

Erasmus + Educational Visit Portugal May 2019



In the May 2019 half-term, teachers visited Lagos in Portugal, to learn about the Portuguese education system and the strategies used by schools in the Algarve to support pupils creatively. The Educational Visit was funded by Erasmus +. Erasmus + supports the implementation of the European policy agenda for growth, jobs, equity and social inclusion. Europe needs more cohesive and inclusive societies, which allow citizens to play an active role in democratic life. Erasmus+ is an important instrument to promote the inclusion of people with disadvantaged backgrounds.

Well-performing education and training systems help to tackle challenges by providing people with the skills required by the labour market and the economy, while allowing them to play an active role in society and achieve personal fulfilment. Reforms in education strengthen progress towards these goals, on the basis of a shared vision between policy makers and stakeholders, sound evidence and cooperation across different fields and levels.

Portugal , May 2019, Sue Palmer



In May 2019, with my colleagues, I was privileged to attend a Creativity in the Curriculum course, which was primarily held at a Portuguese teacher education centre (Centro de Formação, Lagos). The main objectives for the course were to learn more about the Portuguese education system and the strategies used by schools in Lagos to implement the new law on Curricular Flexibility, based on educational creativity and inclusion. The course spanned four working days and allowed us to collaboratively develop new thinking about Creativity in the classroom and to promote pupil's motivation for learning.

Day one.

Our first day consisted of an introduction to the Portuguese education system run by the programme director, Ana Cristina. During this session we identified the broad differences and similarities between the UK and Portuguese education systems:

Similarly, to the UK, education in Portugal is free and compulsory until the age of 18, when students complete the 12th grade. The education is regulated by the State through the Ministry of Education. There is a system of public education and also many private schools at all levels of education. However, I learned there are some fundamental differences:

Nursery and pre-school

UK

- Pre-school / nursery education
- 30 hours provided by government at age 3
- General nurseries/ pre schools

Portugal

- Pre-school education optional.
- Covers children from age 3 up to the age of compulsory schooling (age 6).
- Provided by kindergartens, which are run by a variety of State organisations, charitable institutions, private schools and cooperatives, unions and other organisations.

Primary/secondary education

UK

- Age 4-18.
- Children study GCSE and A levels

Portugal

Split into basic and secondary education.

Basic education

- Age 6-15.
- Pupils who complete this schooling receive a certificate of basic education.
- This level of teaching extends over nine years and comprises three cycles:
 - The first cycle lasts for four years and is taught by one teacher (who may be assisted by others in specialised areas). Emphasis is placed on the integrated development of studies and activities and the teaching of a foreign language may begin;
 - The second cycle, lasting two years, covers interdisciplinary areas of basic education;
 - The third cycle lasts for three years and is structured as a set of disciplines or groups of disciplines, incorporating various elements of vocational training. Classes are taught by a single teacher per subject or multidisciplinary educational field.

Secondary education.

- Secondary education is a cycle of specific studies and includes various courses intended principally to prepare young people to go on to higher education or to enter the labour market. It spans three years, corresponding to school years 10, 11 and 12.
- The options offered by the Portuguese educational system following school year 9 are diversified both in standard education and in other forms of education. They can take the form of scientific-humanities, specialised artistic, technological or vocational training courses, and are provided by secondary schools and vocational schools.
- Standard secondary education comprises:
 - General courses – intended mainly for persons aiming to obtain secondary-level training with a view to continuing their studies in higher education;
 - Technological courses – intended mainly for persons aiming to obtain intermediate vocational training so they can enter the labour market.
- General courses lead to the *diploma de ensino secundário* (diploma of secondary education). Technological courses lead to a Level three vocational qualification certificate in addition to this diploma.
- Year 10 vocational courses are an alternative secondary-level educational and training path for young people aged 15 who have completed their compulsory education and intend to go on to obtain a vocational qualification immediately afterwards. These courses, which last one year, lead to a Level two vocational qualification certificate and are equivalent to school year 10.

We were also introduced to the new national framework for curriculum flexibility. Similar to cross-curricular learning used in UK schools, this system emphasises the need for “time in the curriculum and time to do interdisciplinary work and project work,” (Joao Costa, former Minister of Education). This places emphasis on the need for children to be taught skills of cognitive and metacognitive, social and emotional, physical and practical nature to prepare them for adulthood.

The day closed with watching a brief video, showing how historical recreation could be used in schools as an educational project.

Day two

On the second day of our visit we were taken on a tour of the Vicentine coast. We had the delight of visiting many beautiful places including Aljezur, Prais de Amoreira, Monte Clerigo, Arrifana, Sagres Fortress and Cape St. Vincent.

These stunning locations gave us a clear understanding of the wealth of history in the Algarve, and how this could be embedded to support children's historical learning, such as the **Fort of Sagres**. This located on a dramatic, narrow headland that juts out into the Atlantic Ocean to form Portugal's most south-westerly point. It dates back to the 15th Century, a time when the Portuguese coast was often the target of raids from the Barbary pirates who heralded from the nearby North African shores.



In the evening, we attended an introduction to mindfulness for stress reduction course. There are many definitions of mindfulness, but perhaps Jon Kabat-Zinn (2019) describes it simply as, "being aware of our moment by moment experience. Cultivated by paying attention on purpose, in the present moment and without judgement." In addition to gaining an insight and greater depth knowledge of the causes of stress, we learned through active mindfulness, the benefits to our neurological, psychological and physical health, as well as performance. We also discovered in addition to supporting teachers stress levels, how mindfulness can be equally beneficial for children. In this regard, we learned how incorporating mindfulness in schools, could enhance cognitive performance and stress for our pupils. We came away from the course with a variety of ideas for incorporating mindfulness sessions in our school back in the UK.

Another aspect that incidentally arose from the course, due to it being delivered mainly in Portuguese, was highlighting the barriers children with English as Additional Language face. It made us think of how we need to be more empathetic to children with EAL and find ways to ensure they are able to fully access the learning we deliver.

Day three

Following on from Monday's session, we explored further how historical re-enactment could be used creatively in education, to support children's historical knowledge. For this purpose, led Henrique Guerra (an actor and expert on Historical enactments) we were given an opportunity to role play some characters from the period of geographical discoveries: Portuguese navigators, mariners, captains, noble men and noble ladies; monks; nuns; people, peasants and fisherman.

Accompanied by medieval popular and religious songs, we initially learned some simple dances and songs. This was greatly enjoyable and highlighted how this type of learning would be highly engaging for our pupils.

After dressing up in relevant attire from the medieval period, we were transported to the Port of the Discoveries in Lagos city centre, where we performed our historical reenactment, based on the scene where Prince Henry the Navigator welcomed Captain Gil Eanes and knights him for the discovery of Cape Bojador in Africa.

Performing in our medieval costumes, to the accompaniment of medieval music, really added authenticity to the reenactment. It allowed us to understand how immersing children in an historical reenactment, could really enhance children's understanding and learning of periods of history taught in our schools, such as the Romans, Egyptians etc.



Day four

Our final day was split into two parts. The morning was spent at the Centro de Formacao, where we attended a Workshop of Web 2.0 tools. This was delivered by one of the ICT teacher trainers, Vitor Rocha. During the session, we were introduced to a variety of a tools that could be used within our own setting to support children's learning, such as: Padlet, worlde, prezzi, voki, flickr

vimeo, kahoot and plickers. Some of which, we were already familiar with and used successfully in our own schools.

In the afternoon, we visited Escola Basica das Naus, (a school teaching basic education from pupils age 6 to 15), to attend a workshop on creativity and school radio. During our visit we were given a tour of the school and some background information. This enabled us to see further profound differences between the UK and Portuguese schooling.

Perhaps one of the most significant things, was the simplicity of the classrooms. Unlike our bright, vibrant classrooms in the UK, with interactive whiteboards and sophisticated technology, the classrooms were bare and simple, with a conventional chalk board.



Pupils throughout our visit were polite and courteous and their understanding of the English vocabulary was astounding. This really emphasised the high level of English learning Portuguese children receive.

The classrooms were similar sizes to ours in the UK, with an average of around 25 children. We were not given an opportunity to observe any full lessons, but did drop in to a music lesson to observe pupils being taught recorders.

Despite our initial thoughts on the lack of technology in Portuguese schools, we were simply blown away with the technology the school used for their school radio. At first, from the title school radio, we envisaged this would simply be a radio channel, possibly playing music throughout the school. However, during the introduction we realised this was a much greater project...

Broadly speaking, the school radio used is a multidisciplinary project, whereby a website is used to create video, sound and small podcasts. The website, which the files are uploaded to, can be accessed by the parents so they can see first hand what their children have been doing.

The technology used to produce the footage for the website was sophisticated...Drones were used for filming some footage, Audacity/garage band were used for importing/editing sound and voices were recorded using microphones and instruments in a purpose-built recording studio.

The Radio Naus team explained how the school radio was embedded creatively into the curriculum to enhance pupil's learning across the curriculum. All year groups were allocated 1 hour a week dedicated to school radio learning. As a class, teachers decide how the slot is used.

For example, one class were using the slot for poetry performances, whereas another was presenting information on global warming.

It made us realise that with the purchase of some simple equipment, such as microphones and computers and with someone leading the project, how a school radio could be established in our schools in the UK to support children's learning creatively.

Conclusion

What I will strive to do to move forward in my personal practice:

- Use ICT web 2.0 tools in my teaching practice to support children's learning of ICT.
- Organise CPD for staff to disseminate the information discovered from our visit.
- Try to find ways to immerse children creatively in their learning – such as historical enactment/school radio.
- Incorporate short mindfulness for children sessions within my teaching practice.
- Continue to consider creative learning opportunities across the curriculum, which are inclusive and challenge/support our learners.

I would like to thank Erasmus for giving me this incredible opportunity to gain an insight into education in another country. It is one that I will reflect on for a long time and hopefully will be able to use to make our children's learning experiences richer.

Mrs Sue Palmer

Class Teacher/Maths lead.

