

WORLD DENTAL HYGIENIST AWARDS

Project Category

SOBE

Reading with a mouth full of health

**An Inclusive Public Dental Health Project in
Portugal**

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Abstract,

The Portuguese Directorate General of Health, the National Reading Plan and the School Library Network signed a protocol in July 2011, which aims to develop actions to promote reading, and health, focusing on project *SOBE* that brings together two areas: oral health and school libraries.

Project *SOBE* (Saúde Oral Bibliotecas Escolares - Oral Health School Libraries) (*SOBE* is the Portuguese word for UP) proposes a challenge: *Go up – grow up* on oral health quality; grow up the number of partnerships with schools and other institutions; grow up the degree of perception about the importance of oral health in families and children.

The watermark of *SOBE* is to make the integration of oral health subjects in school curricula inevitable.

We created a set of materials, the *SOBE* Kit, designed to work Oral Health in a flexible and integrated way and also to give creative autonomy to schools libraries, so it constitute a way to develop autonomous initiatives in oral health education. Those materials will allow teachers and students to address in a more rich, competent and effective way, the various oral health areas: oral health projects can provide intentional contexts for learning and practicing the art of language, writing, math and creative skills. 2500 boxes (with books, CD, DVD, games, manuals and other materials) were made for all the Portuguese Schools Libraries, also, a training program was set up to prepare teacher-librarians to use these materials. The project will benefit 1.000.000 children.

Key words: Public Dental Health, Dental Health Education, and Curriculum Integration

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The impact of dental caries in the day-to-day is subtle but relevant, influencing feeding, sleep, study and social roles. Its prevalence and recurrent manifestations, continue to be serious health problems for children and young people, it is considered a silent epidemic (Plano B do PNPSO, 2011).

Since good oral health is essential to good overall health as well as to the prevention of oral disease and unnecessary suffering, oral health education and promotion is a major concern of the Portuguese Directorate General of Health (PDGH). Mobilizing support for good oral health within the community is essential to have success in improving oral health outcomes. It is often useful to develop a community oral health coalition or to add oral health to the agenda of an existing coalition to obtain this support. (Mouradian, Huebner, Ramos-Gomez and Slavkin, 2007).

According with the World Health Organization (WHO) (2012) the following methods appear to be essential components for health education programs and services aimed at enhancing an individual's and a community's health: participant involvement; planning; a comprehensive program; an integrated program; long-term change; altering community norms; research and evaluation.

Oral Health education has a long and diverse history. If health education occurs in many settings, schools are a perfect target (Gagliardi, 2007). In schools, oral health educators teach health as a subject, promote and implement school oral health programs, including health services, student, staff and parent health education. However, teachers form the vanguard of children's education, a health education program should be incorporated into both basic and continuing teacher training, regardless of subject. The concepts of oral health can be reinforced at schools in several ways, like adding them to different areas of the schools curriculum. The health education is most effective when it is

integrated in the normal activities of the classroom rather than be presented fragmented or mentioned only in the presence of oral health professionals. (Gagliardi, 2007)

The PDGH, the National Reading Plan (NRP) and School Libraries Network (SLN) concluded in July 2011, a protocol aiming to develop actions to promote reading, happiness, knowledge and oral health.

The *Dental Team of the PDGH*, decided to design and create an original oral health program to work with and in the school public libraries. The program was developed to help local public school libraries to create new community dental health programs, integrate new or enhanced dental health knowledge into existing school projects and to promote dental health literacy. (PNPSO, 2005) (Evidence Report/Technology Assessment Number 199, 2011)

OBJECTIVES

Since the 60's the dental hygienists set up their target at schools working with children in dental health education. Nowadays oral health education is receiving a higher priority at the national level and more funding have been allocated for the national dental health programs. In the meantime we still depend on schoolteachers asking for help, interrupting the lectures, taking time to our educational activities, and on the other hand, we have the nutritionists, doctors, nurses, a huge health team also seeking for prime time classroom time. As a result: many schools are not compliant any more with dental teams.

In 2011 the Portuguese Directorate-General of Health and its dental team decided to rearrange the Oral Health National Program. The Portuguese Chief Dental Officer (Dr. Rui Calado) set up a special team to rethink all the strategy in community oral health.

That team, created a document named *Plan B* for Oral Health in Portugal.

They start working in a comprehensive oral health project, based on the concept of teaching “the whole child” and using “the whole school” as a tool. In a way they were creating a project that emphasis oral health as an integral part of total body health and also it must be integrated in the school educational curriculum. Oral health should not be merely a fragmented portion of knowledge but instead should be integrated throughout learning (Weinsteim, Getz and Milgrom, 1991), (Kimbrough, Henderson, 2006) (Gagliardi, 2007)

School libraries have a positive impact on students and on learning. According with the Research Foundation Paper published by Scholastic Library Publishing (2008): "A substantial body of research since 1990 clearly demonstrates the importance of school libraries to students' education. (...) a certified library media specialist has a positive impact on student achievement, regardless of the socio-economic or educational levels of the community”.

During the months of May and November 2011 several meetings were held between the dental team of the PDGH, NRP and the SLN team members. The conclusion was to create a program that uses dental health issues to help teachers providing opportunities for all students to read, write, listen, and speak in a variety of contexts. Because most of these strategies were designed for use in a balanced literacy program, they could easily adapt them to meet the specific program goal: *Integrating Dental Health Education* into the classroom.

In the end of this creative period they had created *SOBE* Project (Oral Health School Libraries). The main objective of this project was: help teachers to providing quality, engaging educational work with a set of materials that will enable schools to develop dental health projects in a more streamlined and appealing way.