

Vexillology with high school students

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Abstract

This paper presents an account of the activities developed in the field of vexillology with high school students of the Federal Institute of Education, Science and Technology of São Paulo (IFSP), Capivari campus, Brazil. During the beginning of 2016, due to the Olympic Games held in Rio de Janeiro, I submitted to my institution a proposal to build with a group of students the 206 flags of the National Olympic Committees participating in the games. The students received my instruction (as a geography teacher) to make all of these national symbols in the following months, using flag construction sheet, card stock and collage techniques. The practice of vexillology with students also helped them to a better understanding of notions of mathematics, arts, history and geography in a multidisciplinary way. In the same manner, these flags were exhibited to visitors during the month of August in the internal hall of the campus. The impact of this project was positive among teachers and students, showing that vexillology not only aroused interest among young people but also offers great possibilities for inclusion in the educational field.

Introduction

This paper presents an account of activities developed in the field of vexillology with high school students of the Federal Institute of Education, Science and Technology of São Paulo (IFSP), Capivari campus, Brazil. The objective of this text is to show that the practice of vexillology can arouse the interest of students in flags, their history, uses and meanings. In addition, it seeks to emphasise the multidisciplinary role of flags, which involve strong relationships with history, geography, sociology, philosophy, arts and mathematics – subjects present in the universe of students. Finally, in showing the importance of flags to the students, teachers, employees and visitors of our institution, the role of vexillology is strengthened, both for the group of students that became involved with its theory and practice, and for the public who interacted with the visual impact of the flags in the school environment.

These activities were developed at the Federal Institute of Education, Science and Technology of São Paulo (IFSP) – a multi-campus

institution, specialising in providing technical, technological and professional education. The IFSP is a free public institution belonging to a federal education network (known as Federal Institutes), directly linked to the Ministry of Education (MEC), which offers undergraduate courses, technical and technological education and basic education (high school). The Federal Institutes in Brazil are recognised for their quality of education.

This model of school offers in each of its units the possibility of integral education, where students of high school, technological and undergraduate courses share the same academic space, being an institution that values the work of teachers not only in teaching practices, but also in research and extension projects. In this way, educators are encouraged to develop part of their professional activities to carry out research and extension activities, even with high school students.

Located 142km (88 miles) from the city of São Paulo, Capivari has 53,000 inhabitants and is considered a small city in Brazil. The IFSP Capivari also accepts many students from nearby cities, and offers integrated technical high school courses in the area of chemistry and computing and technological courses in computer science and graduation in chemistry. When I came to work as a geography teacher at the IFSP Capivari campus (in October 2014), the institution provided an opportunity to develop part of my research and extension activities with educational practices, and this way the idea of teaching vexillology for high school students arose.



Capivari, São Paulo State, Brazil



The IFSP Capivari campus

First experiences (2014-15)

The first experiences with the practice of vexillology occurred at the end of October 2014, when the educational direction of our institution were presented with a proposal to stage an exhibition of the pan-African flags during 'Black Awareness Week' at the IFSP Capivari campus.¹ The proposal was approved and the preparations began. Initially, invitations were issued for high school students who

¹ For more details, see the report on this project in *NAVA News*, no. 255 (September 2015).



wanted to participate in the flag-making project and two volunteers were registered: Antônio Christofolletti and Gabrielle Angeli Polli.



Antônio Christofolletti and Gabrielle Angeli Polli making pan-African flags



Showing the meaning and construction sheet of the pan-African flags

One of the first challenges was to establish a pattern for the flags to be exhibited and the type of paper for their manufacture. In addition, the importance of pan-African flags and their meanings was explained to students. At a later stage, the process of executing the pan-African flags started using the flag construction sheet, whose dimensions were found on the site www.vexilla-mundi.com. To ensure an equal and harmonious presentation, it was established that all national flags would have a maximum width of 30cm on the hoist.

The flags were manufactured using collage techniques with cardstock paper (due to the variety and quality of the colours) and application of printed symbols (for flags with complex symbols and coats of arms). A sheet containing the name of the respective country was pasted on the reverse of each flag in order to facilitate their identification by the public. This first experiment also established the pattern of presentation for the flags that was used in later exhibitions. The flags were displayed in the campus entrance hall in the last week of November and remained until the end of classes on 12 December 2014.

Following the positive results of the exhibition of pan-African flags, a project to continue vexillological activities with the high school students for the year 2015 was presented to the educational direction. At this stage, an exhibition of the flags of all African countries was prepared for the November of the same year. In March 2015, high school students were invited to take part in the project and a volunteer was registered: Weverson Domingues Pereira. The students Antonio and Gabrielle had graduated and left the project.

As before, the new volunteer was instructed in the flag-making process, and he was responsible for assisting me in constructing the flags of other African countries. The result of these activities was an exhibition held between November and December 2015.



The student Weverson took part in the phases of the project in 2015-16. Photo, 2016



Exhibition of African flags, IFSP, Capivari campus, November 2015

The project: *Olympic Flags – Rio 2016*

The year 2016 marked a great sporting event held in our country - the Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro - and a great opportunity to link the activities developed so far to an important international event. From this possibility, the project *Olympic Flags - Rio 2016* was presented to all the students of our institution, with the support of our educational direction and the IFSP rectorate in São Paulo.

The goal was to organise a major exhibition at the Capivari campus, displaying the flags of the 206 National Olympic Committees (NOCs) that participated in the Olympic Games. After publicising the idea in our school at the end of February 2016, eight students registered for the project: Eduarda Gaion Lopes de Lima; Emily Brenda Dias Ferraz; Gabriel Henrique Souza Prado; Larissa Isabela Alves da Silva; Leticia da Silva; Rafaela Santos da Silva; Tais Nascimento and Weverson Domingues Pereira.

The flag-making process was developed from March to July, the students meeting for teacher orientation activities during the late afternoon of Mondays and Tuesdays.



Our 'team' of students, 2016



The flag-making process, March-July 2016



Each student was responsible for a specific task, which involved calculating the ratio of each flag, separating the colours of cardstock, plotting the flag dimensions on paper, cutting and pasting the pieces, finishing and attaching the names on the reverse of the flags and fixing a bar made of ethylene vinyl acetate (EVA). In some cases, the presence of the teacher was necessary to cut the more complex symbols and the printed coats of arms with a box cutter.

The flags of the African countries were re-used from previous exhibitions, and only a few needed minor repairs; however, it was necessary to make three-quarters of all the other flags of countries participating in the Olympic Games in just four months. Therefore, the first stage of this project was to teach students to construct the simplest flags, represented by the families of the bicolour (e.g. Poland, Indonesia), the horizontal and vertical tricolour (e.g. France, Germany), and simple symbols such as suns (Japan, Bangladesh, Palau). This was a preparatory step to ready the students for the most complex tasks.



Eduarda, Leticia and Larissa making the flag of Puerto Rico



Larissa and Gabriel learning how to make the flag of North Korea

The second stage involved the construction of bicolour and tricolour flags that required simple symbols and coats of arms (e.g. Canada, Slovakia, Belarus, Croatia, Barbados, Lebanon, Mongolia, Argentina, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico), as well as several flags that use stripes and / with stars (e.g. Puerto Rico, Cuba, Chile, Philippines, Jordan, Israel, North Korea, Myanmar).

In the next stage, the students worked to fix coats of arms and other complex symbols on flags with plain fields, or with borders or divisions (e.g. PR China, Albania, Kyrgyzstan, South Korea, Guam, US Virgin Islands, Maldives, Montenegro, Belize, Sri Lanka, Papua New Guinea).

Following this, the flags bearing a cross or crescent were made (e.g. Denmark, Norway, Georgia, Turkey, Pakistan, Singapore) and printed inscriptions were attached (Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Iran).



Emily cutting the emblem of Guam



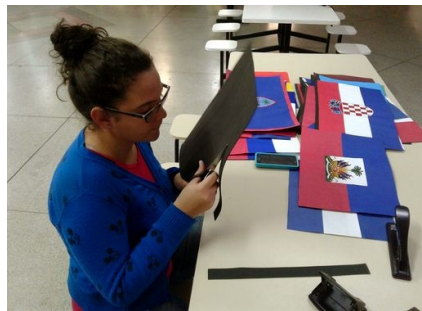
Eduarda making the flag of Georgia

In the last stage, students worked with collage techniques to produce the most complex styles and designs (e.g. United States, Malaysia, Greece, United Kingdom, Kiribati, Brunei, Dominica, Vanuatu).

Flags with maps (Cyprus and Kosovo) and flags that use the Union Jack (Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, Tuvalu, Cook Islands, etc.) were produced at this stage.



Gabriel making the flag of the United Kingdom



Leticia fixing the EVA bar on the flags

The final flags completed by the students were Grenada, Macedonia, Nepal, Brazil and the Olympic Flag.

The names of the respective countries were then fixed on the reverse of each flag, and a bar of EVA material was stapled to each piece – to guarantee the flexibility and durability of each flag when it was placed on the display lines of the exhibition.



On 3 August 2016, the 206 flags of the NOCs² were set out by the students at the IFSP Capivari campus, to greet the start of the Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro. For this exhibition, the model provided by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) was followed, i.e. the flags of the NOCs were organised in alphabetical order in the language of the host country, according to the 'Parade of Nations' at the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games.³

To simulate the opening ceremony, the flags were alphabetically arranged in display lines and organised in three spaces of the modest campus building. Flags A to D were displayed in the entrance hall, while flags from E to J were displayed in the library, which is located to the left of the main campus entrance. Our goal was to give visitors a 180° view of the flags as they walked through the main entrance.



*Flags A to D:
campus entrance hall*



*Flags E to J:
library*

² Kuwait competed under the Olympic Flag at Rio 2016, but we opted to represent the flag of the country so the public could identify it. The Independent Olympic Athletes and the Refugee Olympic Athletes were represented by the Olympic Flag.

³ During Olympic competitions, the flags used usually have the same ratio. We chose to represent the flags in their official proportions, so the public could perceive that they have different ratios. In general, civil flags are represented in this international competition; however, we decided to represent the state flags, because culturally the public cannot differentiate between civil and state flags, and use of the former could give the impression of 'something missing' - for example, Austria, Bolivia, Costa Rica, Haiti, Dominican Republic, Venezuela.



To the right of the main entrance, the flags from K to M were displayed next to the campus secretary and principal's room. The flags from N to Z were displayed along the corridor of the administrative sector and teachers' rooms. All of these spaces are on the ground floor of the building and are frequented by students, teachers and employees.

The initial objective was to display the national flags at the campus during the entire competition period and to remove them after the end of the games. However, due to the success and visual impact of the project, they eventually remained until the end of September.



*Flags K to M:
next to the campus
secretary and
principal's room*



*Flags N to Z: corridor of
the administrative sector
and teachers' rooms*

Another important aspect of this project was its impact on the media.

The work done with the students in our institution was mentioned on important academic websites, especially those of the rectorate of the IFSP, and of the rectorate of the São Paulo State University (UNESP), both in the city of São Paulo. The regional TV website (EPTV), affiliated with Rede Globo – an important TV station in Brazil – also reported the exhibition.



In November 2016, at the invitation of the UNESP, the flags were exhibited in the library at its Rio Claro city campus. The students involved in the project had the opportunity to visit the university and also helped in the process of installing the exhibition, which remained at that institution until December 2016.



Flags exhibited in the library of São Paulo State University (UNESP)



Our 'team' of students in the UNESP library, Rio Claro city campus.

Conclusion

The practice of vexillology is an interesting way to give the young and the public at large greater knowledge of flags, their uses and meanings. Many of the high school students involved with this project had their first contact with vexillology, learning more about flags and their importance as national, political and cultural symbols. The flag-making stage also showed the students a practical and fun way of applying all kinds of knowledge gained in daily school life, as well as revealing several possibilities to aid teachers in enriching and illustrating their teaching practices.

Another important aspect of the project was its cultural perspective: as highly recognisable visual and cultural symbols, the flags stimulated greater involvement with the theme of the Olympic Games, coloured and brightened our school environment, and stimulated public participation and interaction. Finally, the impact of this project was positive in many ways, proving that vexillology is alive among young people and offers great possibilities of insertion in the educational field.

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