

**Birmingham (UK) – 10<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> April 1995**

**Maria Teresa Pereira dos Santos (Escola Superior de Educação de Beja)**

**THE ARTISTIC ACTIVITIES IN THE CURRICULUM OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS**

**ABSTRACT**

This study stresses the importance of artistic activities (visual arts, music, drama, movement and dance) for the educational process of children with special educational needs.

Having as a reference the recent legislation and the context of the Educational Reform in Portugal, it aims to understand the meaning attributed to those activities in the curriculum of a group of children with special educational needs who were integrated in regular primary schools during 1993/94 in Beja.

For this purpose the analysis focuses on their educational programmes and on the perspectives of their support teachers who were responsible for both the design and implement of those programmes.

Even though one cannot generalize on the basis of such study, there are some reflections that can be raised about the educational proposals that are usually made for this group of children and how educational practice can improve through adequate models of teacher training.

**INTRODUCTION**

The integration debate aroused in the 70s gave back to regular schools their responsibility in the provision of the necessary resources to answer adequately to the needs of all school children, independently of their difficulties.

More than 20 years have passed and one is still far from achieving that aim. Quite often, the integration discourse gives place to a segregation practice, hidden behind the arguments of lack of preparation or lack of resources.

In Portugal, the absence for many years of an adequate and articulate legislation was an alibi for the assumption and legitimacy of such practices. But, fortunately for others it constituted a motive for innovating proposals and developing some interesting experiences.

The most recent legislation (Law 319/91) does clearly refer to the need for any child to have the educational response in the 'least restrictive environment', which is to say, the regular school.

It is known that one of the adequate answers has to be found in the curricular modifications, having as a reference the child's characteristics and his context, analysing for that purpose their potentialities and limitations.

When thinking about those modifications for children with special educational needs and most particularly those diagnosed with mental handicap, the educational proposals are often quite impoverishing. The belief on their limited capabilities to understand the world around them, frequently leads to a lower level of expectations and consequently to a more restricted educational programme, in which certain learning experiences are neglected, whereas their complexity and diversity could be challenging and promote development, not only cognitive, but also in other areas.

Among many experiences, those of an artistic nature, if planned at all, seem to have a merely accessory role. The reason may lie in the fact that these children are considered unable of artistic sensitivity and creativity. However these activities should constitute the core for all the other learning, since their integrating role in the educational process of any person is certainly unquestionable.

The Portuguese school has been quite defective in what concerns the practice of expressive and creative activities (visual arts, music, drama, movement and dance). In order to invert this situation the recent Educational Reform (Law 46/86) has emphasized it, trying to restore its importance.

The question is to know if teachers are also attributing more value to them, most particularly teachers working in special education and if that is explicit in the contents of the educational programmes designed for the children to whom they are giving support.

The main objective of this study is an attempt to answer the above question. For that, an analysis of the educational programmes developed with a group of children with special educational needs who were integrated in the regular primary schools in Beja during 1993/94 was conducted. On the other hand, to be able to understand the teachers' perspectives and to seek for possible constraints on the issue, some interviews were made.

In the first part of this work the main theme is discussed within the context of the educational reform and the primary school. The second part describes the general and methodological aspects of the study. On the basis of the data collected and analysed, some questions concerning educational practices towards children with special educational needs and the need for adequate teacher training are discussed.

## INTEGRATION AND EDUCATIONAL REFORM

The reflection on school integration is related to an important turning-point of the educational thinking, certainly influenced by the research on individual and social advantages of being educated in the 'least restrictive environment'.

Both in Western Europe and USA laws are developed to exert pressure on the school towards integration, which is to say the need to organize itself in order to answer adequately to the specific educational needs of its population.

Portugal follows this international movement and the integration happens, dependent as it may be on the goodwill and sensitivity of the teachers. However, after all these years, there is still a long way to go and instead of the 'Inclusive' School of the 90s (UNESCO, 1994), the reality still shows a school of exclusion.

The law for the Educational Reform (46/86) points out the principles for all the system reform in its different dimensions (curriculum, assessment, management organizational models). Its 'discourse' is an example of the need to 'build' a basic school open to diversity and able to:

- Promote “the individual realization in harmony with the values of social solidarity” (7,a);
- Offer “children with specific needs, mainly due to physical and mental deficiencies, the adequate provisions for the full development of their capabilities” (7,j);
- Create “conditions for the promotion of school and educational success of all the pupils” (7,o).

Between discourse and practice the gap is often enormous. Nevertheless, the theoretical aspects of the Reform contributed for a certain enthusiasm and generated a certain dynamic for change. Even if it was a reform at a national level, there was space for the local initiative and an important margin of autonomy was given to teachers and schools.

In spite of all the evidence from educational research, primary school in general seems to have difficulties in introducing innovative practices and the traditional ways of work are very much kept alive. The proposals are often the same at the same time for the all class group, as if it was a homogeneous group.

However critical one can be, the fact that the Portuguese primary school was devaluated for decades cannot be ignored and the retardation inherited from certain political measures can only be overcome by a significant investment at this educational level.

If one considers the conditions under which primary school teachers are forced to work and if one joins to this the imposition and instituted nature that the educational reform assumed, it is understandable that no great changes have occurred. There is an absolute need for improvement of the working conditions and the professional quality through an adequate formative support in order to be able to make the 'spirit' of the reform understood and put into practice.

## PRIMARY SCHOOL AND SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

Largely questioned, the Portuguese primary school is 'faced' with enormous inner and outer contradictions. Determinant for the future school life of all people, what kind of answers does the child with special educational needs find in it? In what way is it organized to take into consideration the differences? What type of programmes does it develop? Who are the intervenient in the whole process? What is the legislative support?

The 319/91 Law went further on the issue and gathered a series of spread legislation about the integration of the child and young person with special educational needs in the regular school (from basic to secondary education). It offers the different modalities of provision and defines the functions of the various participants in the educational process.

A more school-centered than child-centered approach is proposed. It takes into account particularly the forms of organizing space, time, learning experiences, human and material resources in the search for creative answers to the needs of its target group.

The challenge is there, but in what way is it handled?

The truth is that the dominant responses are centered in the child and his difficulties. The proposed curriculum, either adapted or completely modified, is implemented with more or less support from the special education teachers. That support takes place out of the classroom within the normal schedule and the work is done in more or less articulation with the class teacher. The study described here is a good example of this.

This kind of intervention will have great difficulty in questioning the forms of organization of school, classroom, pedagogical methods and so the impact to promote a 'school for all' will also be minor. The option for this type of approach has certainly to do with the professional status ambiguity of the teacher working in special education. A considerable number of these teachers do not have a special education degree, their training is done in-service, their career is not properly defined and therefore their acceptance among other colleagues often presents difficulties. These aspects do clearly appear in the study.

As a defensive attitude they take 'refuge' in the close relationship with the small group of children they give support to, investing in the development of those children 's capacities in order to facilitate their integration in the class they belong to. Of course this is not an easy task and not a less important one.

This group of children who have educational support from teachers working in special education teams (generally these teams exist in most municipality areas and are formed mainly by teachers and nursery teachers. Psychologists and therapists are not always part of the teams) is usually an heterogeneous group, but in any case, as the 319/91 Law states, the measure 'special teaching' should only be applied to children who, due to 'physical or mental handicaps', require a certain type of procedures and support for the development of an educational project that cannot be accomplished without such 'net'.

It is also determined that for these children (the more complex situations) an individual educational plan has to be drawn by the psychological services in collaboration with the school health services. The plan must give a 'picture' of the child and outline the general orientation for the most adequate educational provision (Law 319/91, 15).

On the basis of these elements the special education teacher should, in cooperation with the class teacher, design an individual educational programme which must include the skills of the child in the curriculum areas and contents, the objectives to be attained, the methodology to be followed, assessment criteria, level of participation in school activities, division of tasks among people in charge, schedules and programme evaluation (Law 319/91,16).

The individual educational programme must have as a reference model the curriculum for the school year or cycle in which the child is integrated. As this study focuses on the primary level ( 1st cycle), it is important to say that for this level the learning proposals must result from an equilibrium and articulation within the following areas: Expressive and Artistic (Music; Drama; Visual Arts; Physical education); Social and Environmental Studies; Portuguese and Mathematics (Law 286/89).

As Luisa Alonso (1994) states when referring Zabala and Tann's perspectives: "From the methodological point of view, the curriculum project must lie on a global approach, in which the contents are organized in learning sequences (integrating activities), orientated for problem solving, significant and intentionally, rooted in the life experiences of the children in such a way they are meaningful and functional" (p.20).

The question one may raise is to know how this global approach is dealt with by teachers. How do they interpret and build the school curriculum? Are they concerned with equilibrium and articulation inter and intra-areas, attending to a logical and psychological significance?

The knowledge of the primary school reality indicates that the dominant concept of curriculum is still very much a fragmentary one and that the artistic areas are relegated to a secondary place, utilized only as instruments at the service of other areas and even this in a very limited way.

Both in the Educational Reform Law (46/86) and in the programme for the primary level, the role attributed to those experiences has been stressed, as is shown by the following statements:

One of the main goals of basic education will be: "to contribute for physical development, to value manual activities and promote artistic education in order to sensitize for the different forms of aesthetic expression, detecting and stimulating skills in those domains" (Law 46/86, 7,c).

The education of the body, the gesture, the audition, the voice and the vision develops in children the field of possibilities to interpret the world, to express thinking, to create ( ...) the practice of expressive activities do clearly contribute for the expression of personality, for thinking structuring and character formation' (Programme for the Primary School, 1993, p.6).

The practical translation of all these principles are of course dependent on the skills of the teacher in this field, but and above all on the value he attributes to it and certainly on what he thinks Society expects from him. The effects are here quite perverted, since in a Society that for a number of generations has not been educated for the production of a culture that values the role of the arts in the educational process, the artistic activities are considered a loss of time, stealing space that should be dedicated to the basic and most important learning experiences, such as literacy and numeracy.

The teachers interviewed testify this idea when they refer to the little value that their colleagues of regular school give to the activities of the artistic areas.

The social devaluation leads the teacher to the same mechanism. Interesting enough is also the political orientation of the Ministry of Education on the subject of permanent teacher training. Appearing to have forgotten all that has been expressed before, they say that the priorities now should be in didactic aspects of Portuguese and Mathematics, the 'noble subjects'. Maybe this turn-about is due to the recent transnational studies on literacy and numeracy in which the Portuguese did not do very well.

But can't these results be a consequence of poor and less diversified teaching proposals, without space for exploring and expressing in different areas, mainly the artistic ones?

Isabel Costa (1992) when reflecting on teacher training in this domain, raises the hypothesis that the devaluation of artistic component in that training process may be a result of "the lack of courage or fear to assume the transgression from which art is bearer" (p.43).

Or is it because there is a consciousness of this that devaluation occurs? The transgression function can lead to changes and innovations that may escape to the control of the system, so it may be important to keep it at innocuous levels.

The role that arts perform in the educational process of any individual is largely documented in the literature. The papers presented to the meeting 'Education through Art -thinking the future', organized in 1991 by the Gulbenkian Foundation (Lisbon), are a good example of the above assumption. Though in Portugal there aren't many studies on the issue, an increasing interest for the research in which concerns the links between art and education, or at least a greater diffusion of it, is emerging.

The integrating role that arts accomplish, opens the possibilities for learning in different areas and contributes to develop intellectual, affective, motor, communication and social skills (Cunha, 1981; Santos,A., 1982).

Over evaluating Portuguese Language and Mathematics, precisely the areas in which children with special educational needs fail ( this is evident in the programmes analysed), school tends to increase the exclusion of a considerable number of children, who therefore see the possibilities of expressing themselves using other symbols, other languages greatly reduced. In this sense and most particularly in what concerns the

educational process of this group, the artistic and expressive activities must be emphasized in their curriculum, since their relevance for the promotion of development and learning seems unquestionable.

## **ARTS IN THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS**

Many authors have stressed the importance of arts and creative processes in general for the integral and harmonious development of the individual with any type of handicap. The diversity of experiences and materials that are offered can reach all the dimensions of the human being, contributing for the development of self-confidence, self-esteem and interpersonal skills, facilitating the control over his own behaviour and a more adequate school and social integration (Tansley and Gulliford, 1960; Jeffree, 1986; Kuczaj, 1990).

Children with special educational needs do often present emotional difficulties as a cause or consequence of problems of different types, and if the approach based on a therapeutic educational model is accepted (Santos,J., 1988), the importance given to expressive and creative activities cannot be ignored as a means for the development of a balanced personality.

The contribution for a greater emotional equilibrium is reason enough to make use of those activities, but they are also important for the development of intelligence. If the graphic expression of the child, particularly drawing, is often used as a diagnostic instrument why isn't it used as well to promote the intellectual level, since nowadays the possibility of modifying the cognitive potential has been largely defended (Schwebel and Maher, 1986).

The creative and expressive activities do call up for fundamental cognitive processes (Tansley and Gulliford, 1960). When these experiences are provided to children with these characteristics, one is expanding their repertory, offering them various possibilities of interpreting reality and increasing their autonomy.

The general belief that these children are unable of creativity functions as another barrier and determines the experiences offered. Normally these are highly structured and orientated. Though this may be necessary at certain moments with certain children, it is important to know how these children express themselves in free artistic activities. Here the teacher has only to worry about the right materials and environment for them to take place.

Marks (1980) describes his experience with a group of young mentally handicapped who were enrolled in a visual arts project and whom he filmed during those sessions. The analysis of those records made possible a deeper insight into their attitudes and other aspects of their behaviour towards the task. The author verified a far greater capacity of concentration, an extreme sensitivity to suggestion, which is to say, when those activities were preceded by the audition of music or the visualization of an artistic work, their product

reflected those experiences in a very deep way, and independently of those stimuli their work revealed a great creative capacity, expressed through the imaginative combinations of colour and shape.

The creative capacities of young people with mental handicap are also described in other areas of expression as can be found in the testimonies of Lishman (1980) about a movement-creative dance project that for two years enrolled a group of youngsters with severe handicaps and also Park and Fuss's work (1991) in drama and theatre production with a group of mentally handicapped.

Besides the opportunity these activities offer for a better understanding of the children involved, the educational and therapeutic benefits are fully demonstrated, specially by Park and Fuss, who evidence the importance of the mixture of languages that theatre uses and how it can be a good source of knowledge acquisition at factual, ethic and social level and its influence on the development of communication skills.

It appears that any curriculum designed for children with special educational needs cannot ignore the role of the different means of expression (Upton, 1979) and that they must be integrated coherently and in articulation, to offer the child a rich and varied spectrum of learning experiences aiming to the development of the person as a whole and not only in the perspective of knowledge acquisition, sometimes in a rather mechanic way.

Since it was known that in the Portuguese primary school these activities were merely accessory, a desire to know in what way they were considered in the educational programmes for children with special educational needs integrated in primary schools led to the following study.

## **DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY**

### **Objectives**

The intention of this research work was to approach the issue on an exploratory and essentially qualitative basis to open way for further and more detailed studies.

The objectives set up initially were:

- To analyse the meaning attributed by special education teachers to artistic activities (visual arts, music, movement, drama, dance) in the curriculum of children with mental handicap (This designation was later substituted for children with special educational needs);
- To verify the correspondence between the meaning attributed to those activities and their explicitness in the educational programmes of those children.

## Methodology

Having as a reference the above aims, contacts were made with the coordinator of the special education team in Beja, through whom the information and the required cooperation reached the group of teachers under the conditions of the study (teachers who were supporting children with special educational needs in the primary school). By suggestion of the person in charge, the cooperation 'contract' included some training seminars with that group of teachers, on a participant and active basis.

At a first stage, the project involved the analysis of the educational programmes of children with special educational needs integrated in primary schools in Beja, during 1993/94.

In a second step the teachers responsible for the conception of those programmes were interviewed in order to understand their perspectives, the role of artistic activities in the educational process and difficulties faced throughout the process. The techniques used were documental analysis and interviews.

For the analysis of the programmes a grid, not very different from the programme structure, was built. It seemed important to be able to isolate the most relevant data for the understanding of the subject. The registration of the elements which made reference to artistic activities was done following the grid as shown in table 1:

**Table 1 – Grid for Programmes' analysis**

CATEGORIES	SUB-CATEGORIES
1- THE CHILD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Skills</li><li>• Difficulties</li></ul>
2- PROGRAMME AND ITS COMPONENTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Areas</li><li>• Objectives</li><li>• Activities</li><li>• Evaluation</li></ul>
3- MODES OF ATTENDANCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Place</li><li>• Time</li><li>• Intervenient</li></ul>

After the documental analysis, the teachers and authors of the programmes were interviewed (7 of the 8 teachers who gave their programmes for the analysis as one was sick by the time the interviews took place).

The option was for a semi-structured type of interview, for which the following themes were defined:

**Theme A - Identification of the child for Special Education** - it was intended to know how the educational diagnosis of these children was made (type of data, instruments used, observation contexts, level of skills and difficulties in the process);

**Theme B - Individual Educational Programme** - it was important to hear about the reference models for its conception, the privileged areas and contents of the curriculum, the place where the activities would be developed, the articulation with the regular class teacher, parents' participation, the skills and difficulties found.

**Theme C- The Artistic Activities in the Individual Educational Programme** - it was aimed to collect data about the meaning of these activities for the re-educational process, to know what kind of activities and materials were more often offered, the time dedicated to them, the context where they were developed, the results, constraints and needs found by the teachers.

The interview was conducted on a quite informal atmosphere, in small groups, since there was some difficulty to find space/time to do it individually. Of course this method may have influenced the amount and diversity of information collected. The interviews were not tape-recorded because it was thought that the group situation was already inhibiting. So there was an option for a written registration of the main ideas, recollected as faithfully as possible immediately after they have taken place.

Since from the analysis of the programmes it was not possible to characterize the studied population, the teachers were asked to fill in a form to make possible the characterization of both children and teachers. The contents were: 1) Professional training; 2) Professional experience; 3) Students supported in the primary school during 1993/94 - number; ages; main problems and mode of attendance.

## **Population**

From the documents given for study it was possible to analyse 49 educational programmes, designed for a group of children between 7 and 14 years old, diagnosed, some as mentally handicapped, some with language problems, other with emotional difficulties, and a large number with specific learning difficulties.

Since this last group was dominant, and as it was impossible to know to whom those programmes belonged, the initial objective of analysing only the programmes of mentally handicapped children was altered and the broad categorization of special educational needs was adopted.

In any case it is important to refer that this group of children was considered in the perspective of the intervenient in the educational process as presenting sufficiently serious difficulties to justify the intervention of the special education team, as it is stated in the 319/91 Law, previously mentioned in this study.

Table 2 presents some of the data for the characterization of the group of children supported by the interviewed teachers:

**Table 2 – Children Supported in Primary School during 1993/1994**

<b>Teacher</b>	<b>Number of Children</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Diagnosis</b>	<b>Group Support</b>	<b>Individual Support</b>
A	2	7-8	Learning Difficulties/ Language Disorders	2	-----
B	10	8-12	Learning Difficulties/ Mental Handicap	4	-----
C	9	8-13	Learning Difficulties/ Mental Handicap/ Language Disorders/ Emotional Disturbance	4	1
D	10	8-13	Learning Difficulties/ Language Disorders	3	1
E	12	10	Learning Difficulties/ Mental Handicap/ Language Disorders	4	-----
F	14	8-14	Learning Difficulties/ Emotional Disturbance	4	-----

The number of children supported (69) was higher than the number of the programmes given for analysis (49). This selection done by the teachers may be explained by the level of the difficulties presented by the children and by the need to put aside, due to the initial purpose of the study, those children with learning difficulties as a consequence of physical and sensory handicaps.

The teachers interviewed gave support to a group of 10 children in average (there is one exception: a teacher who works also with children at higher levels). The mode of support was in small groups of about 3 elements and only two of the children had an individual attendance, certainly as a result of their severe difficulties.

Table 3 draws attention to the characteristics of the teachers interviewed, in what concerns their professional training and experience:

**Table 3 – Teachers’ characterization**

Teachers	Professional	Training	Other	Professional	Experience
	Primary Education	Special Education		Special Education	Total
A	X	-----	-----	13 years	18 years
B	X	X	-----	15 years	22 years
C	X	-----	-----	16 years	24 years
D	X	-----	-----	13 years	20 years
E	X	-----	-----	12 years	15 years
F	X	-----	Physical Education	1 year	7 years
G	X	-----	-----	3 years	6 years

In this group of seven teachers, only one has got a degree in special education and five of them have worked in special education for more than twelve years. The specialized training has been hold mainly in the big urban centres and the access for people working in peripheral areas such as this has been more difficult. A course in special education in this region is a necessity as it is demonstrated by the study done by Espírito Santo and Miguel (1992) and the report of the Special Education Department of the Ministry of Education (1991) when referring that only about 10% of teachers working in special education in the southern part of the country have a specialization.

## **DATA COLLECTED AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS**

### **Educational Programmes**

Most of the programmes (46 in 49) followed the same format, incorporating the orientations found in the 319/91 Law and already described here, which served as the basis for the structure adopted by the coordination team. The other three programmes were influenced by a model of curriculum organization for children and youngsters with mental handicap organized by Pereira and Vieira (1992).

As a common feature there is the fact that they were conceived for a horizon of a school year with an evaluation done every three months, based on the diary or weekly records some teachers say they keep.

The proposals only specify the areas, contents, objectives, and activities representing alterations to the normal curriculum and are implemented by the special education teacher in a resource room. Four of the programmes make a reference to a shared responsibility between the special education teacher and the regular class teacher.

What is established then in the programmes is all that has to be executed by the special education teacher while working with the child alone and there is no account of how the time the child is in the regular classroom is organized, and as can be seen in table 4, it is four or five times more than the time he spends in the resource room.

**Table 4 – Time and place of attendance**

<b>Place/Time Children</b>	<b>Resource Room Hours per week</b>	<b>Regular Classroom Hours per week</b>
17	3h 30m	21h 30m
13	5h 30m	19h 30m
2	>6h	<19h
17	No information	No information

The majority of children (17) had the support of the special education teacher about three and half hours a week. It is implicit that during the time the child is in the regular classroom, he shares with the other colleagues all the activities except for those which have been altered. In this study it was evident that most of the modifications recommended were in the learning process of mother tongue.

This raises the doubt whether the educational programmes should contemplate all the learning experiences in the different curriculum areas that either in the resource room or in the regular classroom, are intended to be developed with those children.

It could be of some advantage for the child, because it would force both teachers to a greater commitment and also a stronger curriculum articulation and consequently an educational project within a broader perspective.

These aspects came to show how restricted this study is and how necessary it is to develop larger scale and deeper researches that can evidence the educational solutions provided by schools as a whole in answering the needs of the children they attend to.

Being conscious of the limited nature of the programmes analysed and without trying to escape the main objectives of the study, an attempt was made to verify the type and amount of references to the artistic component in the programmes in the categories described. Table 5 gives a picture of these elements in what respects the first one:

**Table 5 – Children’s artistic skills and difficulties**

<b>Artistic Areas</b>	<b>Visual Arts</b>	<b>Music</b>	<b>Drama</b>	<b>Movement</b>
<b>Child</b>				
<b>Skills</b>  (described in 13 programmes)	Likes to draw  Likes colourful drawings  Draws human figure  Paints inside a limited area  Knows how to paint, to cut  Draws carefully  Shows imagination in drawings	Likes to sing and musical instruments    -----    -----	-----   Dramatizes everyday life events, real or imaginary    -----	-----   -----    -----
<b>Difficulties</b>  (described in 9 programmes)	Unable to draw general and simple figures  Unable to draw human figure  Unable to paint  Unable to cut	-----    -----	-----    -----	-----    -----

It looks evident the valorization of the instrumental aspects (e.g.: knows how to draw, to paint, to cut) and affective factors (e.g.: likes drawing or painting) related to the performance of the tasks. The fact that most of the items belong to visual arts may be a sign that graphic and pictorial representation are considered important to establish a diagnosis, with special emphasis for the drawing of the human figure.

The interesting aspect is that there is no reference to negative affective factors related to activities of an artistic nature (e.g.: not to like drawing or painting), which can reveal the pleasure those tasks offer and how through them the child with special educational needs can find a good means of expression as it was pointed out in the initial reflection of this study.

In what concerns the programme and its components, specially the areas of study, table 6 summarizes it:

**Table 6 – The programme and its components: areas**

<b>Areas</b>		<b>Frequency</b>
<b>Curriculum Subjects</b>	Portuguese	33
	Visual Arts	13
	Mathematics	4
<b>Developmental</b>	Social	3
	Communication	2
	Motor	2
<b>No Information</b>	_____	14

Eighteen of the programmes have reference to more than one area and most of the programmes are built on the basis of curriculum subjects, with special evidence for the Portuguese Language (appears in 33 programmes), which shows the importance given to the learning of reading and writing as the core for all the other learning experiences.

As it is at this level that most of the difficulties emerge the programmes' logic is a compensatory approach in order to develop skills where there is a deficient situation. As it was argued in the first part of this study this may be counter indicated.

In order to facilitate the analysis of the other components of the programmes the data is synthesized in table 7:

**Table 7 – The programme and its components: objectives and activities**

	<b>Visual Arts</b>	<b>Music</b>	<b>Drama</b>	<b>Movement</b>
<b>Objectives</b>  (described in 13 programmes)	Represent human figure  Develop taste for painting and drawing  Work with paper and modeling materials	Listen to children songs	-----	Coordinate large movements  Accompany music's rhythm with body movements and
<b>Activities</b>  (described in 27 programmes)	Text, sentences, words' illustrations  Paint, cut, collage, contour, draw (free orientated using different techniques)	Children songs	Dramatization of everyday life events or stories – real or imaginary  Experience different expressive forms of oral language	Dance to music

The objectives that, for their formulation, can be related to artistic areas appear only in 13 of the programmes and are mainly in the visual arts field.

The activities proposed within the artistic domain are expressed in 27 of the programmes and are mainly distributed among visual arts and drama.

It was confirmed that there was not always a straight correspondence between the objectives expressed and the activities through which they could be attained. To the activities proposed in the expressive areas do correspond mainly objectives related to the domain of the learning of mother tongue, being therefore an instrument at the service of oral and written communication skills.

Fifteen of the programmes mention evaluation criteria based on drawing and the answer to questions about it.

In general terms, the analysis of the programmes seems to show a weak expression of the artistic component and when it is present its role is rather limited. However there is coherence with the fact that programmes are orientated for the development of the domain and functionality of mother tongue.

## **Teachers' perspectives**

The analysis of the programmes raised some questions due in part to the lack of information. On the other hand the understanding of the teachers. Opinions about the programmes and their thinking about the issue discussed were considered of extreme importance to fill in some of the possible gaps. Therefore, on the basis of the framework described, the teachers' perspectives are synthesized in the following chapter.

### **Theme A - Identification of the Child for Special Education**

Everybody says that the first assessment is done by the regular school teacher, who at the usual school meetings presents the case and shows the need for having special education support. After this, the special education teacher observes the child, his skills and difficulties, having as a reference model the regular school curriculum, particularly in Portuguese language, since this is the area with which the colleagues from regular school ask for their help.

Some children have complementary assessment done by psychological or health services. When this is not the case the psychologist working in the special education team makes the necessary psychological assessment. One of the teachers criticized the fact that the diagnosis should be established by multidisciplinary teams, as the law states, but those teams simply don't exist.

The pedagogical assessment done by the special education teacher takes place outside the classroom context - in the resource room and/ or playground, individually or in small groups.

In what concerns the instruments adopted, the great majority of teachers seems to opt for a type of naturalistic observation, recording the child's behavior either in free or orientated activities. Two of the teachers say that sometimes they make use of systematic instruments such as checklists, behaviour inventories or other, but they don't apply them in a very strict way. Two other teachers say they have already applied some of those instruments but as they didn't know how to use the results, they didn't find them helpful.

The loose nature and incomplete form those documents reach people, without complete explanations and formative support, may contribute to these attitudes.

Three of the teachers feel they have difficulties in the assessment/evaluation process and recognize the need for better information and training at this level.

Having consciousness of this fact is important because teachers understand they can become more skillful and that a good assessment is undoubtedly a fundamental step for a better programme conception and a better answer to the needs of the children.

## **Theme B- Individual Educational Programme**

All the teachers state that when a completely alternative curriculum is not justifiable, the model they follow to build the programme is the curriculum of the regular school.

Conceived for a school year, the programmes highlight Portuguese Language and Visual Arts as stated by three of the teachers, while the other four give particular emphasis to Portuguese Language and Mathematics. They say that these are privileged areas not because they find the others less important but because it is in these areas that the children they work with show more difficulties and also due to the colleagues' solicitation.

These opinions are absolutely consistent with the programmes' data analysed, as stressed before.

The implementation of the programme takes place mainly in the resource room except when the child refuses to come out of the classroom or in the cases there is a better coordination among the two teachers, though these are rare.

It must be discussed and approved by the regular school teacher, but most of the times the articulation between both is not well succeeded. One of the reasons for this is the lack of time of the regular school teacher to work with that particular child or group of children, as stated by three of the teachers.

Questioned about the impact and influence of their work on the classroom management, three of the teachers say that when the colleague asks for their advice on the way to work with a certain child, and even though these are not immediately translated into practice, in the long run it may produce some effects.

It seems that it is in what respects the organization of the class groups that their influence is greater because there is legislative and inspection support.

Talking about the parents' participation, this same group of teachers reveal that in fact it occurs in a very limited way, since the majority of these families belong to low social classes and they tend to delegate everything on the teacher upon whom they rely. When children live in institutions, staff involvement seem to be greater, as stated by one of the teachers.

Four of the teachers confess their difficulties in the planning process and express the need for more training, without specifying those needs. The other three teachers say their difficulties lie more in the execution than in its design. The little time with the child and the big breaks between sessions make it difficult to attain the objectives set, which generates frustration.

One sees clearly how a child-centered approach in the way it has been referred seems to have less positive effects for all, including the special education teacher. If there is no support structure at the school level, if the results expected are not obtained, the guilt cannot be avoided and eventually the fear, either real or imaginary, of the devaluation of his own image among the other colleagues in school.

### **Theme C – Artistic Activities in the Individual Educational Programme**

All the teachers consider the creative and expressive activities of great importance for the development of children, most particularly for the language and communication development of inhibited children, for behaviour self-control and for the learning of reading and writing.

It is curious that there is no reference to creative development and to the therapeutic benefits of those activities besides the educational benefits. This may be explained by the fact that teachers do not consider educational sets as having a therapeutic effect.

The artistic activities developed are mainly in visual arts and drama, used both as a motivational strategy to enhance literacy learning, therefore they start with a story or a free text produced by the child or achieve them through painting or drawing.

Either orientated or free, the most common activities in visual arts are: drawing, painting, modeling, cutting and collage.

In drama, the interpretation of stories or children's everyday life events are the most frequent. The use of puppets is reported by one of the teachers.

Music is present in a very small percentage and it appears to be reduced to songs with the help of a tape recorder or simple instruments.

There appears to be a great consistence between what teachers say and what is written in the programmes, as drawn out before.

The difficulties to implement these activities are related to the short time teachers have and the fact that some of them, like for instance painting, require a great deal of previous preparation. The physical conditions of schools and rooms where teachers work as well as their lack of training in certain areas are other reasons pointed.

One of the teachers says to have participated in a refreshment course in musical education but thinks to lack capacities for this area. Another, who participated in a visual arts and physical education course, found it extremely important to improve practice. The teacher who has a degree in physical education applies that knowledge in extra- school programmes enrolling other groups of children.

When asked if those children had the sufficient quantitative and qualitative opportunities in the artistic domain when in regular classroom, the teachers said that the great majority of their regular school colleagues do not value them as they are regarded as recreation activities, therefore a loss of time. However they think this attitude is changing.

The devaluation attributed to those activities by colleagues influence their views on the issue and sometimes they don't value them as much as they should or would like to. One of the teachers says the special education teachers' work is evaluated and when the regular school teachers ask the child what he was doing

in the resource room and if they come to know there were too many of those activities, they try to exert some pressure arguing that the important is that the child learns how to read and write.

So they feel their work can be criticized and they end up by giving up, offering more opportunities for those artistic experiences to children who don 't need them so much, because they have regular school teachers who find those important.

Synthesizing the contents of the programmes and the interviews, there were quite a number of common features, some of which put in evidence along this text. One verifies that the accent on the observation/assessment of the child as a form of getting a 'picture' of his skills and difficulties is based on his answers to curriculum proposals, mainly in the area of mother tongue and that drawing appears as an important diagnosis instrument in order to evaluate the maturity level for the literacy learning.

The components of the educational programme are also at any level - areas, objectives, activities --mainly related to the Portuguese language, and when artistic activities are proposed they aim to the acquisition of skills thought as essential for language learning.

This shows that the artistic component is not valued by itself, with an autonomous status and contributing for the whole development of the child.

The teachers' lack of information and training on this domain deserves some reflection and needs to be studied.

On the other hand, the fact that the work of this group of special education teachers appears to be a little outsider, but in their view, highly controlled by the regular school teachers, leads certainly to less conflicting practices and maybe because of that less enriching as well.

The expressive and creative activities are of extreme importance for the development of social interactions and relationships. As they generally take place within a playful and free atmosphere, they can open space to a great diversity of learning experiences. And besides making possible a deeper knowledge into oneself and the others, they will have a reflection on the school atmosphere, with all the advantages it can bring to children's education.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

As a result of this exploratory study it became evident the need to develop further researches in this field. The analysis of regular school teachers' perspectives; the observation of a group of children with special educational needs in primary schools; the opinions of other special education teachers working in different social contexts and other schools with different management models must be considered and seem to be essential for a better understanding of the issue.

For what was possible to interpret it is important that people involved think about the type and quality of support which is being offered to children of this sort. The role of the special education teacher as a potential agent of change must also be reflected upon.

In the sequence of this work some training sessions with the teachers involved, and with the cooperation of the coordinator, have already been scheduled. The themes to be developed are related to all the phases of the planning process, from assessment to evaluation, and they will be based on the concrete problems faced by those teachers. Group reflection will help to find the best solutions, not forgetting the main goal which is to improve the quality of educational answers and to contribute for the best school and social integration of the child with special educational needs.

This type of intervention in small groups, departing from the reflection upon real problems is considered to have more positive and long-lasting effects (García, 1992; Schön, 1992).

To think of expressive and creative activities and of the richness they represent for the child's development in all its dimensions forces us to think about curriculum organization and educational programmes, in what may be enriching or impoverishing about them. Bringing it to consciousness leads to more adequate practices.

It seems also of great importance to reflect about the special education teachers' role in the educational process of these children and to consider other intervention perspectives that do not require necessarily a direct work with the child but will indirectly get to him in the end.

Finally, to be able to reflect on this issue at school level, a school with certain human and material characteristics, with particular forms of organization, inserted in a particular social and cultural context, is essential to develop a more effective practice.

## REFERENCES

- ACARTE/F.C.G. (Ed.) (1992). *Educação pela arte - pensar o futuro*. Lisboa: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian.
- ALONSO, L.G. et al. (1994). *A construção do currículo na Escola - uma proposta de desenvolvimento curricular para o 1º Ciclo do Ensino Básico*. Porto: Porto Editora.
- COSTA, I.A. (1992). 'Reflexão em voz alta', in ACARTE/F.C.G. (Ed.) *Educação pela arte - pensar o futuro*. Lisboa: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian.
- CUNHA, M.C.R.B. (1981). 'A Educação pela Arte'. *Revista Margem*, 4 (22), 14-18.
- ENSINO BÁSICO - Programa do 1º ciclo (1993). Porto: Porto Editora.
- ESPÍRITO SANTO, J.A.R. and MIGUEL, N.M. (1992). *Contributo para a Criação de um CESE em Ensino Especial, na Escola Superior de Educação de Beja*. Lisboa: Faculdade de Psicologia e de Ciências de Educação, non published.

GARCÍA, C.M. (1992). 'A formação de professores: novas perspectivas baseadas na investigação sobre o pensamento do professor'. In A. Nóvoa (Org.) *Os Professores e a sua Formação*. Lisboa: Publicações D. Quixote.

GUIA da REFORMA CURRICULAR - documentos de trabalho (1993) 2ª Ed.. Lisboa: Texto Editora Lda.

JEFFREE, D.M. (1986). *The education of children and young people who are mentally handicapped*. Paris: UNESCO.

KUCZAJ, E. (1990). 'Art therapy with people with learning difficulties'. In M. Liebmann (Ed), *Art therapy in Practice*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

LISHMAN, J.W. (1980). 'Movement leading to dance with ESN(S) children'. In *Communication and Handicap*, Report of BASE 80 -Congress for Special Education, Finland, 90-92.

MARKS, B. (1980). 'Creativity and Down's syndrome; observations and reflections on a vital link'. In *Communication and Handicap*, Report of BASE 80, Congress for Special Education, Finland, 98-99.

PARK, C. and FUSS, D. (1991) 'Drama as an educational and therapeutic medium for work with the mentally handicapped'. In *Rehabilitasie in S.A.* 35 ( 1) 20-24.

PEREIRA, M.C. and VIEIRA, F.D. ( 1992) *Um perspectiva de organização curricular para a deficiência mental*. Lisboa: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian.

SANTOS, A. (1982). 'Reeducação Expressivo-Musical e Dificuldades Escolares'. In *Revista do Desenvolvimento da Criança*, vol. IV, nº 1 e 2, 54-60.

SANTOS, J. (1988). *A Casa da Praia - o psicanalista na escola*. Lisboa: Livros Horizonte.

SCHÖN, D.A. ( 1992) 'Formar professores como profissionais reflexivos'. In A. Nóvoa (Org.) *Os professores e a sua Formação*. Lisboa: Publicações D. Quixote.

SCHWEBEL, M. and MAHER, C.A, (Eds.) (1986). *Facilitating Cognitive Development: international perspectives, programs and practices*. New York: The Haworth Press.

TANSLEY, A.E. and GULLIFORD, R. (1960). *The education of slow learning children*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

UNESCO ( 1994). 'Declaração de Salamanca sobre Necessidades Educativas Especiais: Acesso e Qualidade'. In Separata da Rev. *Inovação*, vol.7, nº 1.

UPTON, G. (Ed) (1979). *Physical and creative activities for mentally handicapped*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

## **LEGISLATION**

Decreto-Lei nº 286/89, de 29 de Agosto -Novos Planos Curriculares.

Decreto-Lei nº 319/91, de 23 de Agosto -Regime Educativo Especial.

Lei nº 46/86, de 14 de Outubro -Lei de Bases do Sistema Educativo.