

The Child Town project

Quality assessment in practice

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“You need a whole village to educate a child” sums up the aim behind the Child Town (*Cidade Criança*) project, run by the Brazilian non-governmental organisation (NGO), the Popular Centre for Culture and Development (CPCD)¹.

The Child Town project is a platform for social change that integrates hitherto independently developed and somewhat isolated actions and programmes in the areas of services, childcare and education for infants and school-age children. The project has been running since 2005 in Araçuaí, a municipality located in the state of Minas Gerais, in the Jequitinhonha valley, one of Brazil’s poorest regions. Child Town encourages the valley’s inhabitants to treat all community spaces as locations where young children can have a social life, learn and explore their opportunities safely. To make this possible, the project has built a network of people from different generations who fulfil various tasks. Mothers and carers, community education agents, nursery and infant school educators are involved, all of whom are well qualified to promote the principles of the project in a co-operative and committed way.

Work planning and monitoring applied in day-to-day activities

Since its early beginnings in 1984, the CPCD has developed into an institution for learning. After defining its aims and forming its pedagogical principles, the organisation went on to produce mechanisms for measuring, monitoring and evaluating learning. It is important to stress that each of these mechanisms is not only an essential work tool but also a tool for evaluating the project’s day-to-day activities. This systematic application is vital, as it enables children’s daily progress, however slight, to be detected and followed through, as well as enabling greater coverage and understanding of Child Town objectives among the wider community.

The Work and Evaluation Plan

Each year, work on the project begins by collectively producing the Work and Evaluation Plan (WEP). In the early days, this was drawn up by the team of educators, but with time, it was enriched by contributions from all those involved. Their daily discoveries and challenges stimulated their desire to put forward and share solutions to problems and ideas for new activities.

An example of the WEP in action can be seen in the educators’ efforts to involve the community in project activities. These include evening walks with pregnant women, walking tours around the community with the children, crop growing in the market garden, massage for babies, play workshops, storytelling and guitar sessions. The villagers have also learned to make cough mixtures and other preparations from medicinal plants. Many of these activities encourage self-respect, self-esteem, appreciation and affection between members of the community, attributes that are especially important for young children. For pre-school children, project activities help to smooth the transition from home to school life.

Learning Results and Process Monitoring (LRPM)

This is carried out on a monthly basis together with families, the community, educators and particularly with pregnant women and children aged up to five years. The LRPM mechanism allows educators to keep an eye on changes in a child’s behaviour, observe their development and respond to their personal needs. Using the LRPM mechanism allowed the team to discover several positive outcomes from Child Town activities:

- The number of children breastfeeding up to the age of 6 months increased by 100 percent.
- The use of medicinal tea, cough mixture and anti-lice shampoo helped address the children’s most common health problems.

- The number of malnourished and underweight children fell considerably.
- The family-to-school transition process occurred smoothly.

Project quality indicators

One of the greatest challenges facing the CPCD was to produce a set of project quality indicators that were both specific and measurable. This was particularly difficult since the team needed to measure intangible outcomes such as self-esteem, learning through play, happiness and pleasure.

Self-esteem indicators can be derived from field notes and include personal care (combing hair, bathing, etc.), care of clothing and personal possessions, appreciation of beauty, expressing opinions and tastes, taking a prominent role in meetings, willingness to help and take part in collective actions, and appropriate expression of smiles and tears. All these factors are specific and observable on a day-to-day basis and are fundamental to planning and carrying out project actions.

The project team used the same strategy for each of the specific objectives: learning, socialising, citizenship, participation, etc. They reached a consensus (this was important) and set 12 Project Quality Indicators (see box in next page). The 12 factors can be observed and measured individually, but also complement each other. For the CPCD, the interaction and sum of all 12 factors provides an indication of the overall quality and success of a project.

Measurement of the 12 factors is based on a series of specific questions for each participant (educators, children, community education agents, care assistants, mothers and other members of the community). The questions guide the participant to consider each of the factors within the context of the project activities as a whole. For example, to measure the degree of co-operation, educators are asked such questions as:

- Is there an absence of competitiveness between members?
- Is there teamwork and a convivial atmosphere? What has been done to improve non-competitiveness?

- Does competitiveness in play contribute to improving or hindering relationships? How is this issue managed?
- Do respect and solidarity increase or decrease? What is it like at home, at school, in the community?

For the same indicators, the questions would be put differently to children and adapted to suit the way they express themselves, for example:

- Do people cooperate around here or do they fight?
- How do people work: in groups or everyone on their own? And you, how do you join in?
- Are the games and play activities competitive? Does this help or not?
- Where do you think there is more co-operation: here in the project, at home or at school? Why?

CPCD has been applying PQIs in many of its projects since 1995. They are now considered social technology and were awarded a prize by the Banco de Tecnologias Sociais da Fundação Banco do Brasil in 2005.

Systematising qualitative monitoring and evaluation systems

Qualitative monitoring and evaluation through the comprehensive use of process and impact micro-indicators (WEP and LRPM) together with product and results macro-indicators (PQI), have had a positive influence on improving the work done and on achieving forecast objectives and goals in the Child Town and other CPCD projects.

In practice, this has meant that educators are reading and analysing the indicators (both micro and macro) in their training and day-to-day activities, and this has now become common practice. For example, educators have formed groups to discuss the harmony, or mutual respect indicator.

The evaluation of WEP, LRPM and PQI is carried out objectively through discussion groups with members of the community. To ensure people are not overwhelmed with excessive questioning, the activities are normally carried out on an informal basis. Emphasis is placed on listening and recording the

The CPCD 12 Project Quality Indicators (PQI)

1. Appropriation: *Balance between what is desired and what is achieved.*

This indicator invites us to follow a watching brief, to not enforce education, to respect learning stages and the rate at which each individual processes knowledge.

2. Coherence: *Relationship between theory and practice.*

Indicates the importance of a balanced relationship between formal, academic knowledge and non-formal, empirical knowledge. It shows that both are important because they are relative and therefore complementary.

3. Cooperation: *Team spirit, solidarity.*

This indicator urges us to co-operate with others working in an educational role. This includes promoting the issue of solidarity as the basis for teaching and learning, as well as accepting the different needs of individuals.

4. Creativity: *Innovation, entertainment and leisure.*

This indicator drives us to create new approaches and to dare to move away from more old-fashioned academic teaching methods. This indicator gave rise to a new teaching tool: in how many 'different and innovative ways' (DIW) can the whole community get involved in caring for its children.

5. Dynamism: *The ability to change according to need.*

This indicator invites us to recognise our different needs and accept that we are on a continuous quest for complementarity. We are born to be complete but not perfect individuals.

6. Efficiency: *Identifying the end and the need.*

This indicator invites us to balance our energies by providing the proper means and resources to fulfil planned outcomes. The four pillars of learning are: a) learning how to be, b) learning how to do, c) learning how to know, and d) learning how to live together.

7. Aesthetics: *Refers to beauty and refined taste.*

This indicator concerns the search for the brighter side of life. If, according to Domenico di Masi, "aesthetics is the ethics of the future", we need to reconstruct a concept of aesthetics that acknowledges humanity's spiritual side as the source and creative force of beauty and light.

8. Happiness: *Feeling good about what we have and who we are.*

This indicator reminds us of the unfaltering quest for being fortunate (and not for happiness) that is the *raison d'être* of the human race.

9. Harmony: *Mutual respect.*

This indicator stands for understanding and generous acceptance of others as part of our ongoing learning process, and also of the benefits of making the past and the future part of the present.

10. Opportunity: *The options open to us.*

This indicator presents the contemporary view of development (creating opportunities) as a means and an alternative to building social capital. The more opportunities we are able to create for children and adolescents taking part in our projects, the more options will be open to them for achieving their potential and their dreams.

11. Taking the lead: *Taking an active part in making fundamental decisions.*

This indicator deals with our ongoing ability to face challenges; break down barriers; push the limits; put our knowledge, actions and desires to the test; stay ahead of our time; and be fully involved in shaping the future for our fellow human beings. What can each of us do? Which group, school, country and society do we want to be an active member of?

12. Transformation: *Moving from one state to a better one.*

This indicator translates our mission from passive participants in the world to agents of change, whose responsibility is to leave the world in a better state for future generations than that it is at present.



Photo: Courtesy Projeto Cidade Criança

The Child Town project encourages the valley's inhabitants to treat all community spaces as locations where young children can have a social life, learn and explore their opportunities safely

views of all project participants, whether they are educators, children, mothers, fathers or other members of the community.

Currently, for the Child Town project and for others managed by CPCD, instruments for planning (WEP), monitoring (LRPM), measuring quality (PQI) and innovation (DIW), are fundamental in guaranteeing that all children, no matter where they come from, can have access to learning adapted to their age and ability, especially in the transitional phase between family and school life.

Note

- 1 The CPCD (Centro Popular de Cultura e Desenvolvimento) is a non-governmental non-profit organisation located in Minas Gerais, in southeast Brazil. Founded in 1984, the CPCD's mission is to promote local people's education and community development through culture. Its work has received national and international recognition for its quality benchmarking and its example of an alternative method of implementing public policy. For more information, please see the website, www.cpcd.org.br.

Further reading

Websites

UNESCO – Education

Early childhood education has vast potential for human development and is vital to achieving Education For All. As learning begins at birth and continues throughout life, UNESCO's goal is to assist countries in expanding access to early childhood education, improving its quality and ensuring equity at this vital stage.

<http://portal.unesco.org/education/en>

Education For All (EFA) - Global Monitoring Report

The annual Global Monitoring Report is the publication on progress that countries and agencies are making towards the EFA goals, providing the latest data available alongside in-depth analysis.

The 2008 edition, *Education for all by 2015: Will we make it?* is a mid-term assessment of where the world stands on its commitment to provide basic education for all children, youth and adults by 2015.

<http://www.efareport.unesco.org>

Global campaign for education

The Global Campaign for Education promotes education as a basic human right, and mobilizes public pressure on governments and the international community to fulfil their promises to provide free, compulsory public basic education for all people; in particular for children, women and all disadvantaged, deprived sections of society.

The campaign is driven by the conviction that quality education for all is achievable, and by the concern for the immense costs of failure.

www.campaignforeducation.org

ECA WebWatch

ECA WebWatch is an eclectic mix of the best websites and information on: early childhood development, growth and learning; early childhood practice, programs and policy; and emerging issues and research. It is a service provided by Early Childhood Australia, an early childhood advocacy organisation seeking to ensure quality, social justice and equity in all issues relating to the education and care of children from birth to eight years.

www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/early_childhood_news/eca_webwatch.html

ERICDigests.org

This site provides one way to access the ERIC Digests (education articles) produced by the former ERIC Clearinghouse system. It gives access to full-text access to thousands of ERIC Digests in many education areas including teaching, learning, special education, home schooling, etc.

www.ericdigests.org/

Publications

Strategies for reaching the EFA goal on early childhood care and education (ECCE)

UNESCO Policy Brief on Early Childhood
N° 42 / January – March 2008

Lack of early childhood care and education programmes and uneven pre-primary education are two major problems highlighted in the efa Global Monitoring Report 2008. This Policy Brief emphasizes a crucial resource to alleviate the lack of ECCE programmes – parents, the primary educators of young children everywhere.

<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0015/001586/158687e.pdf>