

## PROJECTO OCEANO – AUGUST 2011 REPORT



I knew I should have listened to Freddie Brunt, AZLera's UK-based manager, when he told me August would be a unique challenge... However, with the optimism that comes naturally to someone enjoying a sunny existence in a UNESCO World Heritage site in Southern Africa, I assumed that the challenges posed by Ramadan would be easily overcome. In reality, working with a community which is 90% Muslim (a proportion reflected in Projecto Oceano's teachers and students) meant that Ramadan, like the proverbial elephant in the room, was not a topic that could be so easily avoided! To

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save the inevitable embarrassment of a Christian Englishman trying to explain a Mozambican Muslim tradition, please refer to September's edition of our monthly newspaper *Voz Jovem* (on the website) for more information. Tino, the editor-in-chief of our publication, has written a fantastic article explaining many of the intricacies of Ramadan – well worth a read.

Although people observe different levels of dedication to the rules of Ramadan, it generally requires no eating or drinking between sunrise and sunset, roughly 5 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Ilha de Moçambique. Inevitably, a full day's schooling in the morning in addition to daily Physical Education classes in temperatures of 30+ degrees Celsius meant that our students were frequently devoid of energy by the time our afternoon classes started. To minimise disruption to our activities, we changed the Project's timetable for the month of August and were able to run some effective small foreign language classes in the early afternoon and at 6 p.m. (i.e. after the evening meal had been observed). In terms of my role as Project Manager, the decrease in daily teaching / class planning activities opened up some welcome space in the diary to plan for the coming months. On the management side, comprising of our fantastic team in the UK, France and the USA, AZLera has been growing and developing its practices. Driving these changes on-the-ground amongst our teaching staff and Mozambican managers is crucial to our sustained impact and success; as such, August provided some invaluable time to make sure this is done properly. Additionally I have Ramadan to thank for affording me the time to plan and prepare foreign language curriculums to take us through to the end of 2011. Our French, English and Spanish classes have been working well so far, but it definitely helps if both teacher and students have a clear idea on exactly what ground we'll be covering in the future. The recent introduction of compulsory monthly tests for all foreign language students ensures that grammatical concepts are absorbed and learned in 'bite-size' chunks. There has been the odd groan around the classroom, but it should work well! To ensure rapt attention during class I have also introduced a 'fine' system aimed at punishing myself for any mistakes and keeping students 'on the ball'. If a student spots a mistake of any kind that I have written on the blackboard in any language, their name goes on '*James' Wall of Shame*' next to the blackboard and I pay them 10 Meticaís per mistake I make. So far, it is helping to keep us all on our toes, although unless my spelling of the French *passé composé* improves, I could be struggling to pay for my flight back home for Christmas...

One of August's major achievements has been delivered by Projecto Oceano's capoeira team. Capoeira, a non-contact martial arts tradition with both African and Brazilian roots, provides a fantastic and fun discipline for Ilha de Moçambique's youth. We run daily training sessions and provide uniforms and musical accompaniment for our team of 15 *capoeiristas*, as well as providing public demonstrations on significant occasions. Gito and Manuel, two talented Projecto Oceano students who have recently progressed to managing all aspects of the capoeira group, organised two demonstrations this month. The first took place in Ilha de Mocambique's beautiful *Jardim de Memória*, an old port location / garden from which Ilha's natives were captured and exported to become slaves in Brazil in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As African slaves were at the forefront of the development of capoeira, it is a very historically 'fitting' place to put on public demonstrations, as well as being an exceptionally beautiful spot. We invite both tourists and locals to attend all presentations in a drive to increase AZLera's standing in local communities and to raise awareness about our educational offering amongst groups of people often difficult to reach. Any money earned in tips is re-invested in the capoeira team's equipment, ensuring that Projecto Oceano's influence in the community will continue to grow in the future. Next on the purchase list, after we have earned enough money, is a set of traditional African drums to accompany the dancing...

In a new entrepreneurial twist to Projecto Oceano, our capoeira *mestre* has been in touch with a new 5 star hotel on Ilha with the aim of organising private demonstrations for the hotel's guests. It has been fantastic to see such initiative from an Oceano member, and the establishment of a contract with the hotel should help to make our capoeira team majority self-financed, as well as giving the *capoeiristas* a major boost in confidence. Congratulations must go to Gito, our *mestre*, for making the group's hard work pay off. Results like this are what make development work so rewarding for all



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involved, and this initiative has given the whole Projecto Oceano team a major enthusiasm boost heading into another important month. In addition, the hotel's interest in Projecto Oceano is justified recognition for all our hard work in advertising our capoeira team and, more importantly, for the dedication and hours of practice invested by Gito and his band of merry youths.

Allied to our capoeira team are the efforts of the artistically gifted amongst us (myself definitely not included), who have spent much time making handicrafts with local materials. At each capoeira presentation we have a stall displaying information about Projecto Oceano's history, philosophy and the services we offer to the community, as well as selling carefully crafted exercise books and paintings of local scenes. Our main artists include Manuel, Firoza and the effortlessly romantic Zito whose 'bloody arrow through the heart' masterpiece inexplicably remains to be sold (a major price discount looms for this *chef d'oeuvre*)! Photos of recent capoeira presentations and Projecto Oceano's stall can be seen, as ever, on AZLera's website. This fortnightly 'market' fosters the talent of our artists and helps boost the Project coffers (albeit modestly, as the profit margin must remain relatively small so as not to price our products too high for local buyers), but more importantly shows our students that a little time and effort provides money to be re-invested for the collective benefit of all students at Projecto Oceano. It reduces the 'dependency cycle', as when we need to buy materials for the Project (paper, chalk, potentially computer parts), we can do so from funds earned locally.

The Social Debates hosted by Projecto Oceano will take on a different twist in September as we look to change the format of debates to make each one unique. In order to engage local interest and keep things varied, we will be attempting to use digital media to introduce debates and make discussion and content more dynamic. First on the list is an internal debate with all Projecto Oceano teachers and students on what it means to each individual to be part of this organisation. We will be having a group session before the debate to look in detail at the website and explain the role of all AZLera employees abroad. It is important that all Projecto Oceano members 'on-the-ground' have a more holistic view of AZLera and can see the results of their hard work here in Mozambique; equally, their input is central to any changes made to our organisation. We then aim to hold a second (and open to the public) debate at the end of the month on the emotive topic of Racism. Three students will open the debate with short biographies, photos and critiques of the politics and personalities of Robert Mugabe, Adolf Hitler and Martin Luther King. Following which we should have some fairly impassioned discussions, and an examination of what constitutes racism in present day.

So, for another month it is time to bid farewell to blogs and the World Wide Web and return to reality on Ilha de Moçambique. All that remains is for all of us in Mozambique to wish our UK-based team all the best with AZLera's presentation in London on 6<sup>th</sup> October (contact Freddie Brunt on [freddie@azlera.com](mailto:freddie@azlera.com) or +44 7725 213 034 for more details on the event), and to thank you all for your continued interest and support of Projecto Oceano.