

Dynamic Literacy by Senior for Seniors, Motivations and Expectations

Sara Lopes¹, Catarina Mangas², Jenny Sousa³, Luísa Pimentel⁴,
Miguel Mesquita⁵

ESECS, CICS.NOVA.IPLLeiria, Polytechnic Institute of Leiria, Portugal¹

ESECS, CICS.NOVA.IPLLeiria-iACT, CI&DEI, Polytechnic Institute of Leiria, Portugal^{2,3}

ESECS, CICS.NOVA.IPLLeiria, Polytechnic Institute of Leiria, CIES.IUL, Portugal⁴

ESECS, Polytechnic Institute of Leiria, Portugal⁵

Abstract

The focus on lifelong learning, such as the creation of new educational responses that contribute to the empowerment of people and communities, as well as the recognition and valuation of multiple contexts where people acquire and share their knowledge in order to achieve universal literacy, has guided the European policy guidelines.

In this article we present some results of a lifelong learning project – PROALFA, which promotes literacy workshops, focuses on learning to read and write and are directed at elderly people in residential structures. The workshops are performed voluntarily by adults, in retirement, who are students of a senior training programme of a Portuguese higher education institution. The aim is to understand the main motives, expectations and the driving forces that leads them to participate in a voluntary way, in these educational activities, meet the participants of the workshop, interact personally with them and their literacy aspects.

The data we present is based on a qualitative approach, using: i) techniques of semi-structured interview, for the 4 senior facilitators of the workshop; and ii) documentary research, for the characterization of the 16 participants in the activity.

We can conclude that the need to share knowledge and experiences, mutually stimulate cognition and interaction with near generations, are the main reason that lead seniors to streamline a socio-educational activity.

In Portuguese society this project can be understood as good practice in adult education and for the future elderly.

Keywords: *Lifelong learning, literacies, seniors.*

1. Introduction

The aim of education for all and at any stage in our life cycle has allowed the creation of new spaces and educational moments favouring new dynamics of learning and social interaction that meet some recommendations of the Organization of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) [3] and the European Union (EU) [4].

The focus on lifelong learning [6], from the creation of new educational responses that contribute to the empowerment of people, communities, as well as, the recognition and valuation of multiple contexts where people acquire and share their knowledge in order to achieve universal literacy, has guided the European policies.

Despite the educational activities of and for adults that constitute the present moment in today's societies, only in the mid-20th century did they assert themselves by distinguishing adult education from education for children and young people. This context stimulated the need to establish the field of adult education, to develop new ways of working with, production, family, media, technologies, governments, among others, that would affect the dynamics of societies throughout the 20th century.

These changes led to the recognition that individuals need constantly to learn, to recontextualize their insights beyond knowledge acquired at an early stage of life. It is in this context that the reference to adult education and the need to build policies in this field that should be included in UNESCO reports.

When we look at the 1972 report – *Learning To Be* - coordinated by Edgar Faure, where he denotes great necessity in revamping the concept of education. He claims that it should no longer be associated only to the logic of the schooling years or to a specific stage in life, but to be understood as an ongoing process throughout the life cycle of the individual. In the same line of thought, the 1996 report – *Education a Treasure to be Discovered*, coordinated by Jacques Delors, in which education is

assumed to be permanent and an integral part of the development of the human being, inside and outside of school, and for everyone, children, adults and the elderly [2] [8] [17].

We believe that the acquisition of knowledge should not be limited to age, since everyone, at any age, will always have something to learn and to teach. In the case of the elderly, the accumulation of knowledge and experience should be seen as an important source of knowledge for themselves and for society.

In contexts where longevity is notable, various strategies were developed to meet the challenges that this phenomenon poses, such as Day Centres, Residential Structures for the Elderly, Senior Universities or, by example, Senior training programmes in University context.

As [10], we believe that the education of the elderly must be distinguished from that recommended for adults, since the goals and needs will certainly be different, based on issues of personal satisfaction, well-being and quality of life and not so much on increasing the qualifications and certifications. The education for the elderly should not be only understood as a space of fun or entertainment, but, above all, as a way of contributing to maintain functionality, promote individual development [1] and stimulate participation and social interaction.

It is in this framework that the ProAlfa project and literacy for seniors.

2. ProAlfa

The PROALFA project comes at the request of some elderly of a residential structure for older people (ERPI) of the municipality of Leiria-Portugal and it aims to create literacy workshops for the learning of reading and writing. It aims to develop literacy skills, promote social interaction, encourage the sharing of knowledge and experiences and enhance skills acquired throughout life. The project has been upheld by retired volunteers, who are more than 50 years old and who are students of the University Training Program for Seniors - IPL60 + (<http://60mais.ipleiria.pt>).

Literacy workshops take place once a week in ERPI, Leiria, for 1 hour and 30 minutes. These are performed by 4 senior students of the program IPL60+, which at the time of dissemination of the ProAlfa accepted the challenge to provide a community service thereby giving meaning to the fundamentals of active ageing. The sessions are prepared in advance, considering the personal goals, motivations and difficulties of the participants, according to themes and content that they wish to explore with the support of the institution's cultural animator.

In these sessions we promote individualized work that is adapted to the rhythms and the needs of each of our participants, thus allowing total liberty to participate and perform the proposed activities. These are essentially focused on individual and group readings of poems, short stories and the practice of writing single letters or words to form new terms or phrases which are appropriately illustrated with drawings or paintings. During these sessions there is also scope for sharing life stories and for the exchange of experiences between participants and facilitators.

3. Methodology

The study presents a qualitative approach, focused on understanding the motives and expectations of the seniors that streamline the educational activities. It aims: i) at perceiving the workshop participant's personal points of view and that of their level of literacy; ii) at understanding the reasons that motivated the IPL60 + students to participate in these literacy activities; iii) to know of prior work existence with elders on the part of the IPL60+ students and iv) to understand the expectations of IPL60+ students that lead them to collaborate with the activities of the ProAlfa.

The data selected for this study was based on the documentary research of the socio-demographic characterization of the 16 elderly participants as well as a semi-structured interview applied to the four senior workshop facilitators.

The participants are:

a) the 16 elderly that are residents in ERPI) of Leiria, aged 64 and 101 years. The average age is 84 years and of which there are 14 females and 2 males. Most of them (n = 11/16) are illiterate, five attended the first cycle of basic education.

b) the workshop facilitators are four retired women from the ages of 68 to 73 years old, two have higher education degrees (Bachelor), one was a teacher and the other a sociologist; another has completed the third level of basic education and the other one finished secondary school, both performed administrative functions. All are students in the IPL60+ program.

In order to ensure the ethical procedures of the investigation, all the participating subjects were requested to sign an informed consent statement authorizing the conduction of the research.

The data obtained from the semi-structured interviews were the subject of a content analysis [7], coded by categories and subcategories previously determined, during the elaboration of the interview script, using the online software of Qualitative analysis - MAXQDA. The interviewees are identified in the text as EM1, EM2, EM3 and EM4.

4. Results/discussion

The 16 elderly participants in the socio-educational activities of ProAlfa accept, once a week, the challenge of stimulating their cognitive abilities through reading and writing activities. They arrive at the workshop location guided by the socio-cultural animator and some of the institution's employees. Some by their own foot, autonomously, others in wheelchairs.

The four volunteers of ProAlfa, swap their school (Programa IPL60 +), their family and other tasks for the socio-educational activities of the literacy workshop. Regarding the objective ii) of this study - to understand the motives of the IPL60+ students that facilitate the literacy activities - the analysis of the narratives reveals altruistic reasons (doing good), help the other (EM2, EM3), personal achievement (EM1, EM2, EM3) and an opportunity to put into practice some theories about adult learning (EM1).

The data found substantiates published literature about volunteering and active ageing, which considers that, on the one hand, feelings of solidarity, personal satisfaction, usefulness [14] are embodied by the volunteers and, on the other hand, it is acknowledged that the involvement in socio-educational and cultural activities stimulate social participation, potentiates new learning and contributes to an ageing that wants to remain active and healthy [12] [9].

Regarding the Objective iii) - to know of prior work existence with elderly people by the students IPL60+ - two of the interviewees (EM2 and EM3) indicating regular contact with the elderly. They express great desire to be with the elders, to accompany their state of health, to contribute with clothing and other goods they may need. For the rest (EM1 and EM4), there was no specific connection with institutionalized elderly people, they had never done volunteering, despite having already received some invitations.

The interviewees have positive expectations regarding ProAlfa. They understand that the project can bring benefits to both parties. For them, as facilitators, they emphasize the gratitude expressed by the elderly they guided as well as their own personal and social gratification. For the elderly participants of the institution, it may stimulate cognition and fine motricity (EM2, EM3), and will allow new interactions and personal appreciation (EM1, EM2, EM3, EM4) as well as acceptance of the other (EM2), thus answering to the objective iv) - to know the IPL60+ students expectations about the dynamization of ProAlfa activities.

5. Conclusion

We can conclude, responding to the research question, that the reasons identified by the four seniors to participate in the project, relate to personal aspects, altruism, personal satisfaction, support to the other; aspects of a technical nature, of sharing knowledge and experiences, stimulating cognition and motricity, developing reading and writing habits and social aspects, through the interaction with nearby generations, valuing the image of older people and a sense of greater participation in society.

Given the increasing longevity that increasingly characterizes societies, we understand that the future of education (of adults) should be able to take advantage of the knowledge, experiences and personal desires of the elders, creating spaces for learning and interaction to and from seniors. In doing so, the following are the various recommendations of studies in this field [9] [10] [11] [13] [18]; of UNESCO [15] or the EU [3] [5], thus valuing lifelong education which contributes to a healthy, active and successful ageing [16].

References

- [1] Cachioni, M. & Neri, A. "Educação e Velhice Bem-Sucedida no contexto das Universidades da Terceira Idade". In L. Neri, M. S. Yassuda, (Orgs.) e M. Cachioni (Colab.), *Velhice Bem-Sucedida: Aspectos Afetivos e Cognitivos*, Campinas (SP), Papyrus, 2008, pp.29-50.
- [2] Cachioni, M. & Palma, L.S. "Educação permanente: perspectiva para o trabalho educacional com o adulto maduro e o idoso". In Freitas, E. et al. (Orgs.). *Tratado de Geriatria e Gerontologia*, Rio de Janeiro, Guanabara Koogan, 2006, pp. 1456-1465.
- [3] Conselho da União Europeia. "RECOMENDAÇÃO DO CONSELHO, de 22 de maio de 2018, sobre as Competências Essenciais para a Aprendizagem ao Longo da Vida" in *Jornal Oficial da União Europeia*, [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/PT/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H0604\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/PT/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H0604(01)&from=EN), 2018.



- [4] Delors, J. “Educação, um Tesouro a descobrir. Relatório para a UNESCO da Comissão Internacional sobre Educação para o sec. XXI”, Brasília, Representação da UNESCO no Brasil, 2010.
- [5] European Commission, “EUROPE 2020. A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth”, <http://eurlex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:2020:FIN:EN:PDF>, 2010.
- [6] Ireland, T. & Spezia, C. (Org.). *Adult Education in Retrospective. 60 years of CONFINTEA*. Brasília, UNESCO, MEC. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000227635>, 2014
- [7] Guerra, I. “Pesquisa Qualitativa e Análise de Conteúdo: Sentidos e formas de uso”, Cascais, Principia, 2006.
- [8] Lopes, S. “Trajetórias Sociais e Políticas de Formação de Adultos em Portugal.” Lisboa, Chiado Editora. 2014
- [9] Lopes, S. & Pimentel, L. “The IPL60+: an educational project for seniors of the Polytechnic of Leiria”, In *Minute book of International scientific conference of educational projects for seniors, Porto, 16th and 17th february 2017*, Porto, Euedito, 2017, pp.27-30.
- [10] Mirabelli, S. & Carielo da Fonseca, S. “Educação permanente: diálogo com o contexto globalizado e impacto na vida de idosos” In S. Carielo da Fonseca (org.). *O Envelhecimento ativo e seus fundamentos*, São Paulo, Portal Edições, 2016, pp. 382-417
- [11] Pimentel, L. & Lopes, S. “Programas de Aprendizaje a lo largo de la vida en formación superior, el caso del Instituto Politécnico de Leiria.” In *XIV Jornadas Internacionales sobre asociacionismo en los Programas Universitarios de Mayores Aprender sempre: Nuevos desafíos en el siglo XXI*, Vigo, CAUMAS, http://caumas.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Livro_Humus.pdf, 2016, pp.106-118.
- [12] Roldão, F. “Aprendizagem contínua de adulto-idosos e qualidade de vida: refletindo sobre possibilidades em atividades de extensão nas universidades.” *Revista Brasileira de Ciências do Envelhecimento Humano da Universidade de Passo Fundo*, 5 (1), <http://seer.upf.br/index.php/rbceh/article/view/147>, 2009, pp. 61-73.
- [13] Santos, V., Lopes, S.M. & Lobão, C. “O contributo da Universidade Sénior de Pombal na promoção do envelhecimento ativo dos seus estudantes”, *Res Net Health* 4, <https://journals.ipleiria.pt/index.php/rnhealth/article/view/186> 2018, pp. 1-4.
- [14] Serapioni, M. et al. “Voluntariado em Portugal: contextos, atores e práticas”, Fundação Eugénio de Almeida, 2013.
- [15] UNESCO “*Education Strategy 2014-21*”, Paris, UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000231288_eng, 2014.
- [16] OMS, “Relatório Mundial de Envelhecimento e Saúde”, OMS, <http://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/186468>, 2015.
- [17] Silvestre, C. “Educação e Formação de Adultos e Idosos: uma nova oportunidade”. Lisboa, Instituto Piaget, 2013.
- [18] Souza Filho, P.; Massi, G. e Ribas, Â. “Escolarização e seus efeitos no letramento de idosos acima de 65 anos.” *Revista brasileira de geriatria e gerontologia*, vol.17, n.3 [online], http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S1809-98232014000300589&lng=pt&nrm=iso, 2014, pp.589-600.