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INNOVATION AND COOPERATION IN EDUCATION: THE IMPACT OF THE ``UNIÃO`` PROGRAM MAKES LIFE IN THE REGION: CENTRO SERRA/RS

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Abstract: This article presents data obtained through the Study Group of ``*União Faz a Vida*`` Program, which offers ongoing training for educators in the *Sicredi Centro Serra* region, based in Candelária, Rio Grande do Sul. The study addresses the analysis of methodologies, themes, results and challenges throughout three distinct phases: 2019, 2022 and 2023. Participants expressed high satisfaction and recommended the program, which represents a valuable opportunity for teachers to update their pedagogical practices and promote the exchange of knowledge among themselves, with the aim of improving the quality of education. The results obtained highlight the relevance of continued training for professional development and the advancement of excellence in teaching. The lessons learned highlight the importance of the active participation of teachers, who must be willing to share their experiences and carry out constant evaluations of their pedagogical practices. The ``*União Faz a Vida*`` Program represents a significant movement in valuing educators and in the continuous search for improving the quality of education.

Keywords: Education. Cooperation. Training. Methodologies. Search

INTRODUCTION

Within the scope of an analysis dedicated to the study of cooperativism, it is essential to find a favorable environment to implement practices that generate new perspectives in this field. In this sense, the objective of this report is to identify in the Study Group "*I Colmeia do Saber*", aimed at teachers participating in the "*A União Faz a Vida*" Program in the *Sicredi Centro Serra* region, based in Candelária, Rio Grande do Sul, a solid basis for the development of a humanizing education that strengthens cooperativism and enables educators to become disseminators of innovative pedagogical approaches,

emphasizing protagonism and cooperation among students.

The ``*União Faz a Vida*`` Program (PUFV), in the mentioned region, is based on the principles of cooperation and citizenship, aligning itself with a methodology that follows an investigative approach, promoting school cooperatives as a laboratory for learning cooperative practices. The program is aligned with the United Nations (UN) 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which establishes 17 objectives and 169 targets to ensure global sustainable development. Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 specifically focuses on ensuring inclusive, equitable and quality education for all. Although free education is a right guaranteed by law in Brazil, it still faces considerable challenges, especially due to the multiple social, economic and cultural inequalities that result in high rates of illiteracy in our reality.

The current scenario is characterized by profound transformations and uncertainties, which represents major challenges for the way society thinks and acts collectively and individually. Given this context, it is appropriate to carry out studies based on cooperative principles, which have a relevant connection with research and methodological approaches aimed at continued training in the educational area. For this, it is essential to have a theoretical-methodological basis that allows us to understand reality, as highlighted by González Rey (2011), who emphasizes the importance of working relationships between educators and students in a research and learning process that goes beyond cooperation, involving symbolic-emotional production. This way, the student becomes an active agent in the learning process, challenging educators and assuming a unique stance in the educational process.

In the present study, a qualitative approach is adopted, which allows for a broad

discussion involving a complex network of terms, concepts and assumptions related to educational, cultural and interpretative studies (DENZIN; LINCOLN, 2006).

According to Minayo (1994), qualitative research seeks to answer specific questions, dealing with a level of reality that cannot be quantified, but rather understood and interpreted by the researchers themselves.

In short, the central objective of this analysis is to explore the potential of ``*Colmeia do Saber*`` Study Group, belonging to the “*A União Faz a Vida*” Program, as a solid basis for the development of a humanizing education that strengthens cooperativism and empowers educators to adopt innovative pedagogical approaches. By embracing the principles of cooperation and citizenship, the program contributes to promoting inclusive, equitable and quality education, aligned with the objectives established by the United Nations 2030 Agenda. In this sense, the purpose of this report is to contribute to the improvement of educational practice, encouraging transformative education that is aware of the role of cooperativism in building a fairer and more sustainable future.

PROGRAM TRAJECTORY AND EVOLUTION

The ``*Colmeia do saber*`` Study Group was created in 2019 after an analysis carried out by the PUFV advisory and coordination group, as well as the demands presented by the schools and teachers involved in the program. The initiative arose from the need to innovate and provide something beyond what was already offered by the program to partner schools. In this context, the importance of establishing cohesive and concrete ties to multiply the idea of continued training for participating teachers was realized. The Study Group was then created, following the logic of cooperation, which has played a significant

role throughout the history of humanity, helping and promoting the survival of species (GAMBETTA, 1996).

It is crucial to highlight that cooperation is intrinsically linked to the evolution of humanity and the profound transformations throughout history, driven by a movement that values collective actions and the willingness of individuals to act collaboratively, contributing to a collaborative and sustainable social existence (SCHARDONG, 2020). From this perspective, the Study Group aims to encourage teachers, managers, supervisors and pedagogical coordinators to improve their educational practices, aiming to support students in building relevant, concrete and meaningful knowledge for their lives.

To recognize the continuous training of teachers as a constant process of improving the knowledge necessary for their professional performance, with the purpose of guaranteeing high quality teaching for students.

The *Sicredi Centro Serra PUFV* has a memorable trajectory, covering a period of 20 years and reaching a total of 115 schools, involving 1460 teachers in its 13 municipalities of operation. Within this context, the Study Group promotes a continuing education project through monthly meetings, organized into modules that address relevant topics, such as humanizing education, evaluation, innovation and cooperative education. In order to enrich these meetings, varied methodologies are used, such as dialogued explanation, bibliographic readings, seminars, group dynamics, flipped classroom and gamification.

Therefore, effective learning occurs when teachers are encouraged to experiment and experience the topics covered in their training, transforming knowledge into practical and meaningful experiences. Through this immersion, they become agents of transformation in the lives of their

students, inspiring them to seek knowledge in an engaged and collaborative way.

These pedagogical strategies are based on renowned theorists, such as Paulo Freire (1996), defender of education as a liberating practice, and Lev Vygotsky (1998), who highlights the importance of social interaction and the zone of proximal development in learning. Furthermore, the use of active methodologies and educational technologies is in tune with contemporary discussions about 21st century education and the demands of today's society.

It is essential to highlight that the Study Group is currently in its third year and has witnessed a significant increase in teacher participation with each edition. This characteristic is clear, since educators are invited to participate voluntarily, without calls or demands, which encourages their active participation.

Furthermore, the emphasis on the active participation of educators is in accordance with the principles of critical-social pedagogy by renowned authors such as Freire (1970) and Teixeira (1977). Both emphasize the importance of the active participation of educators and students in the educational process, promoting autonomy, critical reflection and social transformation. This way, the invitation and voluntary participation approach adopted by the Sicedi Centro Serra Study Group not only attracts the support of teachers, but is also based on theoretical perspectives that value freedom, participation and educational transformation.

EXECUTION AND ADAPTATION OF TRAINING

In 2019, when the group was initially implemented, it was subdivided into two classes, totaling 70 participants among teachers. Therefore, the continuing education initiative meets discussions about the

importance of continuing education in the professional development of teachers (CANDAU, 2002).

In 2020 and 2021, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, it was necessary to adapt the format of continuing education, taking into account the restrictions imposed by the pandemic context that made in-person study groups unfeasible. However, there was a reformulation and expansion of the training format, opening space for the participation of a significant number of teachers, not restricted only to the original Study Group participants, but to all teachers involved in PUFV. Surprisingly, this initiative had a significant response, with around 500 participants, which had a positive impact on the organizing team, exceeding expectations given the adverse circumstances of the moment.

The resumption of Study Groups in 2022 brought with it a new format, dividing the group into two distinct classes. The Initial Years Class brought together 40 teachers, while the Final Years Class involved another 40 teachers, totaling 80 participants. It is important to highlight that the proposal for continued training is an essential practice to promote the transformation of teachers' pedagogical practice (FREIRE, 1996).

In 2023, the classes received new names: the Deepening Class represents teachers who began their journey in the group created in 2019 and who are in the process of deepening their studies and practices; while the Beginners Class was created to welcome teachers interested in joining study groups. The Deepening Class has the participation of 60 teachers, while the Beginners Class has 50 participants, thus confirming the continuity and success of the continuing education initiative.

It is worth mentioning that the methodology used for the training process was designed with the aim of promoting

knowledge exchange between trainers and participating teachers. Therefore, the training is designed to be practical and applicable to any teacher in any of the schools, becoming a solid foundation for professional development.

This approach is aligned with the principles of critical-social pedagogy, defended by Teixeira (1977), which emphasizes the importance of the collective construction of knowledge and practice as a basis for educational transformation. Furthermore, the ideas of Hernandez (2012) also contribute to this context, as in his work "Continuous Training of Teachers: Practices and Reflections", discussions are held about the importance of teacher training as a continuous and reflective process, capable of enhancing pedagogical practices and promote the improvement of education.

In 2019, the group focused on studying a variety of topics that are of utmost importance to modern education. During this period, crucial themes were explored, including the fundamental skills required of teachers in the 21st century, the importance of incorporating affection into the learning process, pedagogy based on love, the application of active and innovative methodologies, the fundamental principles of *''União Program Faz a Vida''* (PUFV), and strengthening the autonomy of schools. This effort aimed not only to evaluate, but also to rethink pedagogical processes and structures, with the aim of maximizing the effectiveness of teaching and learning. The careful selection of these themes was carried out by the group of advisors and the PUFV coordination, ensuring that they were aligned with the needs and expectations of teachers, and thus significantly contributing to their continuous and reflective professional development.

In 2022, the methodology adopted for the training process underwent significant changes. Teachers were instructed through

a digital platform, where they had access to specific theoretical content. In addition, online mentoring was offered to help resolve doubts and provide closer monitoring. The topics covered were organized into thematic modules, covering issues such as cooperative games, the use of art as an assessment tool, the application of active methodologies, the National Common Curricular Base (BNCC), the promotion of a creative school, the theme of sustainability and the importance of adequate nutrition in the school environment. This structuring into modules allowed a more in-depth approach to each subject, providing participants with comprehensive and up-to-date training.

For the year 2023, the group's training was strategically divided into two distinct moments, reflecting an innovative approach adapted to the needs of the participants.

This organization took into consideration the creation of specific classes, aimed at groups of participants who were at different stages of professional development. This segmentation allowed each class to receive more personalized and focused training, with thematic approaches adapted to the particularities and requirements of its members. This structure not only facilitated a more relevant and effective learning experience for each group, but also reinforced the program's commitment to tailored, person-centered education.

The in-depth class covered topics such as Project Pedagogy, Inclusive Education, Cooperation at School, Digital Culture, Practical Workshops for Areas of Knowledge, Simplifying Public Speaking, and Socialization of Projects Developed based on the training carried out. These themes were selected to deepen participants' knowledge, providing them with a solid foundation for their educational practices.

In turn, the beginners' class was subdivided into seven modules, covering topics such

as Cooperative Games, Art of Evaluating, Active Methodologies, Common National Curriculum Base (BNCC), Making Oratory Easier, Sustainability and Identity, Time to Eat and Good Socialization Practices. This structure allows for a gradual deepening of different themes, ensuring that beginning teachers acquire a diverse repertoire of pedagogical knowledge, fundamental for the development of their educational practices.

This organization by themes and modules aimed to offer comprehensive and structured training, providing participants with the opportunity to explore different areas of knowledge and develop skills relevant to teaching practice. In this sense, authors such as Freire (1970) and Nóvoa (1992) highlight the importance of continuing teacher training as a fundamental process for professional improvement and improving the quality of education. Through these trainings, we seek to promote a critical and reflective approach, stimulating the collective construction of knowledge and the application of innovative methodologies, in consensus with the demands of the 21st century (BACICH, 2018). Furthermore, authors such as Hernandez (2012) highlight the need to offer support and tools for teachers to develop their skills and competencies, promoting a more meaningful and transformative education.

It is crucial to highlight that the training offered by Colmeia is carried out simultaneously in several cities participating in the program. This implementation model is strategically designed to ensure the inclusive participation of all teachers, regardless of their municipalities of origin. Furthermore, this simultaneity in training encourages the opportunity for meetings and exchanges of enriching experiences between educators from different schools and locations. This approach not only promotes equality in the educational process, but also

creates a conducive environment for sharing pedagogical practices, innovative ideas and diverse experiences, further enriching the learning process and professional development of teachers involved in PUFV.

RESULTS ANALYSIS AND FEEDBACK

To effectively advance towards new knowledge and improve educational practices, it is crucial to adopt cooperative principles and innovative pedagogical approaches (ROCHA, 2018; SCHARDONG, 2020). This combination of cooperation and innovation not only strengthens teaching but also enriches the learning environment. In this context, the results achieved during the training of the PUFV Study Group have been remarkably positive. This is largely due to the focus on challenging educators' accommodation, encouraging them to adopt an active stance in both teaching and learning (LIMA; SOUSA, 2016). This two-way approach emphasizes the importance of an education that is both receptive and expansive, where teachers are encouraged to not only impart knowledge, but also to be open to new ideas and methods, creating a continuous cycle of learning and innovation.

With the aim of evaluating the work carried out by the Study Group, an evaluation structure was implemented at the end of 2022 through a satisfaction survey. This initiative aimed to capture the perceptions and impacts experienced by educators in the proposed training. Below, we will present some of the evaluation moments that occurred. Upon completing the training in 2022, questions were asked, such as the following: "How do you evaluate the experience at the end of this training?" The results revealed that 84.2% of participants felt very satisfied, while 15.8% expressed satisfaction, with none of them expressing dissatisfaction.

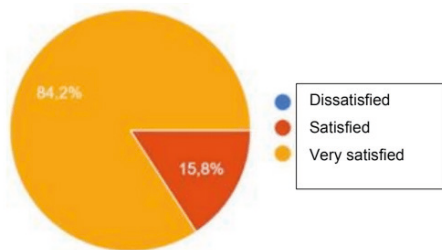


Figure 1 – Participants’ feelings at the end of the training in 2022. Question: How do you feel at the end of this training?

Source: Authors (2022)

Caption: How do you feel at the end of this training?

Note: Study Group satisfaction survey, 2022.

It is noted that the majority expressed a high degree of satisfaction, highlighting the effectiveness of the actions developed by the Study Group and reinforcing the importance of continuing to invest in training that meets the needs of educators.

In the second question, participants were asked about recommending training to other teachers. Surprisingly, 100% of respondents stated that they would recommend this training to their colleagues. This result shows the trust and appreciation that educators have in relation to the content and benefits provided by the training.

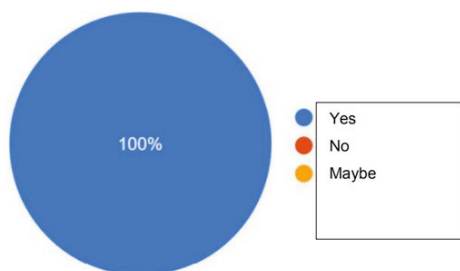


Figure 2 – Recommendation for future training in 2022. Question: Would you recommend this training to other teachers?

Source: Authors (2022)

Caption: Would you recommend this training to other teachers?

Note: Study Group satisfaction survey, 2022.

These data highlight the positive impact and relevance of the training promoted by the Study Group, reinforcing its role in the training and professional development of educators.

The evaluation approach for this year will be carried out at the end of each training, aiming to collect feedback and perceptions from participating educators. Below are some comments and suggestions made by educators at the end of the first training, which took place on April 27th this year, addressing the theme “Project Methodology in Education”:

“Excellent training, as always. ``Colmeia do saber`` exceeding my expectations!”

“Wonderful meeting full of lots of learning.”

“The topic covered, in this case projects, was very relevant. I loved it. More meetings like this.”

“Valuable meeting with collaborative work and lots of activity suggestions.”

“I believe that today’s experiences were very significant for us to think about the daily life of our schools. To also think that we need to have positive attitudes towards our students, to promote meaningful learning. We are all capable.” (Study Group satisfaction survey, 2023).

These comments express the satisfaction and appreciation of the participants in relation to the training, highlighting the relevance of the topic covered and highlighting the importance of collaborative practices in the educational environment. These insights contribute to improving future training and strengthening the teachers’ learning process.

DEVELOPMENT OF SKILLS AND ABILITIES

The Study Group provided the development of diverse potential in the participating educators. The mastery of innovative pedagogical methodologies, collaboration and teamwork, critical reflection on teaching

practice, and autonomy and protagonism stand out. These potentials strengthen pedagogical practice and contribute to improving education.

In 2019, with the aim of concluding the Group's activities, Good Practice Socialization Seminars were organized. During these events, teachers had the opportunity to present reports of experiences, sharing their successful pedagogical practices. This initiative promoted the exchange of knowledge and enriched the repertoire of the teachers involved.

In 2022, it was proposed to produce an ongoing e-book, which will contain reports of experiences from teachers participating in continuing education. These reports will be based on the practices developed by educators, using the knowledge acquired in training. Through this e-book, it will be possible to disseminate good educational practices and inspire other professionals in the field.

For this year, the in-depth class, made up of more experienced educators, was tasked with preparing a project to be developed with the students, using the knowledge acquired during the training. This initiative sought to promote more meaningful and engaging learning, exploring effective pedagogical methodologies and strategies. On the other hand, the beginners' class aims to build an experience report that reflects the experiences in the classroom, highlighting the challenges and learning that occurred in this context. These reports will be shared and discussed in a seminar scheduled for December 2023, providing a platform for reflection, exchange of ideas and professional growth.

In addition to encouraging the development of individual reports and projects in the classroom, teachers were also encouraged to present their work at larger events, such as the Interactive Exhibition of Student Production in Scientific and Technological Education (MoEduCiTec), organized by *Universidade*

Região Noroeste do Estado do Rio Grande do Sul (UNIJUÍ). This exhibition represented a significant opportunity for the appreciation and dissemination of student productions, playing a crucial role in encouraging the protagonism of students and teachers. Furthermore, it contributed significantly to the strengthening and visibility of scientific and technological education.

The participation of two Colmeia teachers in MoEduCiTec is a testimony to the effectiveness and relevance of the training offered. By accepting the challenge of presenting their projects at this prestigious event, these educators not only demonstrated the practical applicability of the knowledge acquired in training, but also reinforced the positive impact of these initiatives on the development of innovative and effective pedagogical practices. This experience highlights the potential that training has to enable teachers not only to improve their practices in the classroom, but also to actively contribute to the educational community.

At the end of each year, as a way of recognizing the effort and dedication of teachers in relation to the work carried out, they are awarded a certificate of 80 hours of training. This certification practice aims to value and highlight the commitment of educators to improving their pedagogical practices and their continuous professional development. Enhancing the recognition of the efforts invested by teachers, training certification reaffirms the importance of seeking qualification and constant updating, promoting a culture of continuous learning in the educational environment (FREIRE, 1996).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The ``*Colmeia do Saber*`` Study Group, at PUFV, faced challenges typical of the educational context, such as limited time, resources, and resistance from some teachers. To overcome them, efficient time management, search for additional resources, personalized monitoring, local contextualization, openness to changes and support in writing were adopted, aiming to improve pedagogical practices and the learning environment.

The training activities revealed valuable lessons learned: the importance of teachers' active participation, the need for flexibility and adaptation (especially during the pandemic), the appreciation of collaboration, individualized monitoring and the relevance of continuous assessment and constructive feedback. These elements contribute to the constant improvement of training, alignment with the needs of educators and continuous professional development.

The experience highlighted the importance of a culture of autonomous and continuous learning among educators, effective and open communication, and the alignment of pedagogical practices with the goals of modern education, focusing on skills such as critical thinking, adaptability, creativity and collaboration. Thus, ``*Colmeia do Saber*`` proves to be an inspiring model for global educational initiatives, influencing

the evolution of pedagogical practices in line with the demands of the 21st century and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

THANKS

Our sincere gratitude to the president, board, management and all employees of *Sicredi Centro Serra* for their valuable support for educational initiatives. Your contribution has been essential to the development and success of significant activities in this crucial sector.

We also extend our thanks to ``*Sicredi União*`` for its generous encouragement and continued support in the area of education, especially through ``*União Faz a Vida*`` Program and other educational projects. Your dedication and commitment are fundamental to enriching education and making a lasting impact on our community.

These collaborations, strengthened by cooperation between the parties involved, are fundamental to the advancement of education, reflecting a genuine commitment to the growth and well-being of all participants. The union of efforts demonstrates how collective work can transcend barriers and create significant educational opportunities. We are deeply grateful for this inspiring partnership and the positive and lasting impact it has generated, highlighting the strength of cooperation in building a more promising future in education.

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