Once upon a time...

Using storytelling to support students with mental health needs

marina prete

Background

Mental health problems among students are a growing concern in education.

- School phobia
- eating disorders
- self-injury
- suicidal thoughts and ideation
- suicide attempts

Education and mental health needs

The priority is health and well-being above all else

Education is certainly important, but it takes a backseat to the urgent need for students to be in a safe and stable situation
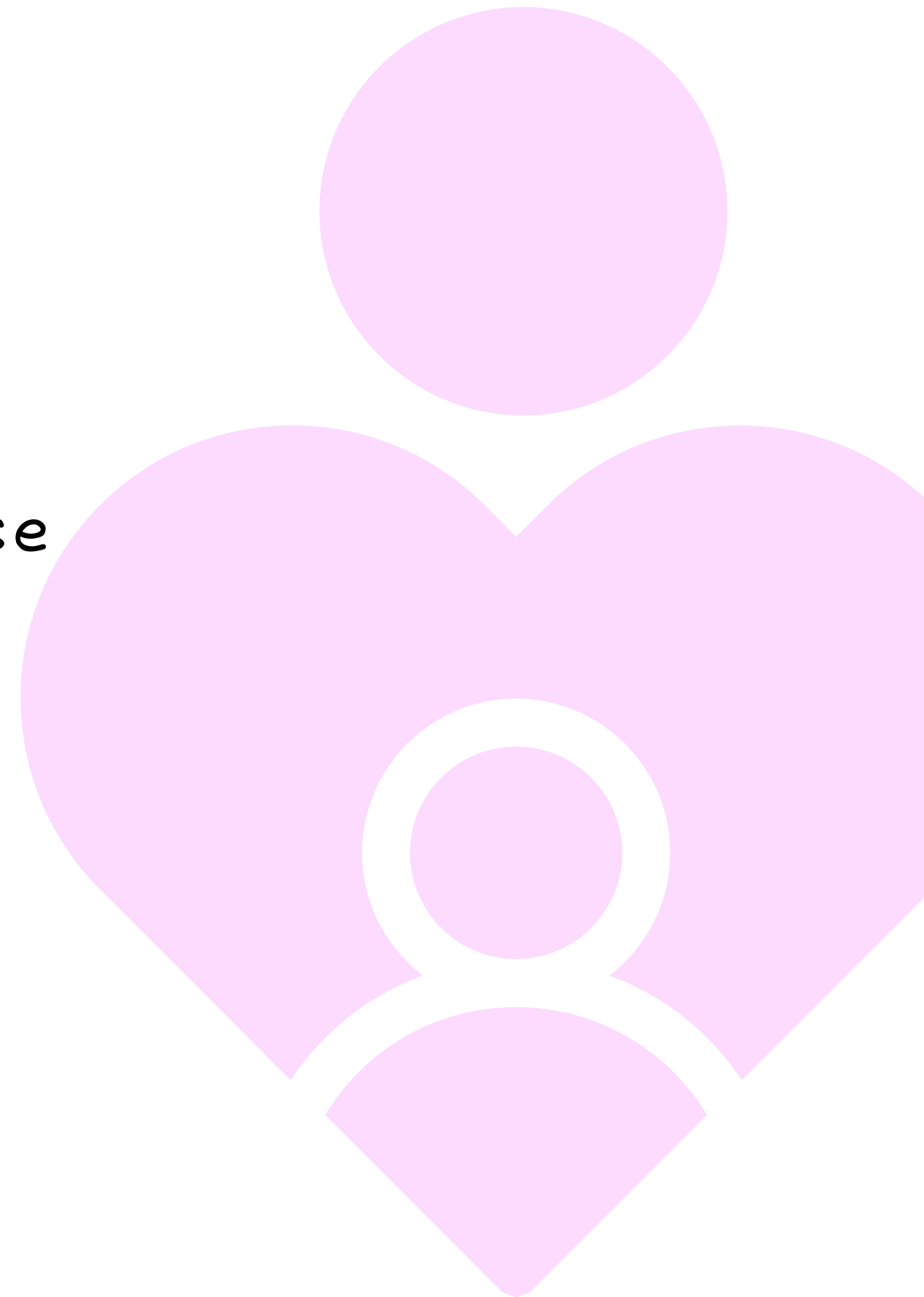
Context

In our small hospital school, there is only a primary school.

The users suffering from mental disorders are usually older, from intermediate school (aged 12-14) and secondary school (aged 14-17).

The students with mental health needs don't keep in touch with their schools for a while, according to the medical prescriptions

A project to motivate and involve

Students need a meaningful learning path that offers a formative occasion and helps their motivation to learn

Digital Storytelling as a strategy

- effective tool in addressing mental health problems in students
- useful tool to process negative experiences, heal emotionally, and regain agency
- fairy tales can have a positive impact on children's emotional and cognitive development

Idea:
rewriting Cinderella fairy tale set in a contemporary context

The choice was addressed to this character because:
- Cinderella is a strong young person
- She faces a very hard time in her life
- She finds someone who can help her
- She has to respect some rules ("Be back in time")
- She doesn't lose courage and she resists
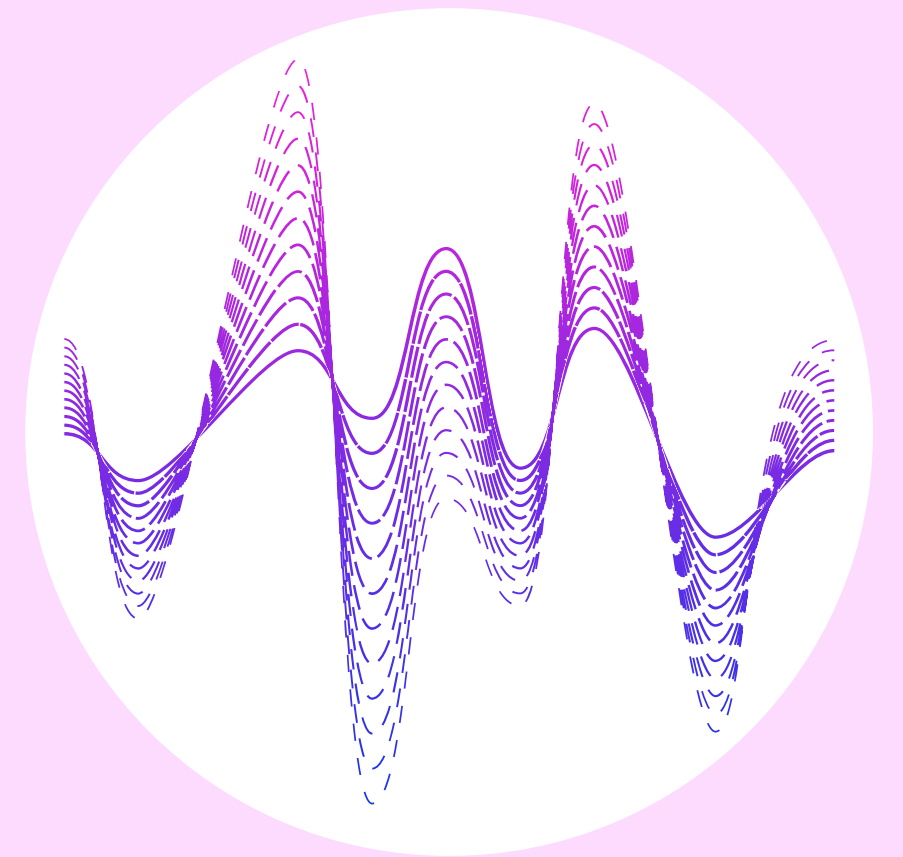- At last she can enjoy the "happy ending"

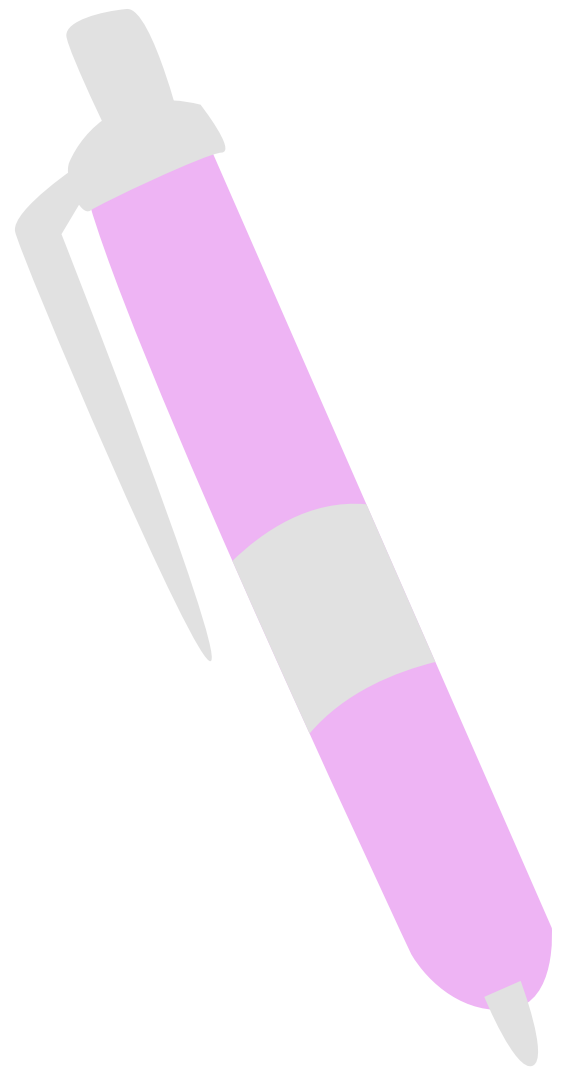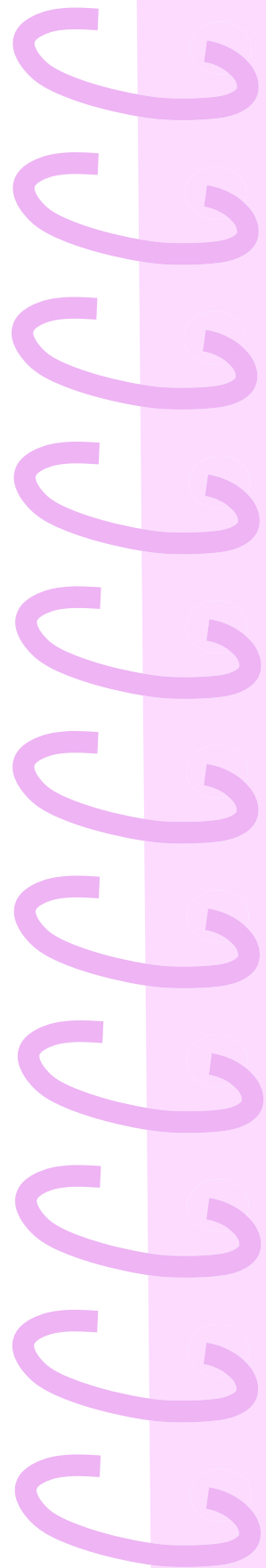# Ingredients for the story

Narrative plot

Artwork

Sounds

Some numbers

- Students: 18 between 11 and 17, 2 male and 16 female
- Attendance: from a couple of days to 7 weeks
- Teachers: me (the referent of the project), two volunteers (retired from school) for some days a week
- Time of development: from October 22nd to June 23rd for average of 8-10 hours a week
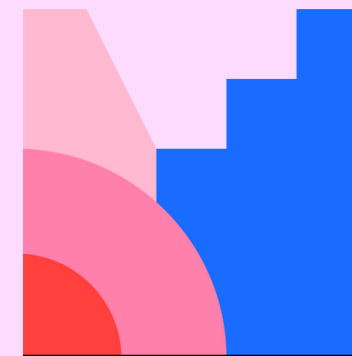
Digital tools

The development of the project was registered in a shared diary (set up with Google Slides)
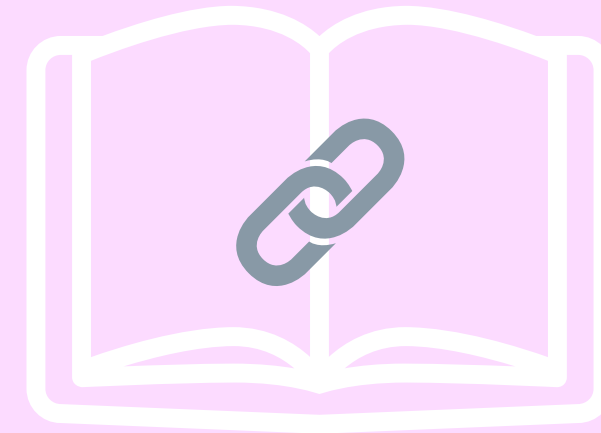
Many free digital web tools were used during the work; for example:
- Mentimeter
- Quizziz
- Pixlr
- Audacity

Experiences

The artwork to illustrate the book played an important role in increasing the motivation to take part to the project

A huge amount of techniques were experimented with by the students; for example:

- Zentangle
- Collage
- Watercolor
- Image Transfer
- Mosaic
- Stencils

To enhance the textual experience, carefully selected sounds and music were added and mixed. Here is an example:

C'era una volta...
ora è tutta un'altra storia!
Capitolo Terzo

Assessment

Observation

Self-assessment
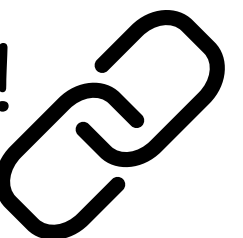
Briefing with the neuropsychiatric team

Challanges

The main difficulties while developing this project were the constantly changing variables:
- students age,
- attendance duration,
- health conditions
- trust building

Those factors made hard the assessment process as well

In any case the outcome of the project is unfolding in an absolutely remarkable manner!
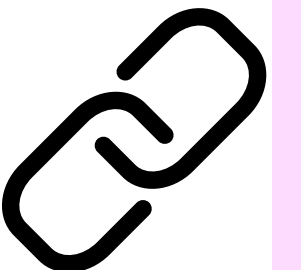
Question Time

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