OPEN SCIENCE HUB
PLATAFORMA DE ESCOLA ABERTA
PORTUGAL

In Conversation:
What do I need to know to get started?

Key:

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CL: As you know, I started lecturing the discipline of Citizenship and Development a month ago, using the Open Schooling methodology and I wanted to ask you: "For you, what is Open Schooling?"

DP: For me, and from what I have been able to work with my students, Open Schooling means working with the community or with partners that may help us and who are more engaged in the community. I think it's also to try to make students look around them and see beyond their own family and school world. It's making them see what's happening in their broader community. And that's it.

CL: In practice, how can you implement that? How can you make students have this vision, as you say, of looking at their community?

DP: It hasn't been as easy as I imagined, for several factors perhaps. I started working with the same class 3 years ago. So, when we started they were in the 7th grade, they were around 12 years old. What I gathered from working with such young students is that they have many difficulties looking at the world from a global perspective. Even regarding their own community, it wasn't easy for them to identify problems nor benefits. It was necessary to help them. One of the reasons could be their lack of maturity, because they are very young, they have no life experience. I don't know if there could be other factors… This is what I observed. Over the course of these 3 years, I have noticed their evolution. Now that they are 14 they are working better.

CL: So you could really notice a difference… Do you think they have more enthusiasm, interest or motivation, by using this Open Schooling methodology, than using a more expositive model?

DP: I notice that they like to work with this model but I have the feeling, from conversations with them, that they continue thinking that this discipline and the way we work is not going to be useful for them. Still, I can tell they have evolved, not only in the development of mental processes, but they

have also evolved a lot in the use of digital tools, because they have worked on digital tools such as Google workspace, video tools… What they really enjoy is the direct contact with stakeholders, that interaction with someone who comes from the outside turns out to be what actually motivates them and makes them get out of the routine a little bit. There I notice a big enthusiasm!

CL: So, tell me what's the level of acceptance from those local stakeholders. First, who are those local stakeholders and second, how can you find them? Do you think they are receptive to this type of initiatives to work with the school community?

DP: From the experience I've had in these 3 years, yes. Although we also had the constraints associated with the covid situation and the fact that we had to be on lock down. In this situation it was very difficult to work, because everyone was in their own house and the Open Schooling concept didn't work as well. But, regarding the stakeholders, I notice real openness and I have to add that the coordination of the Citizenship and Development discipline has a list of stakeholders that we have access to, which includes the degree of engagement they may have with the school. So, if they are available weekly or only for one occasional activity and this is very useful. In the specific case of this school year, I worked with Plataforma de Ciência Aberta and with a municipality teacher who is connected to the Melika project, which is a project that helps communities in Angola and the students wanted to participate.

CL: Well, that's interesting! And when kids have this engagement with the local community and stakeholders, do you think that afterwards it may lead to future collaborations? Do you think that this leaves a little seed that can grow? Or, on the other hand, after the project phase end, this sharing and this partnership ends too?

DP: I have the idea that, at least, the students feel more comfortable to contact and approach other people, because all the contacts and communications with the different stakeholders were made by them. And what I noticed is that they started to feel more comfortable. Our students are quite shy, they're a bit afraid to talk to people they don't know, and I observed that evolution. So, I believe that, in the future, in their lives, they will feel they have the baggage to contact different types of people.

CL: And do you think that the use of this methodology also transforms them into more attentive adults and more active in the society and in the problems that may arise?

DP: Without any doubt. This year, for example, it was easier for them to identify problems and situations that they could help solve. So, during these 3 years I have realized that they end up being more attentive to what surrounds them.

CL: Well, as you know, we have a quite extensive curriculum in all the disciplines. How do you see the involvement of other disciplines in the projects you have developed over the years?

DP: The contributions from other disciplines were occasional, and that is only natural because I have a specific time to work with the students in their citizenship classes and other teachers contribute during their own classes, so of course they can't spend so much time on this. Still, the Portuguese teacher helped with writing, the science teacher also helped gather information about healthy eating. But this was always an occasional help, not one that would happen throughout the semester or the school year.

CL: Which were the main challenges you faced? Not only challenges, but also opportunities that, taking into account your experience over the past 3 years, you would highlight as advice for someone new to this, trying to apply these methodologies in their classes.

DP: Perhaps one of the main challenges is the fact that, initially, students weren't used to working this way and I wasn't either… But you could notice some resistance and the fact that they couldn't think outside of their own world was the biggest challenge. However, I think seeing them evolve, get better and, this year, be more motivated in this discipline is one of the most positive outcomes – to see some real evolution. What I want to make clear is that, initially, it isn't easy to implement the

Open Schooling system and make students think about the problems going on around them and not necessarily their own problems. But afterwards it pays off, if you don't give up, be persistent and resilient and help them and guide them – it becomes motivating to see them change and improve.

CL: And now, to conclude, I want to ask you a final question: Which do you think was the real impact of the projects these kids developed? What was the impact for the community? And in which way did you contribute to the initial challenge you set out for?

DP: It isn't easy to answer those questions because this is all a process. Students end up making several activities within one project. Throughout these years they focused more on the school community and less so on the outside community. Last year they made an activity with the primary school students and this year we are still working on the initiative that we believe will have a bigger impact. We thought of a contest about healthy snacks, which also involves the primary school students, because we believe these changes (in healthy eating) should happen as soon as possible. So, we think this game to make students bring healthy snacks to school will create some impact because younger students normally like this type of contest and really like to deal with colleagues that are a bit older than them.

CL: Ok. Thank you Dora! Thank you for your availability!

DP: Always! You can always ask me questions!

CL: Thank you!