there are several "physical" causes of colour, but one with which we are all familiar is the rainbow, which forms in the sky when light bounces off raindrops and splits - called "refraction" - into its different wavelengths. (p. 25).

However, in addition to this aspect that is unrelated to human action, it is also necessary to understand the physiological and perceptual aspects, i.e how colours are deciphered and their contamination effects resulting from the neighbouring relationship between adjacent colours. Our perception of colour stems from the way our brains process the information initially provided by the cones in the retina. Cones are one of two types of photoreceptor cells that convert light radiation into electrical and nerve impulses. As it gets dark, or in low light conditions, the rods, the other group of photosensitive cells, become

essential to our vision. Of these two types of cells, only the cones are responsible for colour vision. Although each type of cone specialises in a particular colour, it is also receptive to adjacent colours in the spectrum. Therefore, the brain is able to triangulate (by comparison and not by mixing or adding) the information coming from the three types of cones to calculate the colour we are seeing at any given moment (Falcinelli, 2019).

But colour is also associated with a wide range of symbolic and cultural meanings, some of which are perennial, while others change according to the geographical context and experiences of a given society over time (Pastoureau, 1997). Thus, as Ricardo Falcinelli notes,

in today's society, colour is not a sensation or a mere characteristic of things; colour is often an idea or an expectation. This means that some colours are so closely identified with objects that it is difficult to think of them in any other way (2019, p. 7).

Widely studied since Antiquity, from a philosophical point of view, it is, in fact, with Isaac Newton (1642-1727) that light and colour acquire a scientific, objective and controllable nature, from various experiments carried out with prisms that allow the refracting and recomposing of the white light of the sun. In fact, for Victoria Finlay (2013), among other specialists with a similar vision, the main novelty lies in this second operation, « (...) his genius consisted in placing the second prism upside down, so that the multicoloured light would pass through it. And he discovered that on this occasion the rainbow disappeared and the white light was reconstructed». (Finlay, 2023, p. 25). The result of this innovative vision was a new colour order that questions the Aristotelian order that had been in force until then. Thus, as the French historian Michel Pastoureau, author of several books on the phenomenon of colour some of which have recently been translated into Portuguese by Orfeu Negro (2014; 2016; 2019a; 2019b; 2023), explains,

(...) red is no longer in the centre of the sequence, but at its end; green comes between yellow and blue, thus confirming what painters and dyers had been doing for decades: it was possible to produce green by mixing yellow and blue. But above all, there is no longer any place for black and white in this new colour order. This constitutes a revolution: black and white are no longer colours (2014, p. 205).

However, this and other new scientific advances in the following century, made known, for example, by Jakob Christoffel Le Blon (1667-1741), known for the development of four-colour printing (the CMYK system), which made it possible to reproduce prints in colour, which until then had been limited to black ink and white paper, and «which prepared the ground for the future theory of primary and complementary colours» (Pastoureau, 2014, p. 212), would have repercussions on everyday life in the following years. Therefore, due to its transdisciplinary nature, the study of colour requires not only a scientific approach, but also, for example, attention to the knowledge of dyeing, painting, dress codes, the moral and hierarchical principles of a given society, among others. We don't see colours in isolation, but linked to objects. Thus, the meanings and effects of a colour depend on the multiple uses we

give it (Falcinelli, 2019). It can therefore be seen that culture and social experience condition colour perception, since colours are identified and decoded by human beings in a visceral relationship with their use/application in a given object or context. Thus, authors specialising in the didactics of design and image point out the fact that

colour is a polysemic element of communication that cannot be interpreted in a univocal and universal way (Cubeiro, 2022, p. 176).

The volumes that make up our *corpus* show clear concerns about trying to translate a phenomenon as complex and subjective as colour in a playful, visually stimulating but also concrete and/or accessible way. Despite being designed around a strong imagery load, permeated by humour and challenge, which serve as a starting point for a conversation, the books that make up the textual corpus of this study present a sparse textual discourse that serves as a very simple guide for the reader. As Ana Garralón points out, emerging readers «(...) they like books where they recognise things (alphabets, object books), and begin their first operations of comparing and contrasting» (2013, p. 206). To do so, these picture books or early representations take advantage of comparisons, analogies, visual metaphors [a visual resource that takes advantage of formal and conceptual relationships to represent another meaning] similar to those present in linguistic discourse, which search for similarities in the surrounding reality known to the children, so that «(...) what seems distant and abstract is made concrete and known» (Garralón, 2013, p. 112). By reading them, the aim is to stimulate in the little readers an attentive and analytical look at everyday life, since the extra-textual recipient can point out and name the images, thus encouraging classifications, comparisons, deductions and the development of hypotheses of interpretation that are crucial for future critical thinking and essential in any process of sensitising the eye or educating about images. As such, the selection of the corpus sought to omit publications whose imagery showed verb-iconic simplicity, and instead privileged works whose relationship between text and image is fertile for the construction and association of new aesthetic points of view.

3 TEXTUAL CORPUS ANALYSIS

With the signature of Aurore Petit, a young French illustrator and sole author of *A minha mãe é como uma casa* [*My mum is like a house*], translated in 2021 by Bruáa Editora, as well as the amusing book *O Piolho Sabe Que* [*The louse knows that*], with text by Mathis and a Portuguese translation by Orfeu Negro, some of the titles in the collection «Des petits pop-up pour les petits mains» [*Little pop-ups for little hands*]² will be analysed below. Published for the first time in 2022 by Éditions de La Martinière, this series comprises a total of 10 books: *Vert* [Green] POP; *Rouge* [Red] POP; *Rose* [Pink] POP; *Jaune* [Yellow] POP; *Bleu* [Blue] POP; *Blanc* [White] POP; *Orange* [Orange] POP; *Noir* [Black] POP; *Or* [Golden] POP; *Argent* [Silver-coloured] POP.

² For this analysis, some Spanish-language volumes from 2022 were consulted (*Rojo*, *Amarillo*, *Verde*).

Designed in a small 10x10cm square format, with sturdy cardboard and rounded corners, these concept books are made up of a total of six double-page spreads each. Each illustration depicts an associated or even cultural meaning of the colour used in the title, on a uniform and mostly white background, thus following a vision similar to that set out by Denise Escarpit (2008), as mentioned before. In this way, the illustrated object, animal or character becomes easily legible, since the limited size of the format requires a central, contrasting and clear representation of the visual element, which is defined mostly by a spot of colour, complemented by small, fluid and expressive black lines that add textures (in leaves, in a beard, in lemon peel), as well as some dots (such as the freckles on a face, the alien's skin or even the wings of a ladybird), shaping silhouettes or giving more information about each scene (night stars, river water, among others).

However, along with its undeniable pedagogical nature, this series stands out above all for its innovative artistic intentionality, if we look at the way in which the characteristic V-fold of pop-up mechanisms is exploited. Thus, when turning the page, the reader is continually surprised by the relief of the illustrations that allow the mouth of a whale to open, carefully camouflaged against the blue of the sea, the simulation of the jump of a small child character wearing blue jeans (figure 1), or the appearance of an aeroplane, partially hidden by clouds in the sky, in the book *Bleu POP*.



Figure 1: *Bleu POP* (2023), de Aurore Petit.

Sometimes the illustrations go beyond the confines of the page, as in the yellow representation of the moon in the *Amarillo POP* volume, or the upside-down bat in the last illustration of the night in the *Noir POP* book, or even the representation of the green of nature in the book dedicated to this colour, as well as the bleached hair of an old lady in the *Blanc POP* volume.

Still in the book about the green colour, we also see the large mouth of a crocodile and are equally surprised to discover a little green mucus hidden inside a nose. Sometimes the use of folds of identical shape, but of increasing size, makes it possible to simulate three tiers of a birthday cake. In other cases, successive strips of similar yellow paper, glued together to complete a 180° arc, remind us of the wavelengths of light. Combining three-dimensionality, interactivity, movement and an expressive simplicity that strategically mixes fictional elements (such as the characters of the ninja or the witch in the book *Noir POP*) (figure 2) and factual

ones, this is undoubtedly a series that will captivate the eyes of the smallest readers for whom the imaginary world and reality are easily mutable universes.



Figure 2: *Noir POP* (2023), de Aurore Petit.

We also propose a reading of the volume *Rouge* (2018), by Marc Pouyet, in the «P'tit Land Art» collection (figure 3) from Éditions de la Salamandre. The renowned artist and author of several children's picture books, some of which are dedicated to the transformations experienced by the seasons (see the titles in the same collection *Automne*, *Hiver*, *Printemps* and *Été*, published in 2013), uses photographic composition to encourage his readers to take a closer look at their surroundings. His photographs capture the attention of readers «tout-petits... et les parents aussi!» [«toddlers... and parents too!»], as stated on the back cover of the book under review, because of the way he explores the shapes, textures and contrasts between the natural elements, transforming them into unique aesthetic artefacts. The reader is invited to admire a series of cleverly and imaginatively constructed compositions on each odd-numbered page of the volume in question, distributed synchronously with an element of nature presented on a white background on the even-numbered page. An example of this is the representation of the poppy flower and the way in which the photographic record of a street pavement and a water pipe cover allows us to identify similarities between the two (figure 4).

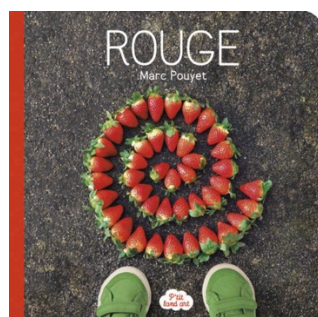


Figure 3: *Rouge* (2018), by Marc Pouyet.



Figure 4: Details from *Rouge* (2018), by Marc Pouyet.

Eschewing the more common architecture of imagery, while still fulfilling his formative and trustworthy role of disseminating a set of foods, minerals or flowers distinguished by their red colour, duly captioned, this illustrator seeks to arouse other readings in the reader, as well as making the smallest readers aware of the beauty of balance, simplicity and stability in natural forms (figure 5). The detail, the volumetry, the play of scales, the fusion of light and shadow, moulded in the textures of the recorded materials, although realistic, have an undeniable artistic and dramatic quality, so the selection of the context, the delimitation of the setting or the purification of the most striking features of each element represented are not left to chance. Volumes like this one, along with others such as *Noir* (2014), *Jaune* (2014) or *Jardin* (2014) make readers sympathise when they discover that, by turning the page, they are able to find a visual message that others may have missed.



Figure 5: Details from *Rouge* (2018), by Marc Pouyet.

We end this analysis with a publication that uses strangeness and incongruity as a humorous vehicle and as an invitation to image discrimination, as the unusual title suggests: *Bleu comme une banane*, by Delphine Chedru (figure 6). In this proposal by Éditions Nathan, published in 2023, the extratextual recipient is faced with a game of discovering the intruding element, that is, the figure whose colouring is different from the others grouped on each double page. The stylised representation and chromatic similarity of the different groups of illustrated elements make the challenge put forward on the back cover – «In this colour search and find, the images correspond to each colour. But on each page, an intruder has been hidden. Open your eyes and find the object

that is not in its natural colour». – more labour-intensive, requiring a careful and slow reading of the images, which doesn't end with a single viewing (figure 7).



Figure 6: *Bleu comme une banane* (2023), by Delphine Chedru.



Figure 7: Details from *Bleu comme une banane* (2023), by Delphine Chedru.

But concepts such as primary and secondary colours, warm colours, cool colours, as well as other qualifications such as stippling and gradient, among others, are also explored in this large format book. As such, a mediated reading is recommended, but the sharing and dialogue between the child and the adult can attest to the view put forward by Maria Emilia López that, despite the resistance of certain mediators to a “silent” book, the narrative potential of the illustrations «(...) it is surprising to observe, if one stops to follow their reading, how many elements they discover before an adult does in certain illustrations, or how they relate elements apparently unconnected to the gaze of their father, mother, librarian or teacher» (2018, p. 96).

4 FINAL REMARKS

From an early age, babies' interest in words and images must be welcomed and encouraged by the adults close to them, recognising in books a way of being with others and an object of socialisation. As such, the positive bond and mutual trust of the introductory dialogues started from

the first months of the baby's life will be essential for the subsequent acquisition and development of verbal skills and visual interpretation of the illustrations in the edition that is potentially intended for them. The previous theoretical exposition also shows that colour has a strong visual impact, to the point of provoking feelings and emotions, often without us being aware of it, triggering instinctive and intuitive reactions in each of us (Branco, 2022). In fact, it seems unequivocal to several titles that «colour is life because a world without colour seems dead to us» (Itten, 2020, p. 13).

The analysed books and the expository question posed above show the relevance of the connection between the visual representation of each image and the context that surrounds it, in close comparison with the factual reality known to the child. Concept or «l'imagier» books designed for early childhood stimulate the construction of the child's critical sense and the development of their capacity for abstraction through the association between elements (Escarpit, 2008). Bringing children closer to knowledge that is necessary for aesthetic awareness and essential for the creation of any visual message, but also to enhance the acquisition of vocabulary, seems to be the driving force behind the creators of these editions. In the selected books, we can see that the way in which each creator expresses or shows the reader the theme of colours is not done in a neutral or purely objective way, following a perspective similar to that put forward by Ana Garralón that «Many scientists are personally involved in what they say and pass on their passion» (2013, p. 69), combining humour and playfulness with an educative intent.

Despite the obvious purification and lightness of the linguistic and imagistic discourse alluding to a complex and subjective theme, the works in question promote early and informal contact with the book and the concept of colours, and their reading can go beyond the mere naming of the elements represented therein (colours, objects, animals, etc.). In fact, it can also motivate the identification of other objects in the immediate environment and the gradual apprehension of the cultural meanings associated with a particular colour. Thus, over time, the child will learn common characteristics between elements that share the same colour and the positive and negative meanings socially attributed to each hue. The child is thus introduced to a game of observing images and discovering the word (concept) with each new turn of the page. This exercise is therefore enhanced by chromatic similarities, the search for similarities, analogies or deductions from the surrounding reality, as well as helping to define classifications in a fun and captivating way in early childhood, a stage in which learning takes place in a playful and sensory way. The most important thing, therefore, is to find a mediator who recognises in these graphically appealing objects an important ally in the process of fostering a desire for knowledge, who identifies in visual language a vehicle for knowledge, capable of recreating with sensitivity and intelligence and transforming the reader. Finally, we'd like to return once again to the words of Ana Garralón, in *Leer y Saber – los libros informativos para niños*

many contemporary books are playful proposals that motivate us to work with them and are capable of surprising us with their information. Sometimes it is enough to read them calmly to recognise their possibilities and to know that we can share with the children the enthusiasm they have aroused in us (2013, p. 226).

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