

Engaging all Actors in the Educational Process: Outcomes of a Collaborative Project of Entrepreneurship Education Developed at Schools of Baixo Alentejo (Portugal)

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Abstract

The paper that we propose is based on the assumptions, methodology and results of a supramunicipal project in entrepreneurship education, promoted by a broad set of partners representing all the municipalities of Baixo Alentejo (Portugal) and coordinated by the Polytechnic Institute of Beja (IPBeja), that was carried out in Elementary Schools (1st to 3rd Ciclos) and kindergartens. In the three years of existence, the project involved the training of over 1.600 students and 90 teachers and municipal technicians and ensured the validation of a teaching and learning methodology. The project: Promoting Entrepreneurship Education at the Schools of Baixo Alentejo (PEEBA) was conceived as an experience focused on the promotion of planning, action and reflection competencies in children and youngsters, aged 3-12, rooted in a supramunicipal/regional working platform that aims to create a shared educational ecosystem favourable to entrepreneurship education.

The final results included several entrepreneurial projects designed by children and youngsters, adjusted to the reality of each municipality/school. Due the success of this regional work platform we consider that it could be seen as a benchmark model for others, interested in the development of similar collaborative projects to foster entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurship competencies.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship education; collaborative learning; collaborative educational process

1. Introduction

The benefits of entrepreneurship education in nurturing competences such as autonomy, creativity and proactivity have been largely proven. As mentioned in the European Commission publication entitled: Entrepreneurship Education: a road to success (2005, p.3): “(...) *entrepreneurship education is taken to cover all educational activities ‘that seek to prepare people to be responsible, enterprising individuals who have the skills, knowledge and attitudes needed to prepare them to achieve the goals they set for themselves to live a fulfilled life. It hence covers a broad range of activities across all levels of education – from creativity classes in primary education to Business Master Studies.’*”

The great potential of entrepreneurship education in the school context is the power to stimulate students’ overall academic performance, by encouraging them to understand the relevance of the subjects taught, by increasing their motivation and school involvement, and by reducing some of the problems associated with the school drop-out phenomenon (Hoppe, 2016; Lackéus, 2015). Developing young people’s skills to innovate and solve their own everyday problems, as well as their community’s, is the true goal of entrepreneurship education. Raposo & Do Paço, 2011 argue that education, rather than focussing merely on knowledge, must aim to change attitudes, and to leverage creativity and the ability to generate new value-added solutions.

Framed by this theoretical referential, the project: Promoting Entrepreneurship Education at the Schools of Baixo Alentejo³ (PEEBA) was conceived as an experience focused on the promotion of planning, action and reflection competencies in children and youngsters, aged 3-12, rooted in a supramunicipal/regional working platform that aims to create a shared educational ecosystem favourable to entrepreneurship education.

2. The Project

The PEEBA project started due the existence of supramunicipal diagnosis shared by several entities, namely, schools and municipalities, which evidenced:

- the lack of territorial balance in the supply, diversity and periodicity of actions to promote entrepreneurship in schools, which leads to certain overlapping of initiatives and individual

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actions in the same school year, while, in some, the promotion of entrepreneurial culture is scarce or inexistent

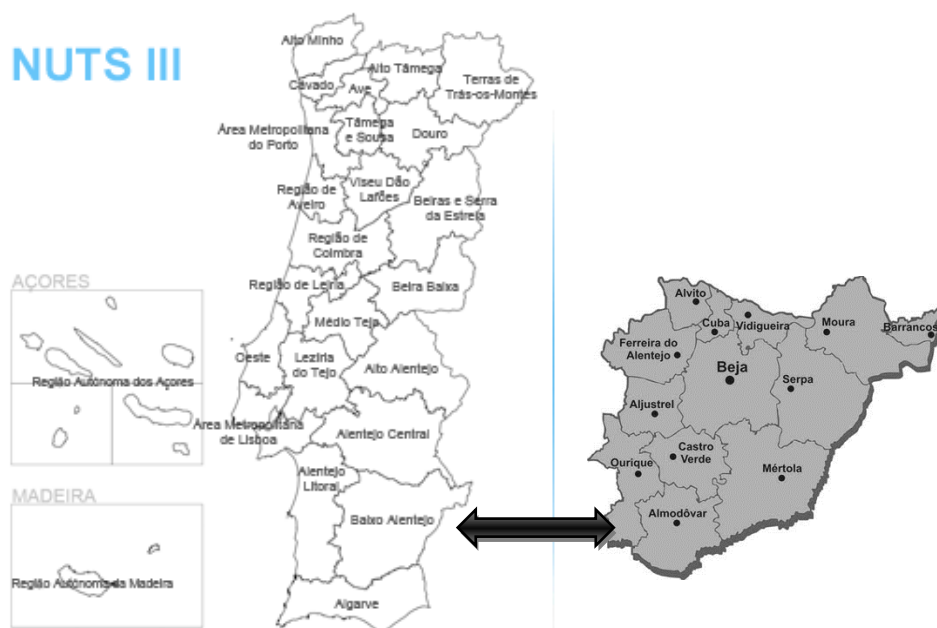
- the need to bring together key partners – municipalities, Groups of Schools, associations, training entities – to guarantee well-articulated shared strategies;
- the recognition by the different stakeholders of the need for coordinated efforts to value and promote entrepreneurial attitudes and skills in the school context, as a qualifying strategy towards educational success.

The diagnosed situation resulted in the identification of the following objectives:

- to create a common action platform developed by all involved stakeholders with the main goal of promoting entrepreneurial culture based on the stimulation of creativity and innovation competences of children and youngsters, on educational context, that at the same time could improve their interest and engagement on the educational process;
- to strengthen teachers' and municipal and Local Development Associations technicians' skills to promote entrepreneurial culture and action.

The PEEBA demanded the creation of a broad work platform, coordinated by the Polytechnic Institute of Beja (IPBeja), with all the municipalities and Groups of Schools of Baixo Alentejo, the Local Development Associations, the regional Business Centre, the Company for the Development of Alqueva Infrastructures and the Alentejo Regional Development Agency.

Figure 1. Location of Baixo Alentejo (Portugal) and its 13 municipalities



Source: <http://www.pordata.pt/O+que+sao+NUTS> and <http://www.cimbal.pt/menu/651/quem-somos.aspx>.

The PEEBA was launched in school year 2014/15, according to the following Action Plan:

- Organization of a 56-hour training course, during the school year, targeting teachers and technicians, based on the resource book "*Having ideas to change the world: a course book to teach entrepreneurship to children aged 3-12*"⁴. The resource book was awarded by the

⁴ The resource book was developed by the Educational Centre Alice Nabeiro (CEAN), with which a partnership agreement was signed.

European Commission in 2014 as a Good Practice. The training was provided by the IPBeja and developed throughout the whole school year. It provided the participants with the necessary skills to use this resource book and apply the pedagogical model centred in the development of competences such as: autonomy, creativity, negotiation, risk taking or communication, among others in students;

- Adaptation and improvement of the pedagogical contents of the resource book adjusted to the educational reality of Baixo Alentejo. The book was the model to develop new pedagogical resources inspired by the sociocultural heritage of the region. This process was carried out by the IPBeja with the collaboration of all the teachers and technicians involved and its implementation was subject to ongoing assessment.
- According to the training, teachers and municipal technicians, supervised by IPBeja, carried out activities to stimulate the entrepreneurial competences of their students (in the case of teachers, in the context of formal education) or working groups (in the case of municipal technicians, in the context of non-formal education).

The activities developed followed the following pedagogical sequence: Step 1: *Stimulating ideas*; Step 2: *Sharing ideas*; Step 3: *What I want to do?*; Step 4: *Mind-sets*; Step 5: *Active listening*; Step 6: *Talking about the project*; Step 7: *Working with collaborators*; Step 8: *Identification of needs in order to write our offers or proposals*; Step 9: *Building prototypes to communicate the project*; Step 10: *Collaborators' network*; Step 11: *Task cycles*; Step 12: *Project leadership*.

The work developed resulted in several projects built by children and youngsters applied to the practical reality of each municipality / educational context. The project involved the resolution of a problem, which required, without exception, the collaboration of all actors (students/teachers/technicians) with tasks that were consensually distributed and contracted by the group.

- Sharing and dissemination of the projects developed in each school/class to the community at large. Each municipality resorted to different strategies to disseminate the project, but most opted for the organization of fairs, at the end of the school year, open to the whole community, to exhibit their entrepreneurial ideas and sell their products.

Table 2. Some examples of the projects developed within PEEBA

Type of project	Examples of situations that generated the projects
Projects that aim to solve problems or meet the interests of students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the need to equip and requalify a laboratory for scientific projects • the need to improve the recreational area, which was damaged • the interest shared by a group of 1st <i>Ciclo</i> students on how best to explain the legend of the patron saint of their homeland
Projects that emerged from the ideas exchanged between teachers and students and stimulated by concrete challenges presented by the technicians of the municipalities and LDAs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our grandparents' jobs – have some of them disappeared forever? A project developed with the participation of the schools - preschool, 1st and 2nd <i>Ciclos</i> -, families, artisans, among others, coordinated by one of the municipalities involved • Aromatic herb fair in which students from every school had to (re)create products (teas, soaps, jams ...) using aromatic plants – a challenge launched by the local authority as a cross-sectional project for 1st <i>Ciclo</i> students

Source: Author's elaboration.

3. The Results

In its years of existence, the project involved the training of over 1.600 students and 90 teachers, municipal and LDA technicians of Baixo Alentejo and ensured the validation of the educational methodology. The final results included several entrepreneurial projects designed by children and youngsters, adjusted to the reality of each municipality/school. The projects developed represent solutions to collective needs emerging from the training contexts of the target population. They focussed on collective problem solving, which implied the commitment of all the children/youngsters involved, with individual tasks consensually assigned and agreed upon by the whole group. Another

relevant fact, evidenced by the projects designed, was the symbolic and simultaneously operative value of the dissemination moment, which entailed the concertation of purposes between school, municipality, LDA and other stakeholders. For the municipalities, the commitment to entrepreneurship education has become an absolute priority, both in their municipal educational strategic plans and in municipal action plans.

Some conditions of success have been identified to replicate the project, such as:

- It was developed in an educational context based on a close relationship between municipality, LDAs and schools. It involved a strong work dynamic in the school, between teachers and students, accompanied and/or encouraged by the technicians of the municipalities and LDAs, with periods of training and supervision in between, provided by the training team of IPBeja, and also framed by a supramunicipal work scheme in which everyone felt integrated.;
- Besides children and teachers, a network of community collaborators was aggregated to the projects developed in schools and extracurricular activities. The motivation of all the participants geared by the adoption of dynamic student-centred approaches was a success factor.
- At the beginning of the training on entrepreneurship education, some teachers showed some reluctance towards the possibility of involving children in the early years of schooling. It was considered that behind this reluctance there might be a less accurate association of the concept of entrepreneurship to economic issues. These “negative” expectations gradually changed throughout the project – for this shift in attitude it was crucial to demonstrate the virtues of the developed methodology.

Due the success of this real regional work platform we consider that it could be a benchmark model for others, interested in the development of similar regional, collaborative, projects to foster entrepreneurship education. With the motto *the socioeconomic future of our region will be shaped by the students we are educating now*, project PEEBA celebrates the collective and congregates participants from various entities with the goal of contributing to the introduction of new learning and teaching methodologies that could improve the educational success and, namely, the capacity for reflection and action of the future citizens. The project is supported by a teaching-learning methodology focused on the development of students' autonomy, decision-making and creativity competences to solve the concrete problems that surround them.

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