



RESIDENTIAL CARE AND THE INTEGRATED EDUCATION AND TRAINING PROGRAM (PIEF) – EDUCATION AS A RESPONSE TO YOUNG PEOPLE AT RISK OF EXCLUSION¹

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Abstract

The educational pathways of young people in residential care (AR) in Portugal are guided by alternative educational responses to mainstream education due to the growing age gap in education. The Integrated Education and Training Program (PIEF) is one such response, covering 27% of students in AR, as students with an age gap of 3 years or more are eligible, considering a school career starting at 6. This article analyses the academic trajectories of young people in AR, in the 2nd and 3rd Cycles, and the evolution of the PIEF. The literature review contributed to understanding the relevance of creating and maintaining the PIEF at a macro-national level and integrating young people in RA into the program. The microanalysis focused on the municipality of Évora, where 30% of the girls in a residential care home are integrated into the PIEF and concentrated on the perceptions of the heads of three schools about the inclusive nature of the program, which, according to the heads, is seen as a non-discriminatory response. However, threats to student success were identified, such as socio-economic exclusion and mental health issues, due to the lack of adequate responses in the municipality, especially affecting young people in residential care.

Keywords: Residential Care; Integrated Education and Training Program (PIEF); Curricular and pedagogical differentiation; Perceptions and representations of principals; Social inclusion.

How to cite

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O ACOHIMENTO RESIDENCIAL E O PROGRAMA INTEGRADO DE EDUCAÇÃO E FORMAÇÃO (PIEF) - EDUCAÇÃO COMO RESPOSTA A JOVENS EM PERIGO DE EXCLUSÃO

Abstract: Os percursos escolares dos jovens em Acolhimento Residencial (AR), em Portugal, são pautados por respostas educativas alternativas ao Ensino Regular, devido ao crescente desfasamento etário em relação ao nível de ensino. O Programa Integrado de Educação e Formação (PIEF) é uma dessas respostas, abrangendo 27% dos alunos em AR, pois são elegíveis alunos com desfasamento etário igual ou superior a 3 anos, considerando um percurso escolar iniciado aos 6 anos. Este artigo analisa os percursos académicos de jovens em AR, nos 2º e 3º Ciclos, e a evolução do PIEF. A revisão de literatura contribuiu para a compreensão da pertinência da criação e manutenção do PIEF, a nível macronacional, bem como da integração de jovens em AR no Programa. A análise micro recaiu no Concelho de Évora, onde 30% das jovens de uma Casa de Acolhimento Residencial estão integradas no PIEF, e focou-se nas percepções das Direções de três escolas sobre o caráter inclusivo do Programa, que, segundo as Direções, é visto como uma resposta sem discriminação. No entanto, identificaram-se ameaças ao sucesso dos alunos, como a exclusão socioeconómica e questões de saúde mental, pela ausência de respostas adequadas no concelho, afetando sobretudo jovens em Acolhimento Residencial.

Palavras-chave: Acolhimento Residencial; Programa Integrado de Educação e Formação (PIEF); Diferenciação curricular e pedagógica; Percepções e representações de diretores; Inclusão social.

EL ACOGIMIENTO RESIDENCIAL Y EL PROGRAMA INTEGRADO DE EDUCACION Y FORMACION (PIEF) - EDUCACION COMO RESPUESTA A LOS JOVENES EN RIESGO DE EXCLUSION

Resumen: Los itinerarios educativos de los jóvenes en Acogimiento Residencial (AR) en Portugal se guían por respuestas educativas alternativas a la educación ordinaria, debido a la creciente brecha de edad en relación con el nivel educativo. El Programa Integrado de Educación y Formación (PIEF) es una de estas respuestas, que abarca al 27% de los alumnos en AR, ya que los alumnos con un desfase de edad de 3 años o más son elegibles, considerando una trayectoria escolar iniciada a los 6 años. Este artículo analiza las trayectorias académicas de los jóvenes en RA, en el 2º y 3º Ciclo, y la evolución del PIEF. La revisión bibliográfica contribuyó a comprender la relevancia de la creación y mantenimiento del PIEF a nivel macro-nacional, así como la integración de los jóvenes en RA en el programa. El análisis micro se centró en el municipio de Évora, donde el 30% de las chicas de una residencia están integradas en el PIEF, y se centró en las percepciones de los directores de tres escuelas sobre la naturaleza inclusiva del programa, que, según los directores, se considera una respuesta no discriminatoria. Sin embargo, se identificaron amenazas para el éxito de los alumnos, como la exclusión socioeconómica y los problemas de salud mental, debido a la falta de respuestas adecuadas en el municipio, que afectan especialmente a los jóvenes en acogimiento residencial.

Palabras clave: Acogimiento Residencial; Programa Integrado de Educación y Formación (PIEF); Diferenciación curricular y pedagógica; Percepciones y representaciones de directores; Inclusión social.

Introduction

The educational paths of young people in Residential Care in Portugal are marked by educational responses alternative to Regular Education due to the age gap in relation to the level of education.

The objective of this article is to understand and contextualize contemporarily Residential Care and the Integrated Program of Education and Training (PIEF), identifying points of interconnection in the target audience and confluence in the purposes of both, assuming the possibility of education assuming a driving role of inclusion or social exclusion.

It is important to mention that annually, and by legal imperative, data referring to care in Portugal are published in the Annual Characterization Reports of the Care Situation of Children and Young People. According to the CASA 2023 Report, on November of that year, 6446 children and young people were in care. Although in the last ten years this number has reduced, it is still very high since it refers to a measure of promotion and protection that is considered the last to be applied after all other possibilities have been exhausted. In 2023, 62% of care cases were previously intervened through one or more measures in their natural living environment (Department of Social Development, 2023).

Residential Care in Portugal is legislated through Decree-Law No. 164/2019, of October 25, which establishes its execution regime as a measure to promote the rights and protect children and young people in danger (Portugal, 2019). The Residential Care measure is provided for in the Law for the Protection of Children and Young People at Risk (LPCJP), approved by Law No. 147/99, of September 1, and successive updates (Portugal, 1999a). The operation of Residential Care Homes is regulated by Ordinance No. 450/2023 of December 22, and derives from the area of Solidarity and Social Security (Portugal, 2023).

When the promotion and protection measure of Residential Care is applied, it is expected that the home that welcomes the child or young person guarantees the protection and promotion of their rights and enables their life project, respecting the identity and specificities of the child or young person, meeting their needs and ensuring that they are cared for always in a logic of positive differentiation. The feasibility of life projects and autonomy depends directly on the educational success they manage or fail to achieve.

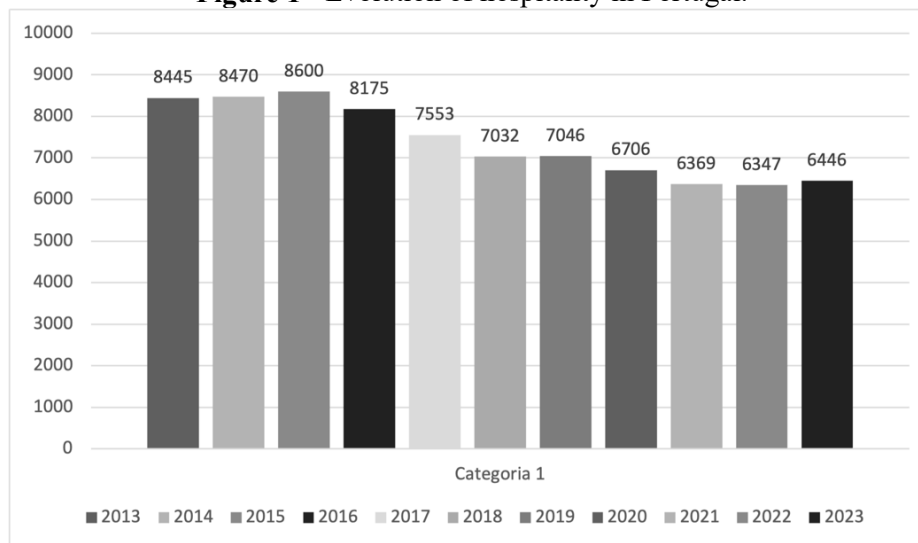
In Residential Care Homes, children and young people under 18 years of age, or under 21 years of age as long as the continuation of the intervention started before they reach 18 years of age is requested, are welcomed, protected and cared for. Young people up to 25 years of age

are also welcomed whenever there are, and only while they last, educational or professional training processes. This article focuses on young people attending the 2nd and 3rd Cycle of Basic Education, and on young people over ten years old, as it corresponds to the age at which they start the 2nd Cycle when they pass all school years, considering a school path started at 6 years old.

In article 6 of Ordinance No. 450/2023 of December 22, it reads that it is the responsibility of Residential Care Homes: ‘[...] ensure: [...] m) The necessary means for education and training, paying particular attention to vocational guidance and study support [...]’ (Portugal, 2023, our emphasis). Residential Care is thus called to think and intervene in a logic of integral development, inseparable from education.

Residential care homes must go far beyond providing 'bed, board, and laundry': their function is to care for and protect all children and young people they welcome, promoting Children's Rights in their monitoring and education, helping to chart new directions for life when the family, by itself, is completely unable to do so (Carvalho; Salgueiro, 2018, p. 4).

Figure 1 - Evolution of hospitality in Portugal.

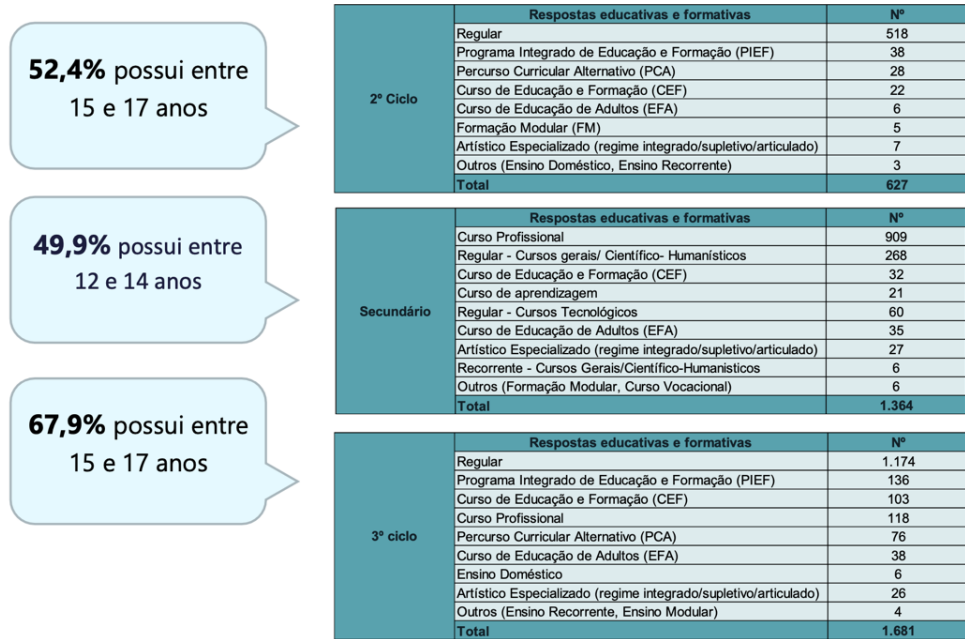


Source: The authors (2024).

Young people between the ages of 12 and 25 represent 68.5% of the total number of those in care (only 5.1% were over 21 years old), with a prevalence of males. Of these, about 68%, aged between 12 and 17 years old, are covered by the publication of Decree-Law No. 54/2018, of July 6, benefiting from ‘[...] individualized access to a specific curriculum, work by a multidisciplinary team to support learning and inclusion’ (Portugal, 2018a, our emphasis). Regarding the PIEF, the percentage of adolescents in care attending the program is 7.3% in the

2nd Cycle and 11% in the 3rd Cycle, although about 27% attend other educational responses alternative to Regular Education. A global view demonstrates that only 49.2% of young people in care attend the 2nd Cycle and 62.4% attend the 3rd Cycle, in the normal age range corresponding to the study cycle.

Figure 2 - Distribution of children and young people by study cycle, age groups and educational and training response



Source: Department of Social Development (2024, p. 22)

A risk factor can be defined as the absence of development opportunities due to the impoverishment of interactions in their contexts and the absence of experiences adequate to the child's needs and capacities (Garbarino; Ganzel, 2000, apud Campos et al., 2017, p. 204).

What, then, are the risk factors that dictate the care measure and justify the academic paths before and after it? The observation of the situations of danger that were at the origin of the application of the Residential Care placement measures, in 2023, include: Neglect via absence of supervision and family monitoring (34.4%); Parental neglect at the education level (19%); Parental neglect at the health level (18%); Situations of exposure to deviant behavior models (18%) (Department of Social Development, 2024).

The lack of monitoring and supervision by attachment figures, mostly parental figures, is in itself an explanatory element of school failure, reinforced by the neglect of monitoring in the school context. The creation of attachment relationships with the adults of the Residential

Care Homes is, in Bronfenbrenner's ecological perspective (1979/1987), suggested as one of the ways to mitigate the negative effects of care. Offering appropriate environmental and relational conditions, with a stable attachment figure ‘[...] provide the child with adequate environmental and relational conditions, namely another attachment figure and the possibility of initiating and developing activities’ (Martins, 2004, p. 322, our emphasis).

Adolescents in care who frequently adopt self-defense strategies to deal with suffering are easily assessed based on their behaviors of isolation, insecurity, apathy, reactivity, self and hetero-aggression, both in relation to peers in care and to adults in the institution, knowing in advance that in 2023, 23% of children and young people already had behavioral problems before being taken into care.

It is also important to mention mental health issues in young people in care, as they are higher compared to young people who remain in their family context ‘Several studies point to the fact that the prevalence rate of mental health problems is higher in young people in care when compared to young people who live with their family [...]’ (Campos et al., 2017, p. 204).

Many children and young people already bring diagnosed mental health problems at the time of care, 15.2% of the total care cases in 2023, with a higher incidence between 15 and 20 years old. It is up to the teams of the Residential Care Homes to intervene therapeutically, to refer for specialized clinical monitoring, considering that this particular characteristic mainly affects young people and is reflected in all personal domains, including the academic one.

However, even in populations considered at risk, some individuals are more susceptible than others to be affected, namely by the multidimensional emergence of biological factors, personality characteristics, socio-cultural conditions, or the family environment itself (Mota; Matos, 2008, p. 369).

Regarding the characterization of the family contexts of care, in 2023, the main caregivers have education at the Basic Education level ‘[...] namely 2nd Cycle of Basic Education (18%) and 3rd Cycle of Basic Education (16%), followed by the 1st Cycle of Basic Education (14%).’ (Department of Social Development, 2024, p. 52, our emphasis). The income of the main caregivers comes from their own work in 51% of cases.

‘The development of the person is investigated through their personal, psychological, biological and physical characteristics.’ (De Antoni, 2000, p.11, our emphasis). These human development changes occur in four fields: physical, personal, social and cognitive. The care process, as mentioned earlier, inserts young people into a new context, which raises issues

related to the ecology of development. Many young people in care carry the stigma from the contexts that led them to this situation, from their family and social dynamics, and even from the very fact that they live in a Residential Care Home. Only by considering the interaction between all the factors that put them at risk, as well as the care environment in its various dimensions of therapeutic intervention, can the cycle of school failure and exclusion from the school and social environment be broken.

In 1999, the Integrated Program of Education and Training (PIEF) emerged in Portugal. [...] within the scope of eliminating the exploitation of child labor, as a measure to prevent and combat school dropout and failure and with the purpose of promoting the social inclusion of children and young people, through the creation of integrated responses (Batista; Fialho, 2023, p. 3).

Starting from the Plan for the Elimination of Child Labor Exploitation (PEETI), Joint Order No. 882/99, of September 28, arose, revised by Joint Order No. 948/2003, of August 25. The last revision strengthened an integrated child and youth policy, reinforcing the promotion and protection of the rights of all minors, betting on integrated and appropriate responses to minor victims or at risk ‘This negative conceptualization of school dropout derives from a significant developmental trajectory unfavorable to subjects who prematurely disengage from the school system.’ (Miguel; Rijo; Lima, 2012, p. 138, our emphasis).

PIEF aims to guarantee the fulfillment of compulsory education and social inclusion, conferring a school qualification of 2nd or 3rd cycle to minors from 15 years old, especially in situations of child labor exploitation. The program integrates students with an age gap equal to or greater than 3 years compared to the level of education attended, having as reference a school path started at 6 years of age. This program favors the integration of minors into educational and training paths, with a focus on school reintegration and professional qualification, in articulation with the Ministries of Education and Social Security and Labor. PIEF operates in educational establishments of the Ministry of Education, with classes composed of a minimum of 10 students and a maximum of 15 students.

It is a socio-educational measure, of a temporary and exceptional nature, adopted after all other school integration measures have been used. PIEF is structured based on an Education and Training Plan (PEF), which considers the individual needs of students, the accessibility and flexibility of paths, considering pedagogical differentiation as a strategy of the teaching-learning processes based on the premise that ‘The factors of a cognitive, behavioral and interpersonal nature, focused on the student, present greater potential for change.’ (Miguel; Rijo;

Lima, 2012, p. 138, our emphasis). PIEF is tendentially structured in aggregating themes and priority is given to project work and actions of integration in a work context, made in partnership with schools and professional training centers, with the possibility of carrying out projects or internships outside traditional entities. Schools that have this educational response have autonomy and competence to manage weekly teaching times, and their scheduling throughout the school year, in broader blocks to allow practical and experimental work, blurring disciplinary fragmentation, based on the reference workload for each domain and the maximum number of daily hours allowed by law.

The PIEF technical pedagogical teams are formed by the Class Council and the Specialized Technician: Local Intervention Technician. The Local Intervention Technician can be from the area of Psychology or the area of Social Work. PIEF actions are coordinated between the Ministries of Education and Social Security and Labor, with the creation of regional coordination structures and the continuous evaluation of the program's execution. The objective is to promote the inclusion and school or professional certification of minors, with social and psychological support, guaranteeing access to education and training, according to the needs of the target audience of the contexts. The execution of PIEF is monitored annually by a commission responsible for the evaluation and analysis of situations that cannot be addressed by the planned measures, with proposals for solutions to be presented by those responsible for the Ministries involved (Directorate-General for Education, 2018b).

Figure 3 - Curriculum matrix for PIEF Type 1 and Type 2 - 2nd and 3rd cycle

Domínios	Carga horária anual efetiva (horas) (a)	
	PIEF T1	PIEF T2
Viver em Português Matemática e Realidade Comunicar em Língua Estrangeira Educação Física (b)	311 (b)	279 (b)
O Homem e o Ambiente Oferta(s) de escola (c)	489 (d)	521 (d)
Total de horas anuais	800 (a)	
Formação Pessoal e Social - Área transversal ao currículo de acordo com o Artigo		

(a) Carga letiva anual em horas, referente a tempo útil de aula, ficando ao critério de cada escola a distribuição dos tempos pelas diferentes disciplinas de cada domínio, respeitando os valores mínimos indicados, tendo em conta o programa de educação e formação (PEF) de cada aluno.

Fonte: (DGE, 2018, p. 4).

Students admitted to PIEF are disengaged from school, without academic expectations of success, trapped in a cycle of failures based on personal experience of multiple retentions, and ultimately removed from the school space after a path of absenteeism that led them to school dropout, ‘School failure translates the inability of the educational system to ensure true equality of opportunities, despite the efforts developed in this direction.’ (Correia et al., 2019, p. 23, our emphasis).

Currently, the Government's priorities in education include: Strengthening school autonomy and improving the decentralization process in the area of education; Promoting conditions of access and school success for all, also taking into account the integration of the growing number of migrant students; Adequately adjusting social supports and strengthening the well-being and quality of life of students; Ensuring the right to equal opportunities of access to high-quality education, which allows school success throughout the various educational levels. (Portugal, 2024).

It can be seen that Portuguese educational policies are parallel to the purposes of PIEF, as well as correspond to the requirements present in the legislation of Residential Care. The perceptions of the School Directorates of the Municipality of Évora are relevant insofar as they reveal the perspective of school leaderships on PIEF, on students who reside in care and attend it, and express their perspectives on the inclusion or exclusion potentiated by the aforementioned Program.

Figure 4 - Explanatory model for failure and dropout from the perspective of the system of actors in Central Alentejo.



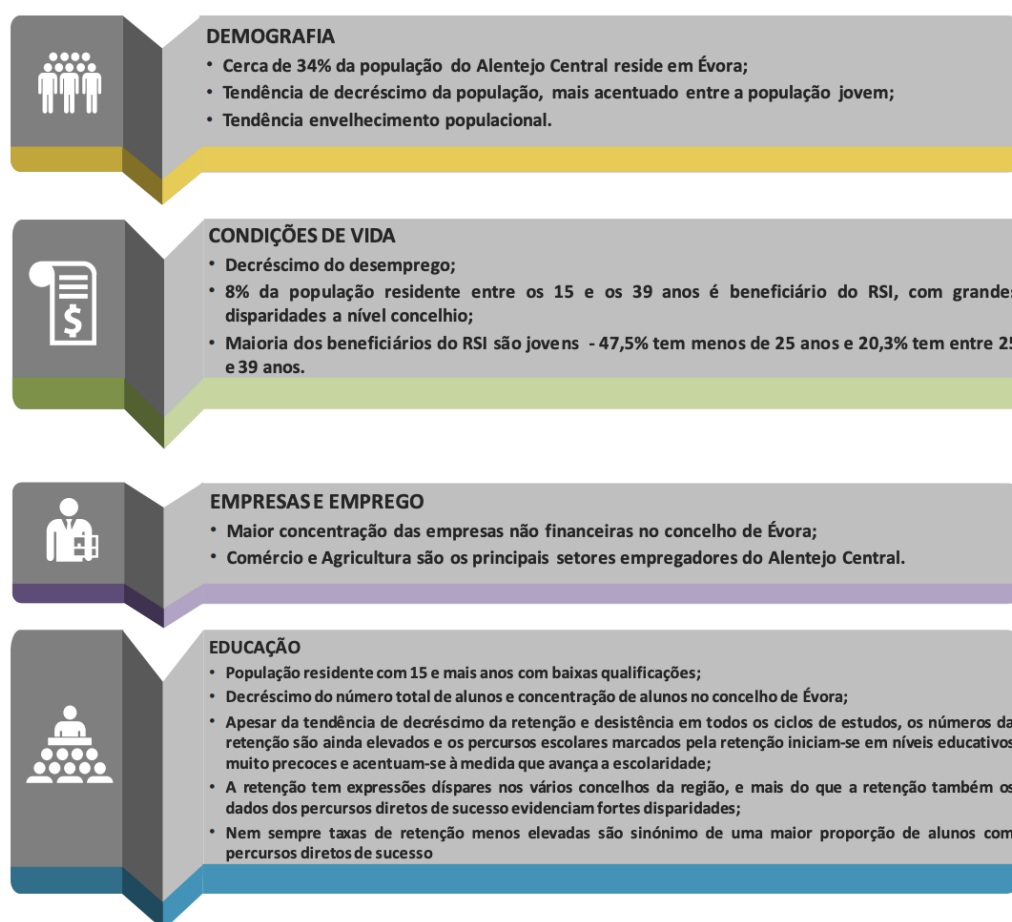
Fonte: Elaboração Própria

Source: Correia et al., 2019, p. 27.

From the perspective of actors in the Central Alentejo region, school failure and dropout are explained, for example, by the inconsistency of educational policies and the mandatory attendance of school by beneficiaries of the Social Insertion Income (RSI). Values adverse to school, family contexts of poverty and exclusion, student learning difficulties, and lack of study habits are also mentioned. They point to fatigue and demotivation among teaching staff, and scarce technological resources and Wi-Fi.

From the characterization of the Municipality of Évora, the trend of population aging stands out, and that the majority of RSI beneficiaries are young (47.5% are under 25 years old). Regarding education, the data is not encouraging, as the resident population aged 15 and over has low qualifications, there is still a high percentage of grade retention, increasingly at earlier levels, and even lower retention rates are not synonymous with direct paths to success.

Figure 5 - Characterization of Central Alentejo



Source: (Correia et al., 2019, p. 22).

In this sense, it is imperative and urgent to eradicate dropout and exclusion from access to the benefits of school and social education, whatever the

reasons that sustain them, within the broader framework of social policies that promote the common good and solidarity among human beings and institutions. This is an insurmountable social imperative and a vigorous source of well-being for each one and for all. (Azevedo, 2010, p. 5)

Methodology

"Both school education and social education have a central role in today's societies, due to the possibility and opportunity they represent to favor this human development of personalization or revelation of each and every one, integrally, throughout life and with life, in a context, we do not ignore, so marked by social and life fragmentation.(Azevedo, 2010, p. 6)

The general objective of this article is to characterize and contemporarily contextualize Residential Care and PIEF, identifying points of interconnection in the target audience and confluence in the purposes of both, assuming the possibility of education assuming a driving role of inclusion or social exclusion.

A qualitative methodology was used, initiating the study with an exploratory phase, followed by the data collection phase, and finally, the analysis, interpretation, and dissemination of results phase (Morgado, 2018).

The information gathering was carried out through document analysis and semi-structured interviews. Both were subjected to content analysis because '[...] it is a technique that frequently has a complementary function in qualitative research, that is, it is used to "triangulate" the data obtained through one or two other techniques.' (Lessard-Hébert; Goyette; Boutin, 2012, p. 144, our emphasis).

The document analysis included legislation, regulations, and statistical data of Residential Care and PIEF. In addition to the document analysis, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the Directorates of three schools in the Municipality of Évora, with PIEF educational response.

According to (Bardin, 1977), the results were analyzed following the order proposed by the author: pre-analysis; Material exploration; Treatment of results, inference, and interpretation. The aim was to understand their perceptions about the character of inclusion or exclusion of PIEF students. Among the PIEF students of these three schools are young people who are in a Residential Care Home in the same Municipality.

Results

From the document analysis, it was verified that 10% of students attending PIEF in Portugal are under a Residential Care measure.

This article is representative of two realities that are at the limit of the solutions that society finds to respond to the social and educational needs of young people in line for discrimination. On the one hand, Residential Care, as a measure of protection and promotion of young people at risk. On the other hand, young people at risk of social exclusion. Both depend on inclusive educational measures; for all these young people, PIEF is an assertive response to fulfill the universal right to education.

After analyzing the interviews conducted, it was observed that the School Directorates seek the following characteristics in the PIEF team: Empathy, assertiveness, and good judgment. These qualities are considered essential to deal with the diversity of students.

It was mentioned that all PIEF regulatory documents highlight the need for a stable and cohesive team to ensure the continuity of pedagogical work and student success, so the turnover of teachers is pointed out as a threat to the continuity of pedagogical work.

The three School Directorates stated that they establish collaborations with various entities in the school communities to address social and educational issues of students, and see the connection to the school community as fundamental for PIEF success.

They acknowledge significant progress in PIEF and a decrease in the school dropout rate. They attribute the Program's success to a supportive school environment and the dedication of teachers. They emphasized that affective bonding, that is, the close relationship between students and teachers, is a crucial factor for the Program's success. Teachers are encouraged to maintain a cohesive team to ensure a positive learning environment.

Regarding perceptions about inclusion and exclusion, they consider that the Program presents a duality, so it is seen as a strategy that can both include and exclude. Although the objective is to integrate students, stigmatization is still a concern, even though in the school space they consider that PIEF students are fully integrated and there is no exclusion by peers or teachers. Exclusion is a concern related to society beyond the school community and how society views PIEF students, not for being Program students, but for their personal, family, social, cultural, and economic characteristics.

The mental health of students is a common concern for the three School Directorates, all of whom verbalized the need for more resources and psychological support.

The adaptation of the curriculum to meet the needs of PIEF students is a highlighted point, reflecting the importance of a personalized approach, thus referring to pedagogical differentiation, which they argue should be transversal to all educational responses available in schools.

Final considerations

The analysis of the interviews with the three School Directorates of the Municipality and District of Évora, in the Central Alentejo region, with PIEF response, reveals that although the Program has shown positive results in terms of inclusion and reduction of school dropout, there are still significant challenges that need to be faced.

Collaboration between the various schools, communities, and mental health services is crucial for the continued success of the program.

The stability of the technical-pedagogical team, curricular flexibility, and attention to mental health are fundamental aspects that emerge as priorities in the perceptions of the School Directorates.

No differentiation was observed on the part of the School Directorates in relation to the students of the Residential Care Home, so the young people in care, in the Municipality of Évora, attending PIEF, are not, in the perception of the Directorates, overly excluded for being under a Residential Care measure.

PIEF is one of the various curricular responses alternative to Regular Education, whose main objective is to respond pragmatically to the needs of education, training, and protection from child labor exploitation.

Residential Care is a legal measure for the protection and promotion of children and young people. Education, by breaking cycles of social exclusion, and being responsible for human development, strengthens the pragmatism of PIEF, positioning it as a social inclusion Program.

Likewise, education enables the inclusion of children and young people in care, both in the academic and social spheres, concluding that PIEF is, in its essence, an inclusive and transitory response to fulfill compulsory education. Inclusive practices in schools ultimately depend on their actors.

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