



The Virtual Classroom: Art Education for Itinerant Students

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Abstract

This text is about a school in Portugal that started to work with itinerant students that couldn't study in regular schools. This school functions virtually, with virtual classrooms, connecting children and teachers throughout a custom-designed curriculum. It's called Mobile School and it started as a project, in 2005, trying to meet children's individual needs in terms of basic education.

Before this project, itinerant children – sons of merchants or circus performers –, without permanent residence, grew accustomed to change school countless times, suffering discrimination from colleagues, with the impossibility of setting up roots and with a difficult progression in the access to knowledge. In this inclusive school of distance learning, these children may now have teachers and colleagues integrated on a stable group.

Technology, here, is fundamental for the development of the skills these children need to face in their future, so, to each student was given one laptop and free internet. In this context, the virtual classroom of Art Education, amongst other subjects these students have to learn, comprehends Visual Arts and Music, in a perspective of learning through projects, using the Information Technologies and Communication as a way of artistic expression. Communication between teachers and students is achieved through a platform which allows synchronous and asynchronous exchanges, and the artistic creations of these students are made through specific software.

Today, the Mobile School helps about 100 students – including not only itinerant children, but also other publics like teenage mothers and young people with more than fifteen years old – to finish basic school or a professional training course.

One question remains: what will be the future of the Mobile School in a period not only of economic crisis but also claiming social inclusion as a way of developing integrated societies?