



Educating from within: educative initiatives for museum's employees

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Introduction

At the moment when educative projects arise in search of solutions for social issues, a question is inevitable: how the museums, through its patrimonial values, can be helpful to the education and development of the society?

Thinking about the museums as spaces that, by excellence, are home to artworks and historical documents, and reflecting on its educational role, an initiative becomes interesting: analyzing the actions that contribute to the development of the society. Accordingly to Isabel Victor¹, in her master thesis "*Os museus e a qualidade: Distinguir entre museus com "qualidades" e a qualidade em museus*" (*The museums and the quality: distinguishing between museums with "qualities" and quality in museums*), the New Museology pulls down the museum's walls by changing its constituting concept: the museum is no longer just its building and its contents but also the territory where it is inserted, and its public is not just the visitors but all the surrounding community.

Consequently, one of the museum's main concern is to enlarge the number of visits they receive, trying to transform in visitors those groups that would not normally frequent the institution. For such, educational, social and cultural programs are created focusing, as an

¹ VICTOR, Isabel. "A qualidade de museus associada à satisfação dos cidadãos clientes" [*The quality at museums associated with the citizens' satisfaction*]. Graduating thesis for Master in Museology, Universidade Lusófona, Portugal. p.6.



example, the public school's students, the physically impaired and groups in situation of social vulnerability, which are very important for a broad social inclusion. But isn't it possible that we are forgetting, or not perceiving, another group that is also part of this community?² It is so close to us, inside the institutions, but doesn't feel part of it.

We are talking about an audience that is inside the expository space on a daily basis, taking care of its historical and artistic patrimony, like the artworks and the building, and who are important not only for helping preserve and protect this heritage but also for attending the visitors. These employees, who are very solicited by visitors in search for diverse information, are not specialists. On the contrary, they sometimes don't even know the "basics", like when the building was constructed, or essential data about the exhibitions in place. The museum's receptionists, attendants, assistants and security guards come upon these cultural assets (art) everyday but they don't necessarily comprehend the cultural richness in which they are inserted, nor are prepared for the projects and programs developed with the community and its surroundings. This group sometimes perceives the work as only a way of assuring their livelihood. Therefore, their attitude is comparable to employees of a shop, a supermarket, a factory or even a bank, as sometimes occurs with the security guards.

Analyzing this "non customary" audience, it is worth reflecting on what Maria Célia Moura Santos³ affirmed on an article presented at the 1st REM meeting⁴ (initials for Museum Educator Network in Portuguese), that these employees are invisible audiences inside the institution museum. She proposes "making the invisible real, from a group of people joined in

² Novo Dicionário Aurélio. **Comunidade** [community]: quality of what is common, communion; the social body; the society. p. 513.

³ Maria Célia Teixeira Moura Santos is a retired professor of the Universidade Federal da Bahia – Museology. Museologist, Master and Doctor of Education, she is also a visiting professor at the Postgraduate Program in Museology of the Universidade Lusófona de Humanidades e Tecnologias, Lisbon- Portugal.

⁴ *Museus e seus públicos invisíveis* [Museums and their invisible audiences], article presented by Maria Célia T. Moura Santos at the I Congresso de Educadores de Museus e Centros Culturais em Rede [1st Network of museums and cultural centers' educators congress], which happened at Rio de Janeiro, at the Casa Rui Barbosa, in September 17th and 18th 2007.



creating learning communities”⁵, and in this case, inside the museum itself. The author also highlights the difficulty in integrating the different museological initiatives within institutions, becoming necessary to develop a relationship that involves all of the institution’s departments for a total social and educative integration. She also states that the museums are going to improve themselves when this transformation begins within the institution itself. After all, the museum, because it is "a social phenomenon, a relational space and, as such, the result of a lot of social subjects’ actions, who are in and outside the institution, building it and rebuilding it everyday”⁶, the inclusion should start, first of all, from its inside.

1 – The museum as a cultural space

The museum, a space that encourages the non-formal education through its educators and other educative initiatives, is by excellence a place for diffusion of cultural production, and the cultural mediation should have a relevant role in all of them.

The ICOM (International Council of Museums)⁷, defined the museum, in 1989, as:

[...] A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment.

It seems pertinent to us that this cultural space full of knowledge, in the service of the society, is used also as a teaching instrument for its “intern audience”, that is, its employees.

⁵ SANTOS. op.cit., p. 2.

⁶ Ibidem.

⁷ Extracted from the article 2 of the ICOM statutes, adopted by the 16th ICOM General Assembly (Haia, Netherlands, September 5th 1989) and altered by 18th ICOM General Assembly (Stavanger, Norway, July 7th 1995) eand by the 20th ICOM General Assembly (Barcelona, Spain, July 6th 2001).



2 - A quality service to the public

Quality, a term used frequently in sales and in marketing, is associated with the consumer satisfaction concept. The consumer, on the other hand, is contemporarily seen as one of the parameters for quality management systems.

Isabel Victor refers to this quality issue at her master thesis. In the chapter V, related to “Museums and the Quality”, she reaffirms the need of “knowing how to assess if the results we proposed to reach are in concordance with the museum’s mission and values, and how to test [...] if the commitments we have established with the different groups of the community are being respected”.⁸

It is interesting to realize that the visitor’s satisfaction, which we could call “consumer”⁹, will depend, in part, of the museum employees that attend them on a daily basis. It is an issue that overcomes the goals, roles, structures and specific knowledge of the Human Resources Department of the museum and aligns more with the Education Department’ assumptions, impacting directly on visitor’s perception.

According to Isabel Victor, the client/consumer, a corporate/commercial nomenclature proposed by the quality management, must be everybody that take part in the organization’s construction, therefore, when concerning the museums, its employees. For her, the education shouldn’t “be understood as only another role or product of the museum but as a key process, transversal to all of its activities”.¹⁰

This affirmation signalizes that both companies and museums, in general, don’t realize that having satisfied employees means an improvement in the final quality of their work. It

⁸ VICTOR, op. cit., p. 6.

⁹ One of the definitions found at the Aurelio dictionary is: consumer is the one who uses services or consumes products of determined company of professionals.

¹⁰ VICTOR, op. cit., p.10.



occurs because usually the employees are seen as the “others”, that is, they produce a work for a visiting audience, but are not part of it. “They are diluted in the organization’s anonymity [...] and in the ritualized fulfillment of their tasks [...]”¹¹, distancing themselves of feelings of pleasure and satisfaction.” For the museologist, this fact will keep on happening until the museum starts “feeling part of the community” and “understanding their employees and collaborators as the first consignee of their services [...]”.¹²

Thus, she explains that for a quality work it is required the involvement of all the staff in the construction of the institution.

This approach is also found at *Metaqualidade: qualidade de vida no trabalho* (“metaquality: life quality at work”), a book by the museologist Marília Xavier Cury¹³, that refers to the need of:

[...] balancing our vision between internal and external audiences, between the museum’s employees and its visitors, valuing the employees participation, once the tendency is usually the overvaluation of the external audiences in detriment of the internal.¹⁴

It is necessary to amplify its educational role through cultural initiatives, what will make possible the insertion of the employees in this context, giving them the opportunity of learning and developing themselves. These aspects coincide with the New Museology and the quality management concepts and contribute to raising the quality levels, measurable in direct outcome for the citizens-consumers, with successive returns, in an improvement cycle.

¹¹ Op.cit., p.18.

¹² Ibidem, p.18.

¹³ CURY, Marília Xavier, 2005. p. 95.

¹⁴ Idem. pp. 96 e 97.



3 – Staff Training Program

Staff Training Program, expression created to substitute *Activities with Pinacoteca's Employees*, characterizes the educative initiatives developed internally by the Pinacoteca's responsible department with determined groups of employees: receptionists, attendants, maintenance servants and also the service providers' teams, like security guards and cleaning servants. Its main goal is to establish a constant dialogue with all the departments' employees, widening their perception of the several activities developed within the institution and about the museum's nature itself. This program has the support and supervision of the department coordinator Mila M. Chiovatto, besides the support given by Márcia Guiote, Pinacoteca's Human Resources coordinator. Currently the coordination and one educator¹⁵, with the assistance of interns, are in charge of this project.

This activity is been carried out since 2003, and initially it was focused only on the employees that had direct contact with the visitors or those who don't participate of the conceptual construction of the museum. Currently all the maintenance team is also participating on the project, like electricians, painters, carpenters, besides the service providers team, security guards and cleaning staff, which are both outsourced.¹⁶

It is common that these workers feel that their jobs are less important than the other roles performed at the museum. Therefore, it is necessary to constantly reinstate that the

¹⁵ The program's coordinator is Maria Stella da Silva and the educator is Thiago Santiago.

¹⁶ Outsourcing means, according to SEBRAE – SP, "...trusting third parties to do the non-essential activities of the company, that is, hiring services". Working with the museum's outsourced teams, despite the high turnover rates that this type of contract presents, seems essential for us since each of the activities performed within the institution should be valued, regardless of how or who performs them (in this case, if it's a museum's employee or not). It is important that these professionals understand the museum's dynamics (its role, the internal activities developed, the visitation rules etc) and that they also have the opportunity of visiting and getting to know the exhibitions. Once inside the institution, they are also their representatives, since for the visitor there is no difference between an employee and a service provider, they are all the museum's "face". Another important aspect is that this professional, when getting to know the institution for which is providing services, he tends to relates better to his role and to the other employees.



museum depends on a collective construction that involves all departments and all employees and collaborators.

3.1 Employee groups that take part in this initiative:

a) Visitor service team: Attendants and receptionists – The Pinacoteca’s Visitor Services Department has the goal of reaching an excellence quality service. **Role:** they are responsible for the safety at the expository rooms, the protection of the artworks and the welcoming of the visiting audiences.

This group’s needs perceived during the Program:

- Larger valorization of their work;
- greater recognition of their role within the institution;
- better knowing the institution (the actions developed by the museum; its departments and staff in general), realizing the need to adjust their work to the institution’s mission and reality;
- Obtaining more information for the better development of their assignments: internal rules, information on events and exhibitions, changes to the visitors’ flow, etc..
- Feeling to be a part of the institution;
- Widening their sense of belonging to the official culture represented by the museum.

b) Building maintenance team: electricians, painters, carpenters. Role: they are responsible for building the spatial structures for the exhibitions (long term or temporary), as well as the painting and the lightning, the general maintenance of the building (renovations,



plumbing, hydraulics, etc) and the preventive maintenance of the building. This team is composed by professionals specialized in woodworking, blacksmithing, painting and electrical.

This group's needs perceived during the Program:

- Receiving information about the exhibitions they are setting;
- Better knowing the institution (the actions developed by the museum; its departments and staff in general), realizing the need to adjust their work to the institution's mission and reality;
- Larger valorization of their work;
- greater recognition of their role within the institution;
- Know more about the internal rules;
- Feeling to be a part of the institution's employees team
- Widening their sense of belonging to the official culture represented by the museum.

d) Cleaning team – outsourced

Role: They are responsible for the cleanliness of the museum's physical spaces.

This group's needs perceived during the Program:

- Larger valorization of their work;
- greater recognition of their role within the institution, even though they are outsourced professionals;
- Better knowing the institution (the actions developed by the museum; its departments and staff in general), realizing the need to adjust their work to the institution's mission and reality;
- Visiting the museum's temporary exhibits;



- Know more about the internal rules;
- Feeling more like a part of the institution;

e) Security guards – outsourced

Role: they are responsible for the safety of the patrimony and of the people that visit the museum.

This group's needs perceived during the Program:

- Larger valorization of their work;
- greater recognition of their role within the institution, even though they are outsourced professionals;
- Better knowing the institution (the actions developed by the museum; its departments and staff in general), realizing the need to adjust their work to the institution's mission and reality;
- Obtaining more information for the better development of their assignments: internal rules, information on events and exhibitions, openings, changes to the visitors' flow, etc.
- Feeling more like a part of the institution.

3.2 The actions developed by the Functional Conscience:

The Program's educative activities were developed from the groups' needs perceived along the years. Currently the Program is structured in eight modules, as further described:

a) Integration and capacitating – it refers to the activities carried out when the employee just



joins the staff. It happens in two days and has the goal of welcoming the professional to the institution, presenting basic concepts concerning museums, heritage, culture and arts, as well as introducing him or her to the museum's structure, its departments, its roles and its employees.

b) Who am I, am I someone? – this activity aims to generate awareness of the staff to their own personal values, their individuality, their forms of expression, their image, origins and limits, but also to stimulate them to understand the importance of respecting the differences.

c) Knowing the other - this activity has the goal of widening the knowledge regarding the several different kinds of audiences that visit the museum, through the ethical and attitudinal involvement of the institution's employees.

d) Meeting with the Pepe (Educative Program for Special Audiences) – This meeting is carried out so that all employees get to know the Educative Program for Special Audiences, comprehend the social role of the museum when concerning the special audiences, therefore provide subsidies to assure that all employees are well prepared to welcome all of visitors (people with physical, visual, hearing disabilities, as well as learning difficulties etc.), and also have them to know all the materials developed by this program.

e) Meeting with PISC (Social and Cultural Inclusion Program) – It aims to introduce the program for all employees, reinforcing the perception of the museum's social role, and explain the profile and characteristics (rather specific) of the groups that are part of the Program and, in that way, enabling everyone to better receive them.

f) Meeting at the Resistance Memorial – Introduces the place in details, presenting the Resistance Memorial's concepts and encouraging the contact with this important space of the institution.



g) Meeting with the museum's restorers – The goal here is to show the employees the importance of heritage, why and how to preserve, when and why objects are restored and the importance of their work in the process of preserving the patrimony.

h) Technical visit to other museum – This part of the program has the purpose of introducing the employees to other expository spaces, promoting the opportunity for them to be the visitors and, at the same time, to observe this other institution's employees attitude.

For the better development of our actions, we created the following publications:

Educational handout - developed by the Pinacoteca's Education Department, it is given to the employee¹⁷ when he first joins the museum staff. It contains information and concept definitions that will be important for their daily work at the museum, like heritage and conservation, as well as information about the Pinacoteca do Estado itself, like its two historic building, a presentation of the departments, the institution's visitation rules, among others;

Internal bulletin – publication distributed to all of the museum's staff, which contains information about each temporary exhibition, such as the exhibition name, artists, dates, the works presented at the exhibit, additional info about the techniques used by the artist, besides any details that might be essential to the relation with the visitors, like if it is allowed to film and photograph and if there is a catalogue about the exhibition.

¹⁷ This publication was initially developed focusing on the consumer services team (attendants and receptionists). Since early this year, its been used at the welcoming meetings for employees joining the museum's team (educators, administrative professionals, interns, etc.), and also for the outsourced professionals (safety and cleaning).



Other actions:

- Educative visits to the institution's temporary exhibitions;
- Children's Day celebration for the employee's children;
- creation of a space for the socialization among employees (currently in development).

Final consideration

Through these initiatives, we now notice among the Pinacoteca's employees a better understanding of the activities they perform in the institution and its importance; they seem to better comprehend the different activities developed at the museum and the relevance of the articulation between them, which adds up to the perception that the museum is a place for everybody. The participants also presented a transformation in their self-perception, beginning to feel more valued by the institution. We also see an improvement at the public response to the institution's employees, being analyzed as highly positive. Until 2012, the Program wants to include all of the museum's employees.



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