

Potential circumstances to special education needs in circus artist's children, when travelling

(Circunstancias potenciales de las necesidades de educación especial en los niños artistas del circo, cuando viajan)

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RESUMEN

Este estudio pretende comprender el fenómeno educativo de las necesidades en los niños del circo, en la escuela primaria. Su escolaridad es irregular, interrumpida y basada en sucesivas y dolorosas relaciones de reconstrucción, lo que lleva al abandono precoz. La metodología de la investigación es doble, cualitativa y cuantitativa. La población ha sido: los propietarios de todos los circos portugueses (18/2008), los artistas con sus niños en la escuela primaria, estos niños y sus profesores en las escuelas itinerantes que han recibido alumnos en la Región de Lisboa. En el análisis de datos se identifican varios contextos/circunstancias y se caracterizan como posibles ambientes de necesidades educativas especiales, asociadas a la escuela viajera. La solución propuesta es una mezcla de enseñanza presente en movimiento, con el refuerzo del aprendizaje mediante una relación virtual. Esto significa una adaptación del año escolar al calendario del circo. Por último, se trata de analizar la variable crítica "tiempo" y convertirla en un recurso educativo.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Necesidades educativas especiales, alumnos itinerantes, interrumpe el aprendizaje, necesidades educativas, el horario escolar, la diversidad, el valor educativo de la diferencia, en la escuela para todos, compartir la responsabilidad educativa.

ABSTRACT

This study intends to understand a phenomenon of educative indigence in the circus children, in primary school. Their schooling is irregular, interrupted and based on successive and painful relations reconstruction, leading to the school precocious drop-out. The investigation methodology is dual: qualitative and quantitative. The target-population groups the owners of all the Portuguese circuses (18/2008), his artists with children in the primary school, these children, and their teachers, in schools that received itinerant pupils, in the Region of Lisbon.

In the data analysis, several contexts/circumstances are identified and characterized as potential environments for special education needs, associated to the school travelling. The proposed solution is a blend of movable present teaching, with reinforcement of learning in virtual relation, and volunteer school travelling. This means an adaptation of the school year to the circus calendar, finally turning the critical variable 'time' into an educative resource.

KEY WORDS

Special education needs, itinerant pupils, interrupted learning, educative indigence, school time, diversity, educative value of the difference, school for all, sharing educative responsibility.

(Pp. 29-46)

Introduction

The itinerant way of life, usually makes people think about the beginning of the human saga of populating the planet, thousands of years before the shy agricultural adventures forced the sedentary way of life as norm, and the possession of the land as a civilization value for which it was worth killing or dying. Between the cultural valuation of the territorial roots and the migratory adventures forced by the irrepressible expansionist spirit, survived some residual forms of itinerant life, almost always understood as strange and slightly reliable. This various classic travelling groups include roma or gypsies, show or fairground people, circus people, bargee or boat people, seasonal workers and 'new travellers', sometimes called hippies or new age travellers...

Today, the frenetic aiming to tame the promised lands of the globalization brought new opportunities to different new itinerant ways of life.

In the EU, the number of people integrating the classic traveller communities is about one million.

But, how is their relation with the School?

This article intends to understand the phenomenon of educative indigence in the children of the circus, in Portuguese primary school. These children are compulsory protagonists of perverse schemes of discontinuous learning, in a *via crucis* of ephemeral and painful school relations, pedagogically aberrant, until the time, after the age of 15, brings them the safety of the self exclusion, through earlier drop-out. In Portugal, only one of these

circus itinerant pupils succeeded to enter the secondary school!

1. Research process

1.1. The methodology

The research methodology is dual, with semi structured interviews as qualitative method, and quantitative data collection through questionnaire. The target population includes the owners of all the Portuguese circuses (18/2008), their artists with children in the primary school, these children, and the teachers who received itinerant pupils, in the Region of Lisbon. The samples for the interviews include 6 itinerant pupils, 7 artists and 3 circus owners. The teachers' sample, for questionnaire, includes 50 primary teachers.

This methodology has been used by the researcher Betty Jordan for his inquiry on the relations of the itinerants with the school, using also quantitative strategies in other studies carried out in Scotland, on the same problematic: *"By drawing on both quantitative and qualitative data from a variety of providers and Traveller clients, it has been possible to construct the multidimensional factors which contribute to Travellers' attendance and achievement rates."* (Jordan, 2001: 120).

It is a combined method used as told also by Patton: *"Qualitative evaluations use qualitative and naturalistic methods, sometimes alone, but often in combination with quantitative data. Qualitative methods include three kinds of data collection: (1) in-depth, open-ended interviews; (2) direct observation; and (3) written documents."* (Patton, 2003: 64).

2. Research strategies and instruments

- a) Questionnaire for statistical data of the pupils' circus population
- b) Interviews:
 - b.1) Circus Owners
 - b.2) Parents/relatives of itinerant pupils
 - b.3) Itinerant pupils
- c) Questionnaire applied to teachers who received itinerant pupils
- d) Observation Protocol
- e) Analysis of Documents

3. Pertinence and limitations of the Study

This is a less equated problematic, always diluted in the most visible problematic of the ethnic itinerants, namely Gypsies, and, for that reason, with few or none concrete solutions.

The same observation was made by the researcher Betty Jordan: *"Looking for causes of Traveller underachievement and rejection of schooling has occupied few research"* (Jordan, 2001: 120)

The reduced knowledge produced and added by the academic national research in correlative areas, only occurred in the problems of the school integration with ethnic minorities, and it seems the same happens in the different countries of the European Union, in spite of several Communitarian Recommendations and Resolutions, since the decade of 70, revealing preoccupation with the schooling of the itinerant children.

The different governments were adopting political measures, with

bigger or less shyness and boldness, namely in Spain, in Holland and in the United Kingdom, but hardly ever the quality and reach of these measures suited systematic research in the complex problematic of the itinerants' school inclusion, with the notable exception of Scotland, where the STEP-Scottish Traveller Education Programme, in the University of Edinburgh, has been producing systematic knowledge and innovative technical proposals, for the inclusive schooling of the different types of itinerant pupils.

So, I must consider the total suitability of the present work, admitting that, in spite of the obvious crisis in the circus activity, keeps on existing for a long time the 'circus world', with the problems of schooling that result from their particular way of itinerant life, and the obvious necessity of extending to every school level the well-adjusted educational initiatives for the real educative necessities of the itinerant pupils in Portugal, and, especially in the inferior levels of the basic school, up to now least considered in the initiatives of special educative politics for the circus children. So, it is basic to produce research that brings systematized knowledge to the problematic and opens new perspectives of action. However, others can be also the reasons for this pertinence:

- It is a practical study, in terms of resources and methodology;
- It has critical amplitude, since it fills out completely the choice's initial motivation, as well as the expectation of reaching significant results;
- It is interesting, from the point of view of my basic formation and to go deep in my competences, and technical skills;

- Its theoretical value seems clear, because it fills out a space in this research area and may add some knowledge to the education sciences;
- It will assume practical value, while pointing to new lines of research and identifying possible solutions in educative organization, facing a more inclusive schooling for these pupils;

4. Definition of the problem

In accordance with the DGIDC (General Direction of Innovation and Curricular Development), in 2007 have been counted 252 itinerant pupils, from the pre-school to the 3.th level, changing from school to school several times in each academic year.

The data available in this year do not permit a straight relation with any type of itinerancy and they refer to a highly unstable population, so it was not possible to separate the numbers of the circus population from total. In the year of 2008, the appropriate numbers point two types –circus and fairground people– however, a confirmation is impossible because of the itinerant instability of these families and because of the absence of trustworthy statistic mechanisms.

While we advance in the analysis of those data, by school level, the first observation is the reduced increasing of the enrolment numbers, which certainly means a strong school drop out.

The effort for a rigorous knowledge of the dimension and characteristics of this group of children, integrating the population target of this study, is important to the research success.

However, in spite of the publication of several charts and calculations, there is no counting, census or statistical official document, which may guarantee the statistic rigour, which, as a matter of fact, was already noted by different international studies when trying to know the real dimension of the problem: *“From the data received from the Member States it was possible to estimate the circus population in the Union (see Table 12), although it was difficult to know with any degree of accuracy just how many children or young adults of compulsory school age are present”* (European Parliament, 2003: 156).

In fact, for the academic year of 2007/08, the DGIDC referred numbers only for the 1st level of the Basic School –91 itinerant pupils, 56 from the circus and 35 from fairground people. However, in direct contacts carried out with the owners of all the circuses, we can check a strong discrepancy of numbers– in accordance to their declarations, the circus artists' children in the primary school, are 21. We have conscience of the changeability of these data, owed to the already above-mentioned high rotation of the artists and to the frequent recombination of the circus companies. These are the possible data in a determined time.

Pre-school	1st level	2nd level	3rd level	Secondary
33	169	32	18	0

Figure 1. Itinerant pupils enrolled in 2007, by school level.

CIRCUS	OBSERVATIONS
MONTE CARLO	Açores (March) - 0 pupils Primary school
DAVID CARDINALI	Espanha (March)- 3 pupils Primary school
V. HUGO CARDINALI	Zona Centro (March) - 0 pupils Primary school
AMERICANO	Abrantes (March)- 0 pupils Primary school
MUNDIAL	- 3 pupils Primary school
SOLEDAD CARDINALI	Fig da Foz (March)-parado remodelação - 0 pupils
CHEN	S. João da Madeira (March)-3 pupils Primary school
LUFTMAN	Zona centro (March)-1 pupils Primary school
IMPERIO CARDINALI	- 1 pupils Primary school
BRASIL	Açores (March)-0 pupils Primary school
MERITO	- 1 pupils Primary school
TORRALVO	Bragança (March)-0 pupils Primary school
CLAUDIO CIRCUS	Bragança (March)-0 pupils Primary school
CIRCOLANDIA	Sintra (March)-1 pupils Primary school
WALTER DIAS/ATLAS	Sintra (March)-2 pupils Primary school
INTERNACIONAL	Algarve (March)-0 pupils Primary school
ROYAL	Zona centro (March)-4 pupils Primary school
DALLAS	Açores (March)-2 pupils Primary school
	Total 21 pupils Primary school

Figure 2. Circuses in Portugal, 2008.

5. Objectives

5.1. General objective

To this list must be annexed the *Cirque du Soleil*, which acted in Lisbon some weeks in April and May of 2008, having been included also in the field works for gathering observation data. The pupils of this school were not considered for statistical effects.

- The social-school situation of the circus artists' children, in the Primary School, mainly the special educative necessities (SEN) linked to their itinerant way of life.

5.2. Specific objectives

- The point of view of the circus businessmen, on the schooling problematic of the children in their artistic population, namely the circumstances, the opinions and proposals, and contributions from the circus community, eventually convertible in proposals of solution for the identified problematic;
- The point of view of the parents with children in primary school, as for their school representations and school success, cultural identity and integration in the active life, restrictions, proposals, strategies and alternative or complementary solutions for an inclusive schooling;
- The point of view of the teachers receiving these pupils, namely on the circumstances and contexts (attitudes, conditions and difficulties) of welcome, necessities of formation, and predisposition for the change, aiming at new inclusion practices, susceptible to be tested and validating in the national context, inside a new education paradigm, in constant reconstruction, and the share of the educative responsibilities-school / family /enterprise.
- The pupils point of view, namely their school learning representations, the familiar learning, the relational instability, factors of exclusion, trying to identify particular types of exclusion, failure and / or special educative necessities;
- Compare the public strategies to this problematic in different States of the European Union, through the analysis of documents telling correlative experiences occurred in other countries of the EU.

6. Validation of the research instruments

The validation of the research instruments was done by a panel of four PhD. experts in four different Iberian Universities, through a 'protocol of validation'.

7. Results and analyses

The content analysis, from data gathered through the application of the research instruments, consists in their treatment, aiming: *"... to understand critically the sense of the communications, his obvious or latent content, the explicit or hidden significations."* (Marconi and Lakatos, 2002: 92) process that produces ideas in the researcher and that, according to Bogdan and Biklen (1994:218) recommendation, must be enough speculative not to curtail the creativity, as the affirmation of the ideas lacks only for plausibility face to the observed data, and not of demonstration. They also recommend the 'use' of the data, in a lonely process of reflexivity, as if they were 'chewed', until the necessary energy is produced to his clarification and register in concluding text.

The application of all the identified and proposed instruments permitted to collect, to negotiate and cross the necessary and sufficient data, in order to support an analysis of concluding characteristics.

7.1. Treatment of data gathered through interviews

The analysis of the data gathered in several interviews was carried out by creating a prior categorical system, through an inductive way, with the support of specific software, namely the NUDist 6, which had been already used in the explorative

interviews. So, after the graphic transcription of the interviews, from the audition of the digital registers, different and successive reading were made to identify the dimensions and respective categories, which composed a basic categorical system, from the texts' reduction to qualitative data, that produces interpretations and conclusions.

7.2. treatment of quantitative data

In the present case, the total number of answers, 50 (fifty), determined the manual way of treatment, without using informatic tools.

The number of subjects was related to each answer, obtaining frequency data. The analytical reading of these frequency data, in each considered variables, as well as its crossing with other qualitative data, obtained through other instruments, permitted to speculate with plausibility supported in the data, leading to the researcher's opinions and conclusions.

7.3. Data gathered through observation

During the field works, four sessions of specific observation were carried out, in four schools:

- Two in urbane environment, one in rural environment, in regular school classes with itinerant pupils, in order to observe phenomena, associated to the integration of those 4 itinerant pupils, two boys and two girls, in regular school environment;
- another one in an itinerant school, of a great international circus, in a class formed by 8 itinerant pupils, of several nationalities, from 6 to 15 years old.

The above-mentioned observations were registered in 'observation notes', also used in the crossing of data that sustained the conclusions.

8. Conclusions and implications

8.1. Final considerations

In a qualitative research, the aim of the researcher is the inductive construction of abstractions, materialized in conclusions, as result of the organized accumulated data crossing, gathered from the application of the validated instruments, predicted in the investigation design.

The present work, developed in a systematic way, in successive stages, began by defining the study object, its relevance and limitations, the research type and design, to be focused in the construction and validation of the instruments, which, when passed the final proof of its theoretical validation, could be launched, with high level of comfort and sufficient degree of certainty, in the practical terrains of searching, based on a design with internal validity.

We have no doubt that the itinerant pupils present particular challenges, educative specific and special necessities, which only differ from other *sen* in the origin, and not in the particular challenges of demand and attention to the diversity they put to the School.

- Which educative necessities are these?
- Which are their causes and origins?
- How are they shown and which aspects they assume?

- How does the School accept them?
- Which consequences do they usually have?
- Are there any solutions to identify and answer them, in the school context?

In this case, perhaps more than in any other, the question is 'simply' not to identify, diagnose or find pedagogic and educational answers for special educative necessities brought into the School by pupils, more or less typified, bearers of physic handicaps, like the blindness or the members' paralysis, or 'different' behaviours like the autism or the hyperactivity. The pupils considered in the present study are not different from the majority, without obvious demonstration of the 'differences', up to now, necessary and sufficient so that the School noticed, with pedagogic attention, their rich diversity, accepting as having special educative necessities, lacking for differentiated answers, their 'differences' should be faced like a resource and a surplus value, helping their inclusion in the groups of welcome, and not 'treated' with the reinforcement of segregator compensatory practices. All this because the economical survival of their families suits a functional restless way of life, at the same time unpredictable and governed by climatic calendars and working seasons, and this is less compatible thing with the rigidity of two 'school critical variables' - space and time.

The social and cultural environment where they born and raise, has a common aspect in the construction of their concepts of space, time, group, professional formation, social inclusivity, representations of future ... –the itinerancy!

7.2. Characterization of the potential circumstances for special education needs, associated to the itinerant schooling

While the gathering of the data advanced, through the documents' analysis, the observations in natural environment, the application of the research instruments and its reduction, some evidences were revealed, which seemed associated to the itinerancy, and characterized the contexts where the special educative necessities of the itinerant pupils, children of the artists of circus, appear and grow:

- *Interrupted learning*: the discontinuity assumes several forms, from the successive ephemeral contacts with many different schools in each academic year, to the partial sedentary schooling mixed with periods of school itinerancy, and the mixed situation that includes also sedentary partial times in itinerant schools, when integrated in international circuses. The precarious work of the families is a determinative factor in the type of schooling and in the level of discontinuity.
- *Precocious school drop out*: though the affirmation of a new representation of the children schooling value is common in the circus families, as it guarantees their future social inclusion, the statistical data proves that the precocious desertion is high, and not even the compulsory frequency of the ninth year of schooling is guaranteed, when they reach the age limit of fifteen years old, without finishing this school level, they generally choose the definite de-

sersion and the return in exclusive to the circus activity. There are no registers of enrolment in the secondary school, and the rare cases of frequency of professional secondary schools, based on forced sedentary life solutions, were changed again and again for a definitive return to the circus life.

However, the current option for the continuity of the familiar artistic activity, in detriment of the school regular formation, seems to give up space to the resignation of the compulsory schooling, with practice of several total or partial sedentary life schemes, and even with desertion from the circus activity for some families with less success in the artistic employment. However, this change does not seem to guarantee better levels of school success, since the data keep on revealing total desertion in the end of the compulsory school, with no case of continuity in secondary, professional school or university; not even any case of familiar effort was detected to contradict the will expressed by the children of leaving the school to regain definitively the circus.

- *Absence of articulation between the formal teaching and the familiar apprenticeship:* more than a tradition, the familiar apprenticeship is a mechanism of group cohesion, horizontal while it opens space to the straight participation of the child in the familiar economy and begins to guarantee their statute of wealth producers inside the group /circus enterprise, and vertical because it establishes generational bridges in the continuity of the artistic skills that build the name of the family, reproducing and perpetuating his social statute.

However, for the circus families it is now inevitable to prepare the future of their children, also opening them new windows of opportunity, which supposedly the school regular teaching would guarantee. But they all want to have access to a school that could respect their times of artistic familiar apprenticeship, their new and different spaces in constant mobility, a school that could prepare them for the new challenges of the life in a global world, also using their own competences, which would help to form the groups of welcome, as a surplus value in the constant negotiation of their full inclusion.

Their children, when the age of the options arrives, could make a free choice, but, in secret, they believe the choice would be always the circus life.

- *Dysfunctionality in several critical variables of the school teaching:*

- a) School space. A school is a building, delimited by walls and fences, which determine the control of entries and exits through security mechanisms; inside these buildings we find the equipments and educational available resources; it is the teachers' working place, to whom time-tables are previously distributed, controlled by administrative proceedings and commanded by strident and punctual bell rings; in these built sets, the parents deposit their children daily, in the presupposition that their educative responsibility is interrupted and lifted while the last daily bell ring will not strike; everything recommences the day after, except in the summer months because the right to the beach holidays does not admit

compatibility with this unquestionable system of educative seclusion. In this grotesque drawing, unfortunately as real as a portrait, there is no way to understand the 'school space' as a basic 'critical school variable'. It seems, there is a secret and diabolical pact between school space and school time so that, in spite of the constant changes in the remaining critical variables, because of that invariability, the whole System is perpetuated inalterably. And, if for a sedentary community this invariability even can be seen as a guarantee of the System dignity, created to be respectable and eternal, for an itinerant community, always taking life lessons from the constant contacts with new places and different people, each approach to the regular school is nothing more than a compulsory social obligation. It would be different if the school, every time it has the privilege to welcome an itinerant pupil, goes out from its usual space, in order to visit, with sense of learning, the fascinating ephemeral space of the circus' *chapiteau* and caravans, not even in the magic hour of the show, being able to understand the environment of a culture that can bring new educative resources to the school. In the collected data, it is obvious that the circus families are ready for an active and intervenient share of the educative responsibility with the school. This was what we could observe in the itinerant school of a great international circus.

- b) School time. There will never be a regular / formal schooling for the itinerant, while the System persists in protecting the sacred taboo of the 'critical school variable time' invari-

ability! From this invariability do not result any pedagogic advantages for the common pupils, but the dread of disturbing the urbane routines of the families with children in the school, is the best security wall for this taboo. We know, the time of the school fills out each academic year, which corresponds to each different school level, being only different from the calendar just because of the interruptions for holidays, dictated by two great Christian festivities and the most favourable climate conditions to spend holidays in the beach; the academic year is divided in trimesters or semesters, on the pretext of the evaluation times; inside these time unities, the School Administration fits in the workloads attributed to each discipline, crossed with the working limits of its teacher, to build the annual puzzle that is a teachers' school timetable; the different classes adapt their particular, familiar and social times to the stuck time-table; normally each school time varies in different school levels, but usually it is contained between two bell rings; the intervals act like separators of time, space, personal relations, contents, activities ...; in the weekend the school is closed. Others, and quite different, are the times of the itinerant pupils. The climate conditions dictate the season, which begins with the first sunshiny days, in February or March, intensifies in the summer months when they must bring amusement to the enormous masses of people in the beach, ending with the first October threats of atmospheric instability. In Christmas time, the circus makes a big effort to re-put the activity for a few days. Then pause time comes,

for the materials mending and change de artistic staff.

In these times of dilated stopping, the school is always the same and the relations with colleagues and teachers seem to stabilize. But the new season arrives again with the dictatorship of the ephemeral permanences... During the season, every week have seven days, but with a different activity distribution from the sedentary routines: *matinées* and *soirées* every weekend, resting in Monday, lifting in Tuesday and leaving for a new destiny the circus businessman believes to have potentialities; reached the new destiny, after many kilometres of travel in heavy vehicles, is time to obtain the licences for the caravans' installation and for the circus activity, to spread the show propaganda, to assembly the equipments and return to trainings; if the meteorology permits, the shows will recommence in the weekend; meantime, since their caravan is installed, the parents search for a school, the son will have to frequent in the next three or four days; with luck, the teacher will get a space in the room where he could be accommodated in these few days, but today the class is almost finished... and it almost impossible to begin the evaluation diagnosis, before boarding the contents of the group's curricular project...

The non coincident time between academic year and the circus season, the time discontinuity in the activities used to support the circus art, the invariable rigidity of the school time-tables, have as a consequence a frequent school drop out, with low levels of diligence, when compared with the school predicted times, and a rate of

punctuality lower than the demanded, depending on the short periods of rest after long travels, or on the participation in shows that end too late. It is not possible to adapt the itinerant times to the School common times, so it remains the alternative, and the challenge that the School may rethink 'its own time' as a resource, a critical variable, at the service of 'its clients', the pupils. Curiously, the data gathered from the teachers, reveal the possibility to study the adaptation of the school times to the personal times of the pupils, however without accepting the hypothesis of changing the academic year time limits.

- c) Curricular contents. The collected data reveal the lament of the parents for the immense diversity of manuals and curricular contents with what their children are confronted in each school. Most of them have references, especially the oldest, to one single book, or when the manuals could pass from the oldest brothers to the newest, being easier for them to check their school progress. Now they have more difficulty in understanding that the school autonomy is reflected also in the establishment, year after year, of a new ccp-class curricular project, supposedly in articulation with the representatives of the local communities, and linked to the specific characteristics of each group of pupils, revealed in the evaluation diagnosis. Naturally the itinerant pupil could not be considered in the initial design of the ccp Project.

So, how is the teacher expected to proceed, whenever he accepts in his class a circus itinerant pupil? The research points to a general effort of the

ccp Project adaptation to the itinerant necessities. It seems that the biggest problem is the difficult in identifying, through evaluation diagnosis, these difficulties or necessities, because of the short permanence in the class, which gathers the insufficient use that generally appoints the particular dossier that accompanies the pupil in his dislocations, and what supposedly should reflect with clarity the continue evaluation produced by the successive teachers. The research revealed that the preparation of these dossiers does not usually subject to any criterion that guarantees objectivity and amplitude in the evaluation, and very often the parents take it as a more bureaucratic imposition, instead of a school progress tool, therefore having not the care to guarantee that the children should always take this document with them in the arrival to each new school. For this, the approach to grammatical contents is not always justified with an educational criterion, being very often a repetition of already dominated knowledge, or a succession of supposedly compensatory practices, the mere occupation of the school times with school activities. Some of the produced school works will thicken the volume of the pupil's particular dossier, making that educational puzzle more indecipherable to the next teacher ...

- d) Human references. Among all the regular school critical variables, this is perhaps the one which puts more challenges of resistance and adaptability to the itinerant pupil.

Violently pulled out from his group, where the mechanisms of socialization only begun to consolidate, in-

side a small circle of familiar references, supported by the progressive integration of a specialized lexicon in the expression of their own culture, these children, only six years old, are turned into some frequent and systematic visitors of a countless number of schools, where the different teachers are supposed to add competences and knowledge, added up and registered in a particular dossier, which permits them to end the formal compulsory school with 'success'. And although there is no register of any school's ostensible rejection, excepted some segregation reports due to confusions with Gypsy pupils, is certain that 'the circus boy' fascination produced in the regular classes is disappearing, and there are reports of difficulties of acceptance in some schools 'for lack of place', obliging the parents to the supplementary effort of transporting them daily to other distant schools.

Obligated to establish new relations with new colleagues and new teachers, in a frantic weekly rhythm, and cut abruptly these relations, in order to build another ones, with the same ephemeral destiny, it is natural that these children produce affective defensive mechanisms, which help them to suffer this experience without developing irretrievable traumas.

The research data reveal different strategies used to face the problem –from shyness, to the apathy with which they try to pass unnoticed, hoping those days go by fast, even to the immediate demonstration of natural or leadership behaviours, as if those colleagues and those teachers were only 'variants' or 'different ver-

sions' of the previous ones. However, there are reports of more traumatic cases, in which the cut of affect with colleagues or teachers produced painful marks, even some virtual contacts, as the e-mail, couldn't soften. There is a clear conviction in the teacher's professional group, that the relational discontinuity which affects the itinerant schooling is strongly responsible for the high taxes of school failure and school drop out in these pupils.

Most of these pupils 'choose' one of the teachers as a constant reference, developing with him an affection of memories, and it would be logical that this 'chosen' teacher assumed the constant tutorship of the pupil, as 'the school-mother's teacher', instead of what happens generally, that the 'school-mother' is the school of the first enrolment, in the pupil's family formal area of residence, whose teacher assumes the school's constant distance attendance, through the reception of the working papers that the pupil develops in several schools, very often he had never seen the pupil, because the itinerants have no fixed residence, only a postal address which they visit during short periods – so, this kind of 'school-mother' is something like a 'belly for rent', which allows the physiologic development of the embryo, but does not produce a son, because it does not establish any affection link ...

- e) Using strategies and educative resources. The full integration of the pupils with special educative necessities in an inclusive school, which dedicates attention to the diversity, supposes the use of educational appropriate resources and, especially

the development of strategies of collaborative work. However, the research data show that rarely the teachers look for help next to colleagues, assuming an obligation of a bigger personal effort of personalized attendance of the itinerant pupil, with reinforcement of the supposedly compensatory activities. Rarely the specific artistic competence of these pupils are seen as pedagogic resources useful to the group's formation, and more rarely the parents collaboration is used in the school activities, with potentialities of collaborative participation, for instance the physical or artistic activities, losing the opportunity for the inclusivity reinforcement and the knowledge sources diversification.

The use of TIC (new technologies of information and communication) as support to the itinerant pupils schooling, is seen by parents and teachers as a complementary tool of the essential present teaching, although the access and use of these equipments is current in the circus communities, they show no favourable opinion to the exclusive use of e-learning, but they are in favour to a mixed formula of blended-learning, with personal tutoring of the real school-mother's teacher.

- f) Evaluation. The above-mentioned particular dossier, which should accompany the itinerant pupil in his school itinerancy, containing evaluative registers of progresses and revealed difficulties, as well as examples of the school works developed in the different curricular areas, as shown in the research, is not even mentioned in 50 % of the answers, which presupposes a less care of the parents in its conservation and presen-

tation in the schools, with the obvious complaisance of many teachers which, because of the disparity of criteria, or their lack, in its preparation and organization, they don't recognize as a support to the evaluative diagnosis of the itinerant pupils. And the 'school-mother' teacher, who has the responsibility to receive and collect the information sent by the several schools where the itinerant pupil has passed, has also the competence to give out an evaluative final dispatch, unless he hasn't had the opportunity to know personally the pupil... The successive permanencies of three or four days in each school, are a sufficient justification for the teachers not to accomplish a good part of this scarce time carrying out an evaluation diagnosis, preventing them, in practice from adapting the pcc project to the ephemeral stay of just one more pupil, though this was his purpose. The data show also that a great part of these pupils' school 'success' can be attributed to a continuous levels' lowering, in comparison with the sedentary colleagues, allowing them to advance in the next levels, if possible even to the conclusion of the compulsory schooling, before the option for the school drop-out becomes irresistible.

However, there are reports of effective success in itinerant pupils, thanks to a personal motivation and a relevant familiar pledge, turning the difficulties into winning challenges.

On the contrary of most of the cases of itinerancy, in which the school success levels are generally low, in the itinerant school, associated to the great international circus, the success levels, checked by national examinations, are particularly high;

- *Deficit on teachers' basic and specific formation:* the basic formation of the teachers does not include curricular or pedagogic strategies, special for working with itinerant pupils. The levels of participation in actions of continuous formation in order to acquire the competences to support a responsible work with these pupils, are very reduced. The Educative Administration doesn't promote this type of continuous formation. Nevertheless, paradoxically, most of the teachers affirm to be prepared for the pedagogic challenge of the itinerant's school inclusion;
- *Incipient preoccupation of the Educative Administration with the knowledge and resolution of the problematic:*
 - a) Absence of systematic scientific studies, as support for political and administrative decisions, that guarantee a full schooling for the itinerants. The evident lack of statistical data on the supposed dimension of the itinerant pupils' population in Portugal, and the impossibility of its disintegration for types of itinerancy, reveal a worrying ignorance on the problematic dimension and outlines for which is supposed they must found and apply proposals of solution. There are no identified studies or analyses, carried out with the objective to know and identify the variables of the problem, which could inform the responsables and support the educative politics, in a scientific point of view. Probably, the reduced numerical dimension of this particular population, and the lack of an organism representative of the circus, which assumes the collective aspirations and the correspondent lobbying, justifies the Administration 'oblivion'.

b) Shyness in the proposals and measures, with scarce technical support and lack of an monitored evaluative system. In spite of small advancements registered in the passed years, with actions destined to make easier the itinerants' schooling, the measures are never technically justified, almost always based on the TIC panacea dream, only applied in the highest levels of the compulsory school, when the school drop-out syndrome has already did some irreparable destructions.

In the primary school, was implemented the concept of 'school-mother', in the artificial terms above-mentioned, the pupil's personal dossier, and nothing more of relevant was done, as for the formation of the teachers, schemes of families' support, the possibility of free choice of a specialized teacher as personal tutor...

No evaluative reports of progress are known on the new educative experiences, and sometimes even the periodic progress reports are not sent to the specific Communitarian Institutions.

9. Proposals, solutions and implications

The analysis of the different above-mentioned 'solutions' reveals that the questions of the interrupted learning, the constant break of link affections, the lack of functionality in the curricular contents, among many others that astonish the circus' itinerants formation process, are constant cause of preoccupation and search for solutions.

The artists, parents and businessmen, due to their experiences or relatives' re-

ports, know the different solutions adopted in several national contexts in Europe. The teachers, because of their technical formation, and pedagogic problems they use to solve, begin to equate also the problematic, when confronted with the unexpected temporary welcome of an itinerant. From the analysis of these opinions, it is possible to identify generalized feelings of rejection for practices that have been used in the name of the school stability, whose 'collateral effects' contribute to strongly reduce, or even to annul, the results of the 'school success' that might be obtained:

- a) *Familiar nucleus sedentariness.* Sometimes justified as an effort to guarantee a more balanced schooling for the children, this solution is, in fact, determined by the labour difficulties of the parents that, for lack of stable contracts, make sporadic returns to the itinerancy whenever an isolated opportunity of work appears; in the identified cases, the levels of school success are low, in spite of a reduced school discontinuity.
- b) *Pupil's sedentariness.* The children remain with a non itinerant relative, being forced to a long cut of affection with the nuclear family; the schooling is not interrupted, however, the long absence from the nuclear family and the circus environment, produces anguishes and constant will of returning, with the school desertion as main option, and the school results reflect frequently this constant discomfort; more and more parents reject this solution, for affective reasons, and agree with the school desertion and the children's return to the circus.
- c) *Sedentariness in boarding school.* Solution adopted in Italy, and recently finished, had advantages in the articulation between the school regular

apprenticeship and the circus arts' apprenticeship, with the contribution and participation of the parents and retired artists as occasional teachers. However, this solution is also rejected, because of the long absence of the children from the familiar nucleus, though they point the necessary creation of a circus school, also to bring social value to the competences of the circus artists.

d) *Exclusive e-learning schemes.* In spite of the general access to the informatic equipments and software in most of the circus communities, the common conviction is that the education and apprenticeship must always take place in personal relation contexts, not exclusively in virtual ones; they only admit its advantages as a complementary interesting resource; the experiences carried out in the most advanced levels of the compulsory school are not replicable in the primary school, and I believe it had not yet been object of a critical, internal and external evaluation, which permits to gather supporting teachings to the Educative Administration new decisions; though the most recent recommendations of the European Parliament (Doris Pack, 2005) "*the development and the support to the cyber apprenticeship (e-learning) and to projects of distance teaching (...) the development of strategies on the subject of autonomous / responsible apprenticeship;*" we must recognize that, in these ages and school level, the children could not yet build and mobilize strategies of autonomous apprenticeship.

So, if we set aside those 'solutions', the preferred by significant part of the participants is the 'itinerant school' in each circus, certified by the Educative Administration,

and inserted in the Educative National System. It is the solution adopted by the Spanish government, in a small part of Spanish circuses, and it begins also in France, for self initiative of the biggest circus enterprises, but the model is tested, approved and in expansion in the biggest world-wide circus, the *Cirque du Soleil*, with the pedagogic certification and integration of the Québec educative national system, in Canada. As a matter of fact one of its several itinerant schools was observed and analysed in this present study, with high levels of school success, certified by national examinations. In Portugal, an identical experience passed some years ago, and now it was possible to gather some artists' opinions, as they have done their schooling in such model.

In different versions, this learning model always presupposes a collaborative participation of the circus' enterprise, an Educative Administration certification and inspection, the development of an appropriate teacher profile, with basic and continuous specific formation, a critical dimension of the enterprise, namely a sufficient number of pupils, of different ages and school levels.

Main advantages are:

- An effective management of all the critical variables, namely school time and space, adapting them constantly to the variations imposed by the itinerant regime;
- the construction *ab initio* of a curricular project, linked to the national directives and the pupils and families' motivations, making the curricular contents more functional and improving the motivation;
- contribute to strong affection links in a natural relational context to the pupils and their families;

- a possibility of personalized tutoring of each pupil, in his different apprenticeship level;
- the conjugation of formal school and familiar apprenticeship, with the participation of the families in some school activities;
- the constant use of the new urbane environments and social-cultural diversities, as educative resources;
- the constant proximity between the teachers and the families, making easier an effective share of the educative responsibilities...

Some disadvantages:

- The difficulty in recruiting teachers with appropriate profile, formation, motivation and available to accept an itinerant life;
- a difficult adaptation of the transportable spaces into school spaces, respecting the ergonomic and educational necessities;
- a frequent deterioration of equipments and school materials, due to the constant pressure of heavy transports;
- the difficult development of some school activities in identical age group and school level, for lack of pupils' number;
- a constant, and exclusive, pupils' familiarity in a limited circle, may create some internal tensions;

Nevertheless, the *sine qua non* condition for the implementation of an itinerant school in a circus is the enterprise's critical dimension, namely, the number of children and young people in school age. And this condition imposes not to replicate the solution in all the circuses, even in countries as Spain or France, generally with bigger enterprises. In Portugal, for this moment it will be very difficult to find

an enterprise candidate to such a project, in the presupposition it would be available again. And even so, such as in Spain, the solution would leave out most of the itinerant children, because their families work in small circuses. So, it would never be a global solution.

Facing this obvious impossibility, which must be correct attitude?

Now, having equated the problematic's different variables, it seems natural to advance with new proposals, as suggested in most recent Communitarian Recommendations, a kind of monitored and evaluated projects for the construction of appropriate solutions.

So, considering our particular national situation, this study advances with a proposal for an inclusive schooling of the itinerant pupils, based on a blended solution of personal teaching, with reinforcement of distance teaching and eventual volunteer school itinerancy. This scheme supposes the creation of movable school unities, in sufficient number for the real necessities, without its own permanent pupils, but installed and equipped with welcome and mobility conditions for, at least, two teachers for unity, as they would be destined to the simultaneous attendance of different levels in compulsory school.

These unities would act as the real school-mother for a group of itinerant pupils in itinerancy with their families, with a constant tutoring, and the management of the different evaluation moments, taking the responsibility for their final evaluation, independently of their location during the year. The final evaluation in each level should be checked by national criteria. The present/personal teaching must be as frequent as possible, depending on the itiner-

ant mobility of each familiar group – the school must go and meet the pupil, and not the opposite! An appropriate endowment of informatic hardware and software would secure the virtual daily relation between the pupils group, the teachers and the families, creating a constant virtual relational context, and integrating the parents in activities of effective share of educative responsibility. Sometimes a year, whenever possible in the circus season pauses, the group should be joined and share curricular activities. This means an adaptation of the 'academic year' to the calendar of the circus season, in an independent register of the school regular academic year, finally putting the variable school time as an educative resource, adapted to the pupil self times. It would be possible, according to the wish of the pupils and their families, to participate punctually the school activities in the villages where the circus arrives, without compulsory character and always under the co-ordination and tutorship of the teacher in the movable unity, as collaborative work with the colleagues of those schools.

I think this proposal, only outlined in general aspects, has the conditions to be a project, with support, monitoring and evaluation of the Communitarian Institutions. As a matter of fact, in accordance to the Communitarian Recommendations, such projects previously participated by the parents' representative organizations, must consolidate "mechanisms of cooperation between the member States (...) in order to determine the appropriate schooling models to the children of the itinerant communities" (Doris Pack, 2005).

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However, any adopted solution implicates other efforts and complementary actions, such as the creation of mechanisms of teachers' specific formation, the development of a professional appropriate tutoring profile for these pupils, the implementation of a regular European interchange system of professional related experiences, the creation of an European regular evaluation system for the itinerant pupils, an effort for the certification of the competences obtained in the circus apprenticeship...

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