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## The role of the teacher in the implementation of artistic experiences

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### ABSTRACT

This article presents the preliminary results of a PhD research project on the artistic experiences of the 3rd year primary school students of the public schools in the municipality of Vila do Conde through its cultural facilities in 2011. Through the case study methodology, we identified the time that primary school teachers spent with the areas of the expressions, their recognition of Arts Education (AE), the artistic activities that they implement, the training they accomplish and their attendance to cultural equipment and events. We analysed the Class Curriculum Plan (PCT), the Annual Activity Plan (AAP) and the results obtained from the questionnaires implemented to the teachers. The results indicate that the teachers who answered not only do not use all the hours that are available to work on the artistic areas, but also do not use the cultural facilities that are available thus doubly emphasizing the problem of implementing AE in general elementary education. Therefore, we propose an approach emphasizing the artistic experiences of the teachers and their students through the cultural facilities of their municipality as a teaching resource.

**Keywords:** Arts Education, Primary School, Artistic Experiences, Cultural Facilities

### Framework

The growing recognition of the social, political and didactic level of the educational dimension of cultural and artistic activities in the upbringing of human beings has been visible in recent decades through the debates promoted by national and international organizations in the field of Arts Education (AE) and its relationship with the community. For example, it is recognized internationally that UNESCO in 2006 and 2010 organized two international conferences in which concluded the appearing of new dimensions of AE (Viadel, 2011) and a comparative study of arts and cultural education in schools in Europe published in 2009 in which it is documented that most schools organize visits to places of artistic interest to promote the approach of students to the art world (CE & EAEAC<sup>1</sup>, 2009). In the Portuguese panorama, the recommendations of the *Observatório das Actividades Culturais* (OAC)<sup>2</sup> shows similar goals, which highlight the need to encourage links between equipment, local schools and associations given the favourable context of coordination with the Ministry of Education (ME) and the quality improvement of the relationship with schools (Gomes & Lourenço, 2009). Finally, we highlight the

<sup>1</sup> Comisión Europea & Agencia Ejecutiva en el ámbito Educativo Audiovisual y Cultural.

<sup>2</sup> Non-profit association, created in 1996 and abolished in 2014, whose main objective was the production and dissemination of knowledge in the context of the transformation of cultural activities in a systematic and regular basis.

National Education Council (CNE) which, since the 80's of the twenty-first century, has produced advice and recommendations to promote AE in the educational system and that in his last recommendation reveals concern for the reduced and diminished presence of arts practice in the Portuguese curriculum (Recomendação nº 1/2013). Thus, the implementation of the developed strategies at the theoretical level in a practical plan to promote the connection between the school and the cultural institutions still revealed itself as a major challenge (Lourenço, 2010).

Concerning this context, the problem of research has focused on the articulation of the primary schools with local cultural facilities to promote artistic experiences of students in the 3rd grade. The overall objective was to highlight the extent to which primary schools take advantage of the cultural facilities of their municipality to enhance artistic experiences in their students. We have selected primary school because the activities promoted by the educational services of cultural spaces are usually intended for students of this teaching level. In addition it is in the school where the generic AE can achieve greater amplitude (Lourenço, 2010).

The research context was Vila do Conde, a municipality located in the north of Portugal with a resident population of 79,533 inhabitants and 30 parishes, with economic characteristics of agricultural base, fishing, industrial and technical. During the last decades, the city has rehabilitated its emblematic buildings and giving them new dimensions to broaden their cultural offer (CCDRN, 2011).

The relevance of this research is related to the study of the efforts made in recent years by several organizations in order to promote a generic AE which takes effect in a small municipality as Vila do Conde concerning the bond between school and cultural facilities. Based on the dimensions mentioned before, the following research questions were posed: (i) What is the cultural offer of Vila do Conde equipment; (ii) What is the approach that primary school teachers assign to artistic areas in the curriculum; (iii) Of which artistic experiences do students of the 3rd year of the primary school take advantage through the cultural facilities of their municipality; (iv) How is the articulation between primary school and the cultural facilities of the city?

## **Methodology**

To answer the posed questions we have considered that the best approach would be to implement a case study using the analysis of qualitative and quantitative data. The universe of students was of 903 from 3rd grade of primary schools, their parents and 123 teachers, with the time frame of 12 months. The sample comprised 615 students of the 3rd grade, 512 parents and 91 teachers of the primary school belonging to five groups of schools of Vila do Conde: (i) Afonso Betote; (ii) Júlio/Saul-Dias; (iii) Junqueira; (iv) Ribeirinha; (v) Mindelo.

Regarding cultural facilities, we chose to study 18 of the 28 existing (Ramos, 2010), and the criterion was based on the traditional approach of promoting the arts: the spaces of the museum, auditorium, theatre, gallery and

cultural center. We chose to study all the museums of the municipality since the museum is a device that has broadened its accessibility to school (Fernandes, 2008) in recent years and this is an important fact to AE.

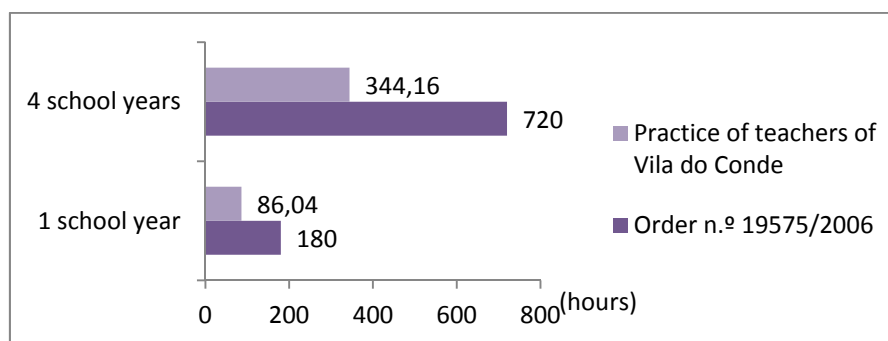
To those we have also added the library and the municipal archive since both have promoted events in the artistic context. Of the cultural spaces involved in this study, 16 are located in the city and 2 in two villages. The data gathering instruments used were questionnaires, interviews and observation.

### The role of the teacher in the implementation of artistic experiences

We will now illustrate the results related to the second research question on the recognition and focus that the primary school teachers give to the AE, based on the curriculum of artistic expressions and the use of cultural facilities, since it is the issue directly linked to the theme of this meeting. We chose this goal because AE is associated to the deepening of the relationship between the arts and schools through encouraging experiences of approach to the works, the spaces and processes of creation (Lourenço, 2010).

Thus, the contribution of the primary school teacher to social change in artistic experiences will be approached in the following areas: the time that teachers devote to the area of the expressions, the recognition credited to AE, the implemented artistic activities, the training sessions they join and their attendance of equipment and cultural events.

The implementation of the curriculum of artistic expressions by the responding primary school teachers of Vila do Conde revealed that most of them work less than 94 hours (47.8 %) per annum out of the minimum time delimited by the order n.º 19575/2006 which was being followed on the date of the questionnaires implementation (Graph 1).



Graph 1: Number of annual hours of work in artistic expressions (2011)

It was concluded that the artistic areas are less enhanced by responding teachers when implementing the curriculum of primary school compared to other areas of knowledge, thus endangering the principles of the LBSE<sup>3</sup> in the artistic context. It appears that in the context of the municipality of Vila do Conde there is a discrepancy between the work performed concerning the emotional and cognitive development, which is a disparity already mentioned and warned at the conference of UNESCO (2006). The Ministry of Education and Science (MEC), with the new curriculum revision for the academic year 2013/2014, shows a reduction from five to three hours *per week* to work the artistic and physical motor expressions. Interestingly, this contradicts the recommendation revision of January 2013 the CNE which unequivocally mentions the need to integrate AE in the syllabus enabling the learning of various artistic languages, highlighting the value of delight, expression, creativity, communication and knowledge of resources (Recomendação n. º 1/2013).

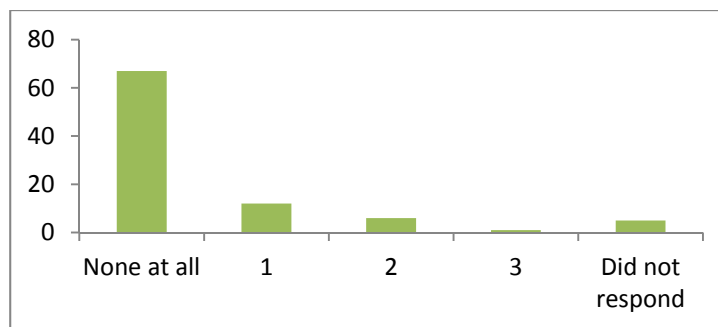
In this context one should question what has changed in the Portuguese education system so that the MEC considers that the three hours ensure the guiding principles set out in the Education Act artistic context. Are we not heading for a setback in the general education of children and also of artistic expression? And do international organizations have effective power to accelerate the implementation of policies concerning the AE so that they can have an impact on small towns such as Vila do Conde?

Concerning the recognition of the importance of AE in the formation of the individual, the teachers mention the various potentials of AE, such as personal, social, emotional, physical, perceptible, technical, global, cultural, complementary and motivational intellectual capacities of children. These areas are listed in agreement with the objectives mentioned by Robinson (1999) in the 90`s of the twentieth century and the aims indicated in the UNESCO world conferences of AE in 2006 and 2010. Therefore, one should ask which are the difficulties teachers have in implementing AE at a practical level in their classes, despite being aware of its importance in the children`s development at a theoretical level? To answer this question the teachers showed essentially the lack of material and human resources, lack of training and lack of time concerning the extent of Portuguese Language and Mathematics syllabuses.

The contribution of teachers implementing artistic activities is mostly in individual and occasional approaches, according to the calendar of festivities, such as mother's and father's days, themed projects and end of school year celebrations. The activities that stand out can take many forms, such as the production of a video, learning songs, moulding, painting tile, creating puppets, concerts and cultural meetings. Therefore, and because the artistic activities are implemented occasionally, the character of continuity, consistency and consequence of artistic areas may be compromised. In this context, the need for continuous training for teachers (Ribeiro, 2000) becomes imperative, however more than half of teachers have not attended any training action in the last three years claiming lack of training sessions in this area.

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<sup>3</sup> Lei de Bases do Sistema Educativo/ Basic Law on Education.



**Graph 2: Number of courses in arts education attended the last three years (2011)**

Concerning the previous scenario, it appears that deficient training in artistic areas is still a gap in the implementation of the generic AE teachers, an issue which has already been recognized by the ME in 1996 (Santos, 1996). Moreover, it also highlights the scarce educational resources provided by the MEC that, despite displaying a virtual platform for all teachers, continues to hand out only a small portion of art materials.

Regarding the use of cultural spaces of Vila do Conde by teachers with their classes it was observed that none of the equipment use has exceeded 50%, the same percentage was detected in the attendance of teachers while spectators (Table 1).

Cultural Facilities	n=91	
	Frequency	
	n	%
Biblioteca Municipal José Régio	42	46,2
Teatro Municipal	32	35,2
Centro Municipal de Juventude	25	27,5
Auditório Municipal	35	38,5
Centro de Memória	17	18,7
Casa Museu José Régio	12	13,2
Alfândega Régia/Nau Quinhentista/Casa do Barco	31	34,1
Núcleo Museológico de Vilar da Fundação da PT	10	11,0
Museu dos Bombeiros	12	13,2
Museu das Rendas de Bilros	15	16,5
Museu de Arte Sacra	11	12,1
Museu das Cinzas	2	2,2
Museu da Cooperativa Agrícola	7	7,7
Solar de S. Roque – Galeria de Arte Cinemática	11	12,1
Centro de Actividades	2	2,2
Arquivo Municipal	2	2,2

**Table 1: Absolute frequencies (n) and relative (%) related to the frequency of teachers in cultural facilities of Vila do Conde in 2011**

Although teachers have revealed an average knowledge superior to 50% of the location of cultural places, these figures do not reflect the frequency which total average is 18.2 %. This reduced frequency by teachers while viewers can also contribute to the reduced frequency with their classes.

The level of assistance of live shows in every artistic domain by 1st CEB teachers responders with their classes had values lower than 50%, while the highest value was the theatre (Table 2).

n=91												
Artistic Domain	Never		Once		Twice		Three times		More than three times		Not responded	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Opera	85	93,4	1	1,1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Music	59	64,8	25	27,5	4	4,4	1	1,1	1	1,1	1	1,1
Choirs	78	85,7	6	6,6	2	2,2	0	0	0	0	5	5,5
Dance	62	68,1	20	23,1	3	3,3	0	0	1	1,1	4	4,4
Folklore	82	90,1	4	4,4	1	1,1	0	0	0	0	4	4,4
Theatre	46	50,5	36	39,6	7	7,7	2	2,2	0	0	0	0
Circus	76	83,5	10	11	0	0	1	1,1	0	0	4	4,4
Cinema	52	57,1	25	28,6	8	8,8	2	2,2	1	1,1	2	2,2
Exhibitions	38	41,8	23	25,3	15	16,5	3	3,3	5	5,5	7	7,7

**Table 2: Absolute (n) and relative frequencies (%) for the annual rate of teachers with their class in live shows and cultural events in artistic fields (2011)**

In short, not only the teachers surveyed do not use all the hours they are available to work with the artistic fields, but also do not use the cultural facilities that are available, thus accentuating the double problem of implementing AE in general elementary education. The contributions of cultural facilities are insufficient for the curriculum of the primary school since its existence has no direct implications for the education of children because they are not used. Thus, if we assume that equality is in the fact that the municipality of Vila do Conde has various cultural facilities, which can be used by the educational community, clearly the inequality subsists in the poor connection with primary schools.

To solve the situation described it would be appropriate to conduct the training by the equipment, associations, institutions and artists from Vila do Conde in the areas of artistic expression to meet the needs identified by teachers so that they can understand cultural infrastructures as teaching resources for AE in the primary school. This training must include not only the contents of specific areas of artistic expressions, but also the technical characteristics and use of cultural facilities, such as looking behind the scenes of the theatre, the stage of an auditorium or the specific aspects of the educational service of a museum. Another important aspect would be

to encourage the relationship between class teachers and teachers of curriculum enrichment activities in the artistic context, because actually, in Vila do Conde, these activities are implemented by teachers and specialists in music and visual arts. With the sharing of experiences of good teaching practices, recapitulation of concepts previously covered in the initial training of primary school teachers, it would be possible to implement an artistic level training in the workplace. It would also be appropriate to enhance the classes final year presentation, which are held in the auditorium or stage theatre, through diverse artistic and relevant given the very low quality of student experiences. We refer this aspect because it is one of the artistic activities that teachers want to implement during their activity.

Finally we suggest the profitability of the school library card which the primary schools of Vila do Conde give to children when they enter 1st grade to order books. This is a structure that exists for several years and that has helped at first the loyalty of students to the school library and later to the Municipal Library. Following this principle, and in order to capitalize the existing resources in Vila do Conde, it is suggested the use of the school library card by students to access other cultural spaces of the city. It intends, on one hand, to encourage students, their parents and teachers to explore and learn about the cultural spaces of Vila do Conde and, on the other hand, to allow the cultural infrastructure to have a tool to count its audience through electronic reading. These obtained through a digital reading data are an advantage because it allows to obtain current and safe data concerning the public attending the cultural centres, and through these data create future programmes. Thus, the card would go along with the students on the school path allowing ensure that at least this way, all students will have tools that enable to develop their artistic experiences through art and cultural spaces of their municipality in all different educational contexts. It is necessary the inevitable cooperation between those responsible for cultural facilities supervised by the municipality and by private entities to reach a consensus regarding the procedures to implement this initiative. This idea was presented to the representatives of the municipality of Vila do Conde, who demonstrated to be fond of the concept and agreed that they would seek technical and financial viability of the company that produces the Library cards to implement this strategy.

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