

Learning for Knowledge, Citizenship and Creativity - A Key challenge for schools in 21st century. A Reflection based on our experience with PMA-CEAGXXI

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Introduction

The challenge for the 21st century for educators, families and community members is seeking to raise and educate children who are knowledgeable, responsible caring and socially competent. A key challenge for schools involves serving culturally diverse students with varied abilities and motivations for learning. (Learning First Alliance, 2001). A school for this purpose should educate students for life and not prepare them for tests only. It will be a school that offers a diverse and comprehensive curriculum covering the fields of knowledge and know-how, including not only the traditional curriculum areas of reading, writing, and mathematics but also music, arts, and physical education (Candeias, 2013; Candeias et al., 2011; Sternberg, 2008). If we focus on education rather than test preparation, we may find that students improve in reading, writing, and math, but also in reasoning, resilience, and responsibility. We can not focus only on students with levels of income or higher, or medium, or low, but on all students and teach them to be active and productive citizens in a rapidly changing world.

A key challenge for 21st-century schools is to address the diversity of cultures, abilities, and motivations of each student (Learnig First Alliance, 2001). Many students lack socio-emotional skills, which disconnect them from school as they go through the various cycles, this lack of connection negatively affects their academic performance, namely performance, behavior and health (Blum & Libbey, 2004). In this paper we present the basic assumptions to improve learning as a process of knowledge, citizenship and creativity, as a process that generates well-being and inclusion in a community of learners.

Learning for Knowledge, Citizenship and Creativity

In this context, we agree with Sternberg's (2008) proposal, when he points out what should be the guiding principles of a school that is dedicated to teaching and learning excellence, namely: i) emphasize excellence for all and not only for students with income levels or higher, or medium, or low, and recognize diverse forms of excellence; ii) provide students with learning opportunities through multiple modalities; iii) to value learning not only in terms of the content considered basic but also as a vehicle to teach students to think critically; iv) to value creative thinking applied to knowledge base, recognizing that knowledge is the backbone of creativity; v) to teach students to apply their learning to practical and real world problems; vi) to promote students' dialogic thinking - the ability to understand things from multiple points of view and to appreciate diversity; vii) to promote students' dialectical thinking - the realization that what is "truth" may now not be in the future, as may not have been true in the past; viii) teach students to take personal responsibility for and learn from mistakes; ix) to teach pupils to concern themselves with others beyond themselves and to think about the effects of their actions on others and on institutions, both now and in the future; x) teach students to use their knowledge ethically, promoting universal values such as honesty, integrity, honesty, reciprocity, and compassion.

In this context, teachers have a fundamental role in the training of children and young people and in the development of their skills of excellence. Excellent adults often remember the impact of some teachers on their way of looking at the future, the choices made, attitudes and values adopted, knowledge and skills acquired. However, there are also those who have passed through the school and several teachers without having been 'discovered' their high skills, sometimes being seen as deprived of cognitive and learning abilities (Araújo et al., 2007; Gondim, 2002).

Educational institutions should be concerned with the educational process rather than focus on results. This model is based on three essential pillars, namely: reasoning, resilience, and responsibility, in addition to the three most traditional pillars - reading, writing, and mathematics (proposed in 2006 by Sternberg and Subotnik in the work *Optimizing student success in schools with the other three R's: Reasoning, resilience, and responsibility*).

This model considers three dimensions:

- i) **reasoning** - is a comprehensive term that includes the thinking skills needed to meet the challenges people face in their lives. These capabilities include creative

thinking, analytical and critical thinking, practical thinking, and wisdom or expertise. Reasoning enables people to use knowledge successfully;

ii) **resilience** - refers to persistence to achieve goals and face the obstacles that life poses, and involves: motivation to know and learn, motivation to overcome obstacles and achieve goals, personal involvement and passion for goals to achieve and self-efficacy, or believe in their own abilities to achieve the objectives;

iii) **responsibility** - refers to the ethical and moral dimension of development and encompasses four components: a) ethics to distinguish between right and wrong; b) wisdom to follow the common good and balance one's own and others' interests; c) Caring, or genuine understanding and empathy for the well-being of others; and d) behavior appropriate to this ethical and moral responsibility.

Social and Emotional Learning at schools – an imperative for well-being

Emotional and social difficulties among students such as school violence, depressive and anxiety symptoms, and lack of motivation have worried researchers, educators, and policymakers taking into account that all these problems have a great impact on the academic life of students (Berger, Alcalayb, Torrettib & Milicicb, 2010). That said, it is important for schools to promote Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) in order to improve students' success not only in school but in their everyday lives. Development research claims that the domain of socio-emotional competencies is associated with greater well-being and improvement in students' school performance, alleviating personal, social and academic difficulties (Eisenberg 2006 cited by Durlak, Dymnicky, Taylor, Weissberg & Schellinger, 2011).

Social competence is a very broad concept and is generally used to describe social behavior, its understanding and application of skills in the social world as well as the evaluation of its functionality, ie the ability of a subject to handle his or her repertoire of social skills, such as empathy, self-control, assertiveness, and the resolution of interpersonal problems comprising the signs of the environment in order to achieve positive consequences for oneself and for one's relationship with others. It is a competence that has a particular role

in the functioning and adaptation to the school, that extends in the relations with teachers and pairs as well as the academic accomplishment, children and adolescents with high academic income are socially more competent and adapt more easily to the school rules. Emotional competence is described as the ability to identify, perceive, name and regulate the emotions in themselves and in others, this competence being a component of Emotional Intelligence (Goleman, 1999). The concept of Emotional Intelligence involves the ability to reason with and about emotions, including the ability to accurately perceive, evaluate and express emotions, ability to access and produce feelings when they facilitate thinking, the ability to understand emotions and knowledge Emotional and ability to regulate emotions in order to promote intellectual and emotional growth (Candeias, Rebelo, Silva & Cartaxo, 2011). Emotional Intelligence involves emotional and social skills, the ability to self-understand and to others, self-expression and relating to others, ability to deal with strong emotions, and ability to adjust to change and solve personal and social problems (Bar-On, 1997, cited by Stys & Brown, 2004).

SEL programs have been defined as the process of acquiring core competencies to recognize and manage emotions, establish and achieve positive goals, appreciate others' perspectives, establish and maintain positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and deal with social and interpersonal situations positive, by mastering SEL competencies each student progresses in their development, beginning to act in accordance with their inner beliefs and values, cares for and cares for others, and makes good decisions by taking responsibility for their choices and behaviors (Elias et al., 1997). SEL programs in the school context incorporate two coordinated sets of educational strategies that aim to improve school performance and student development (Durlak, Dymnicki, Taylor, Weissberg & Schellinger 2011).

The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning is an organization with the mission to help to establish evidence-based in SEL and it is an essential part of preschool through high school education, that defines SEL as the "process through which children and adults acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills they need to recognize and manage their emotions, demonstrate caring and concern for others, establish positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and handle challenging situations constructively" (CASEL, 2006, p. 8). The development of social and emotional competencies is the key to

success in school and life. Currently, it is known that emotions affect how and what we learn, that relationships provide basis for lasting learning and competencies of social and emotional learning and this knowledge can be taught (Zins et al, 2006). Emotions can facilitate or impede children's academic engagement, work ethic, commitment, and ultimate school success, because relationships and emotional processes affect how and what we learn, schools and families must effectively address these aspects of the educational process for the benefit of all students (Elias et al, 1997).

The project: "Promoting changes in learning - School Communities of Learning

Gulbenkian XXI

This Project is implemented in three Basic Schools from Alentejo, a region in the south of Portugal, that still has a lot of rural characteristics and some students are from ethnic gypsy minority. This Project involves seven classes and 147 students and it began with the 3rd grade classes in the academic year of 2014/2015, and will be followed in the academic year of 2015/2016, 2016/2017 and 2017/2018. The Project PMA-CEAGXXI main purpose is to promote the quality of student learning and their wellbeing, reflected through the quality of their school results, and through the acquisition of basic knowledge within the formal curriculum and reasoning abilities (analytical reasoning, practical reasoning and creativity), resilience and responsibility. According to Verdasca, Ramos and Candeias (2014) the Project PMA-CEAGXX basis "should be the unique and the full potential of each student, a compromise between the basic pillars of knowledge and the fundamental pillars of citizenship in order to improve a culture of well-being" (p.4420).

In this sense, learning for well-being is assumed as Ilona Kickbush (2012) defines: The process of fully engaging and expressing who we are as individuals within our common humanity in social, societal and environmental contexts. It inspires us to find ways for being our becoming – living in the present moment while developing, challenging, and creating ourselves for the future. According to the same author, the programs that promote learning for well-being should follow five principles for action: 1) take the child's perspective; 2) encourage expression of each child unique self; 3) focus strengths and inner differences; 4) emphasize the nature and quality of relationships; and 5) be holistic (Kickbush, 2012). This

Project is based in the new understandings of how children learn, “learning is a social endeavour, it has important emotional and spiritual components, it is related to cultural context as well as individual ways of learning and it occurs not only in our brain but in every part of our body” (Kickbush, 2012, p. 58).

This Project includes three main components to improve learning for well-being: i) Learning and Knowledge; ii) Emotional, Social and Creative Learning, and iii) Technology as mediator of learning;

1. Learning and Knowledge

The project is intended to develop and test a model of curricular organization and development to establish the commitment to integrate into the curriculum a new set of skills and learning that can bring to us the contents for a conception of ' open curriculum ' while ensuring a common core of basic knowledge and the enabling capabilities for all students and a complementary and differentiating part that meets the motivations and preferences. (Verdasca et al, 2014). In terms of curricular organization, the school learning communities Gulbenkian XXI, are run under a model of open curricular organization fulfilling, by one hand, the desirability of national curriculum recently reaffirmed in the Decree-Law 91/2013, July 10. On the other hand, the local curriculum designed and approved by the school community within the margins of curricular autonomy allowed by Decree-Law is about affecting a set of integrated learning activities and develop a progressive and sequential manner cross. One must, however, emphasize and reinforce the importance of the principle of integration that underlies two major curricular components and the contribution expected of it in developing the skills of students on the promotion of permanent improvement of learning and educational quality (Verdasca et al, 2014).

2. Emotional, Social and Creative Learning

The main objective of this component is to improve a culture of well-being and promote the creativity, emotional and social development through a School-based Programs mediated by teachers. The Emotional, Social and Creative Learning, proposed in this project, proposes to main objectives: was designed to promote the ability to discover problems,

creating answers (analytical, practical and innovative), and to promote emotional regulation, empathy and responsible decision making.

The school based program to improve emotional and social learning, designated ELP, has as main goals: a) Emotional Perception - the ability to identify, evaluate and express emotion accurately; b) Emotional Facilitation of Thought – ability to use emotions to facilitate thought; c) Emotional Awareness – ability to understand and analyze the emotions; and d) Regulation of Emotion – ability to regulate reflectively emotions to promote emotional and intellectual development. The Interpersonal Literacy Program will be putted into practice in the last two years of the Project (5th and 6th grade) and should promote interpersonal negotiation and conflict management. Following we describe the Emotional Literacy Program.

The school based program to improve creativity, designated FLOW, and has as main objective to develop creative thinking, simultaneously with the encouragement of emotional and social characteristics that are usually essential to the creative process, including self-confidence, perseverance, frustration tolerance and self-esteem. The specific objectives are to develop cognitive processes of creativity as: fluency, it's mean, the production of ideas, to develop the production of different kinds of ideas and approaches them from different points of view, this is, flexibility, to presents his ideas in detail, creation and designing unique and rare ideas, its means originality.

3. Technology as mediator of learning

The technologies adopted in the PMA-CEAG XXI Project for schools are the that currently appear to be those that best serves the objectives and principles of open educational curriculum model, namely computers for individual use (tablets) and interactive tables in addition to the infrastructure network, including wireless networks (wi-fi). The classrooms of the pilot classes are equipped with state-of-the-art technology, each classroom is equipped with a smart screen, each student has a tablet as well, each teacher. With regard to the tablets computers they are used in respect of the principle of 1:1 (one child one computer ratio) taking into account the needs of personalized learning and the use of equipment out of school, taking advantage of its features of easy transport for children' home, allowing to explore as additional benefit and the advantages of flipping learning. Regarding the choice of

interactive whiteboards, they serve mainly to reinforce the central role of the student in the learning processes in the classroom as well as an important feature in the differentiation of learning, taking advantage of the potential of designing proposals and adjusted to the particularities of the individuals. (Verdasca et al, 2014)

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