

AFTER ALL THERE IS HOPE

Parents, Children and Educators Learn about Education

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The event Ser Educação [*Being Education*] took place on the 4th, 5th and 6th of September in the small village of Soajo, Gerês, in the north interior Portugal. The participants were young parents and their children, and young - and not so young - educators with an interest in alternative education.

Photo: Patrícia Neto



The aims of the encounter were to reflect about how *to be, educate and act* in education in order to provide for - or be part of - meaningful learning. Some of the intentions in the brochure of the event were to promote comprehensive, participatory and sustainable education; strengthen networks among parents, educators, children, projects, residents, community services and institutions in Northern Portugal; contribute to create a learning community in Soajo; enhance the village customs and its local development. These came together with the opportunity to explore the grotesque nature of the region and to enjoy a liberating weekend that raised awareness and inspiration <http://sereducacao.eventbrite.pt/>.

The ambiance was cheerful and the debates were all but boring. Children and adults played around. There was neither shouting nor the need for disciplinary measures to keep the children quiet. They were also having fun. Informal gatherings and discussions, circles of sharing and presentations of ongoing projects were matched up with time to play and walk around. Workshops on forms of learning that appeal to emotions and the whole body as a whole sensor for learning gave a particular touch to the event. Going beyond the focus on the transmission of contents defined centrally by the national educational system within the European guidelines these activities shown to be extremely successful. Very diverse stakeholders enriched the event by being part of the debate and standing for their own experiences and beliefs about education seen as a natural part of life. Some were interviewed by two researchers that were invited to observe, listen, participate in sessions and talk to people to understand and analyze their views and expectations. In the tension between the education “we have” and the one “we desire”, the main concerns expressed by interviewees relate to the existence of an adult centered education that is deaf and dumb to life and to people, the claim for a holistic education based on decision making, freedom, self-fulfillment, and the love for the others and the our mother Earth was the one that became more evident to our eyes.

On the other side of the coin, local people sitting on the local central café had a startled look. Who are these strangers? What are they doing here? Seem to be the queries expressed on their faces. After some time maybe seduced by the happy *foreign* children and the workshops

on local traditional knowledge such as weaving – led by locals and engaging foreign participants with hands on learning - the distance between locals and visitors was reduced. There still seems to be a whole world between these two different worlds that appear to live the 21st century at different speeds.



Poster of the event: Organizers

Promoted by the Associação@Moving Cause [Association Moving Cause] and the project Manta do Gato [Cat Plaid], this event engaged a wide set of entities such as the Project Escola Viva [Living School, Academia José Moreira da Silva, Cooperativa dos Pedreiros], CIIE.FPCEUP [Centre for Research and Intervention in Education of Faculdade de Psicologia e de Ciências da Educação da Universidade do Porto] and IPFP [Paulo Freire Institute of Portugal] only to refer some. Participation by donation was another interesting feature of this event that wanted to cater for all and that was built on trust.

To sum up we may say the event achieved its aims and beyond. After all, there is hope for education and another world seems to be possible.