

## Threshold Awareness

An important contribution to empowerment is the theme of the project for this research. It introduces the concept of 'portal' and other related metaphors of 'change' in a pseudo-traditional manner, such as 'transitional space' and 'threshold experience' (Lievegoed, 1985; Scharmer; 2009). This theme, under the title *Wisening Gate*, was chosen to support the students in a newly established school, by discussing 'change, growing up and getting wiser'.

In an emblematic meaning, portals are 'in-between' spaces and they may carry the quality of infinite possibilities; 'the end and the beginning' at the same time. Ray (2008) offers the following interpretation: "Portals are inter-dimensional openings... between different environments, places of transition." Many theorists such as Hume (2006); Tucker (1992); Lipsey (1988); Lane (1988); Richter (1985); Kandinsky (1977); Campbell (1975) and Jung (1968), consider art as an instrument of transition between the mundane and the spiritual.

In our post-modern society, there is a 'renaissance' of portals (Hankiss, 2011). Parallel to the technical contextualisation in the virtual world (i.e. web portals), an interest in 'mysterious' portals, which are allegedly leading to 'worlds' that cannot be explained by science (Rowling, 1997; Pullman, 1995), has also become widespread. Consequently, the concepts of 'portal' and 'threshold' are easily understandable and can generate popular interest. In particular, this may apply to those students who struggle with academic challenges, as their difficulties often link to inner obstacles. Also, students who come from a family background of radical changes, such as those migrating to a new country, may be particularly receptive to such a project.

In this context, portals closely relate to threshold awareness as they accommodate a transitional space. During a threshold experience people may possibly feel a clear sense of finality and a sense of a new beginning. (Von Schwarz & Crowe, 2018; Hirsch, 2015; de Waal; 2011; Conforti, 2008,). According to Lievegoed (1985), it is the main task of humanity to consciously deal with threshold experiences. They are intense experiences, which may never be forgotten. Awareness of portals may draw attention to one's inner life and fosters the ability to deal with everyday problems.

In broader terms, any artwork can be considered as a portal of a unique world experience made visible by the artist. However, in this research, the portal is considered as a metaphoric art & craft project representing shared concerns and values by the members of a school-community. Participating in the making of a portal may facilitate a more conscious crossing of inner thresholds due to its emblematic qualities. Standing in a doorway offers the possibilities of space at both sides, but once the threshold is crossed, decisions have been made. During the process of making a portal, students may become more aware of

their inner thresholds, and consequently become better equipped to deal with problems in their environment. These interpretations may seem esoteric with their roots in spiritually founded alternative education systems, such as Waldorf Education (Steiner, 1919, 1924; Howard, 1998). However, similar awareness of portals can be viewed in mainstream artworks, such as the sculptures of Byles (Weatherstone, 2014); van der Merwe (2014); Meyer (2012); Koenig (2009); Konrads' (2007); Nash (at Kew, Payne 2002); Saint Phalle (2002); Bailey (2000); Szervatiusz (1994); Goldsworthy (1986); Haar (1967); and Magritte's sculptural paintings (1933).

