

in NICO, B., NICO, L. & SILVA, J. (2007). "Community School of São Miguel de Machede: A decade of Learning". In Rui Vieira de Castro *et al* (eds). *Changing Relationships between the State, the Civil Society and the Citizen: Implications for adult education and adult learning. Proceedings of the 2007 Active Democratic Citizenship and Adult Learning Network Seminar*. Braga: Universidade do Minho.

COMMUNITY SCHOOL OF SÃO MIGUEL DE MACHEDE: A DECADE OF LEARNING

Bravo NICO¹, Lurdes Pratas NICO², Joana SILVA³

¹Investigation Centre in Education and Psychology and Department of Pedagogy and Education of the University of Evora

²Regional Board of Education of Alentejo and Community School of São Miguel de Machede

³Community School of São Miguel de Machede)

1. Introduction

The Community School of São Miguel de Machede exists since 1998. A model of Community Education has been developed in this decade of existence, which not being confined to the frequent profiles of the most common approaches in Adult Education, has been the result of a process of symbiosis between a practice that normally precedes the conceptualization and a thought which has always expressed the concern of interpreting and enriching that practice.

Settling on a model of learning based on the PADéCA-Program of Helping the Development of the Capacity to Learn, proposed by Berbaum (1988), The Community School of São Miguel de Machede has been developing several activities centred on a fundamental concern: to create easy and qualified accesses, in this community (council of Evora), so that the respective members can learn to exercise their principal rights of citizenship, in the territory where they live and in a circumstance of equality of opportunities in relation to the remaining fellow countrymen.

Being a project with a decade of life, it is now possible to speak of a history full of stories and learning experiences, which occurred as a result of a rich interaction between the initial thoughts and impulses of the theoretical approaches and a reality full of unexpectedness, mutability and humanity resulting from the complexity that a living community presents, with a history and a present, but not always with a clear and positive idea about the respective future.

2. The conceptual infra-structure

As it was said before, the functioning of the Community School of S. Miguel de Machede settles on the Berbaum (1988) model of learning. All the learning activities spin around four fundamental apexes:

- i) the promotion of positive attitudes towards learning, as an instrument of human development, of interpersonal relationship and of building personal and collective competences, promoters of easier and participated accesses to the opportunities of practising the respective rights of citizenship;
- ii) the building of learning projects, promoters of the participation of all individuals, families and institutions of the community;
- iii) the community creation and management of the learning situations;
- iv) the positive self-assessment, in a dimension of personal and social validation and recognition of the acquired knowledge and competences;

Any object of learning, where the attentions of the community can or should converge, should gather four basic characteristics that provide:

- i) pleasure in learning (the attitudes and the happiness)
- ii) a journey of learning where all generations can participate (the community project and spirit)
- iii) learning situations of which all (individuals and institutions) can profit, according to their characteristics, preferences and capacities (the personal and institutional adequacy of the learning situations)
- iv) the feeling at the end of the activity, that it was worth to take part in it, concluding that learning had a positive consequence in their lives (self-assessment)

According to this fundamental pillar of the conceptual structure on which the structuring and functioning of the Community School of S. Miguel de Machede settled, the activity developed from the beginning, with the firm concern of building locally the capacity of solving problems and the making of accesses to the principal dimensions of life, which will

contribute for the respective quality: the personal, familiar, professional and community dimensions of personal and collective fulfilment, which will certainly depend on the quantity and quality of the opportunities to concretize the access to culture, education, information, health, social support, work, justice, neighbourhood, among other values, in certain territories.

3. The accesses

The Community School of S. Miguel de Machede has developed the following activities and projects: the Community Library, the Community Education Course, the Community Museum, the Sermon Evening, the Day Trips, the Community Expression, the Paper Office, the Heart Window, the Community Newspaper Menino da Bica, the Student Disentanglement Office (in which the Flamiana Salgueiro scholarships are integrated) the Community Meetings and the Idle Talk Brigade.

The Community Library settles on the idea of accessibility, bearing in mind that people read when the reading material is at hand. The accessibility does not mean exclusively the existence of an available space and time to accede to books, magazines, newspapers and other computer supports, but presupposes the concretization of the opportunity of reading in the home of each reader. For that purpose, since January 1999, two school workers of the Community School go through the streets and squares of the town and distribute newspapers (Diário do Sul) and books, door to door, freely and daily. There is a library with around six thousand titles, a computer space and reading areas for newspapers and magazines, in the headquarters of the institution.

The Course of Community Education was created in 1998, for those who can not read or have trouble with the alphabet. This Course resorts to the Paulo Freire method, suitably adapted to the social microclimate and enriched with other curricular activities like, Painting, Gymnastics, Computing, Gastronomy, among others and completed with short term projects, like day trips, exhibitions, publishing, etc.

The Community Museum is assumed as a space and a time dedicated to the communication among the people of S. Miguel de Machede, between those living there and the ones who are living out; the ones no longer there and the ones, meanwhile, living in the community; the elder and the younger.

The Community Museum is an episodic reality and occurs when there is a suitable occasion, either a symbolic commemoration or date. The objective is to preserve, to know

and to value the culture and the identity of the community by the younger generations of the town of S. Miguel de Machede, so that they continue making part of the collective memory.

A collection of biographies of the most significant people and symbolic moments of the town is being done, edited and published through an editorial project of the institution.

The Sermon Evening occurs in a completely familiar atmosphere. Present day subjects like the Environment (explaining the purpose of selecting and gathering urban solid residues), academic topics (like the life of the university students, relevant because the town has some), matters of superior interest for the community (like the discussion of the urbanization planning of the town, or other important topics for the entrepreneurs, such as the sermons to the local businessmen), or simple cultural subjects (as it was the case when the phenomenon of static electricity was explained) are approached in the school auditorium. Usually, the lecture is the theoretical part of a project, which always involves a more practical activity, like a day trip or field work, of community range. The speakers are, as a rule, local people, who have something to teach or whose professional or community activity should be valued.

The Day Trips are assumed as the way found to confer some educational content to a traditional activity pleasurable to the community – the tourist excursion. The project begins with the realization of a small local referendum, in which the families choose the destiny of the collective journey. Secondly, a group of youngsters visits the chosen place to be visited, collects information, marks circuits, localizes places with educational interest and films all the interesting aspects. Afterwards, a work of research and analysis, is done, with the help of internet, tourist information, history encyclopaedias, agricultural yearbooks, among others, so that an educational film about the place to be visited can be shown, the week before the journey. The younger guide the elder and all learn with each other.

In the Community Expression, all the activities related with Groups of Alentejo Traditional Singing and Community Theatre group together. A group of male and female singers of all ages sing the Alentejo Songs. As for the performing arts, the elements in the project write the plays, draw the characters, paint the scenarios, do the dress-making and act, while the neighbours, the friends and relatives are the audience. The stage is placed in the school auditorium (inside or outside) and the première occurs always on a Summer evening.

The Paper Office is a place for Social Support and Solidarity. Its functioning is simple: since January 1999, any citizen with a problem he can not solve by himself (bureaucratic, legal or of any other nature) can apply to the Paper Office of the institution. Once there, he is attended by the workers, who take note of the case and try to solve the problem. If it is bureaucratic (social security, bank, license, letter writing, request of information, etc.), it can be addressed to a youngster working or studying in the city of Evora (capital of council and district), so that he can contribute to the solution. At the end of each process, the citizen gets his problem solved and the youngster had the opportunity to learn to move in the sometimes complicated meanders of bureaucracy. Thus, Solidarity among generations appears in the heart of the community.

The Heart Window is a department of the Community School whose objective is to assure a space of health prevention and self-control to all population. The measuring of the blood pressure and the escort of some people during a visit to the doctor or diagnostic tests, is one of the main activities developed in close partnership with the health services.

The Community Newspaper, Menino da Bica, is the mass media of the community, so important to produce as to read. The community newspaper (every semester) is an instrument of participation and an opportunity to share what one knows, thinks and does.

The Student Disentanglement Office (in which the Flamiana Salgueiro Scholarships are integrated) was born from the necessity to assure a social basis of support to young students, offering them an opportunity of assuring a basis of pedagogical, financial and institutional support, for the concretization of the respective school courses, in return for their sympathetic work of helping colleagues and participating in community projects.

This office is coordinated by a young female graduated who manages the different capacities of the youngsters involved, in an integrated form, making them help each other, on a methodological basis of cooperative learning, in which the elder help the younger.

In the Community Meetings, a group of initiatives is rendered, to promote the gathering of individuals and families with the roots of the respective community. Leisure and cultural activities are the pretext for that gathering of people, families and generations.

The combat to individual loneliness is done resorting to the work of young volunteers who periodically visit the elderly in their own homes, many times with the purpose of talking and listening. This is the matrix of the project **Brigade of the Idle Talk**.

4. Conclusion...

In a decade of activity, the Community School of S. Miguel de Machede has betted on a model of social intervention and local development, assuming Education as a structuring pillar of thought and action. Learning to identify, equate and solve problems – resorting to the sympathetic and responsible management of the resources, competences and local knowledge – has been the matrix of the project Community Education, rendered in the small town of the council of Evora.

The appreciation and utilisation of the resources and potentialities of the territory, the community, the institutions, the families and the individuals appears as a new and more positive assessment of the form in which the process of personal and community development was normally faced.

References

BERBAUM, J. (1988). *Un Programme D'Aide au Developpement de la Capacité d'Apprentissage* (le PADéCA). La Clastre: Ed. Author.