

PROJECTO OCEANO – MAY 2012 REPPORT



It's been a busy month for Projecto Oceano. After spending my first few weeks on Ilha steadily getting to know the project, the people, and adjusting to the way of life and the way of work, May has passed by in a flash of activity that makes me fear for the speedy passing of my time here, as I can already sense that it's going to be very hard to leave.

The beginning of May saw in the launch of our new language courses at the project. I'm teaching English, French and Spanish to three very enthusiastic groups of students, some of whom are embarking on careers as polyglots as they attend all three courses. A supposed polyglot myself, it has actually proved quite a challenge getting my head around teaching French and Spanish *in Portuguese*. Sometimes my brain and my tongue get a little confused but this is getting easier with time as Portuguese is gradually becoming second nature to me and even infiltrating my dreams. My English class consisted of a few kids who were sincerely keen to learn, but struggling to keep up with the majority of teenagers in the class, so I took it upon myself to start another course specifically for children. Although at times exhausting, it has quickly become one of the highlights of my teaching schedule.

The other significant addition to the timetable this month has been the children's reading groups. Project member Zito and I, one Thursday morning at the beginning of the month, went into the three primary schools on the island, spoke to the headmasters, put up some posters, and went into some classrooms to speak to the pupils about the new classes we were offering at the project. That same afternoon we had no less than one hundred kids turning up at the project wanting to sign up to these classes. So a slight rethink was required.

Now, instead of two *Ler e Aprender* reading sessions per week as originally planned, we are offering 6 classes. Our members Naiza and Tania host reading groups for the kids who already know how to read, further developing their reading and writing skills and creativity. Meanwhile, Zito and Mamy are working with those kids who don't yet know how to read and write, and in the smaller groups that we've created they are already coming along leaps and bounds. Our members are proving to be fantastic teachers, identifying that perfect but often elusive balance of discipline and fun, education and enjoyment. Crucially for our members, as teachers themselves they are learning valuable lessons in the importance of preparation, adaptability, creativity, leadership and presentation skills. It's also great to be working with younger kids, who come to the project completely of their own free will, and amongst whom I can already sense there are the future members of Projecto Oceano.

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One stifling Saturday morning this month we hosted a fantastic presentation on Nutrition at the project. Inspired by last month's *Voz Jovem* newsletter, we invited Anikó, a trained nutritionist, to come and speak to our students and the wider community and suffice to say everyone went away with a host of useful tips on how to look after their bodies and their minds by maintaining a healthy diet within the constraints of the foodstuffs accessible and affordable to all on the island. And the project members and I went away hatching plans for future presentations and workshops along the same lines. May's *Social Debate*, led by our exemplary Queen of Debates, Naiza, was on the subject of abortion, and was as animated as ever, our students relishing the opportunity to exchange ideas and challenge one another's values.

In the midst of general project activity, the last week or so has been dominated by making plans for *Dia da Criança* – national Children's Day. Projecto Oceano, in collaboration with two Portuguese NGOs on the island, WAY and Move Microfinance, will be putting on a big old shindig inside the old Portuguese fort, providing lunch, games, music, films and other surprises for a grand total of 350 kids. Yes, we may well be completely bonkers... Stay tuned for news on how we fare in next month's report.

On a personal note, looking back on the past month my memories seem to be dotted with power cuts, illnesses, water problems and computer issues, blended with the discovery of the joy of weekend boat trips and the beauty of the surrounding countryside and beaches, the forging of friendships and the consumption of several tonnes of rice and beans.

On top of all of this, behind the scenes this month there has been a lot of beavering away on the preparation of the AZLera Scholarship fund and application process. A huge step for the organisation, Projecto Oceano will as of this year be offering a scholarship annually to one carefully selected student, to attend the best universities with the best courses in the country, thus encouraging and enabling our students to fulfil their potential and ultimately to contribute to the development of Mozambique in the direction that this culturally and resource rich, but historically troubled and poverty-stricken, country deserves. Please check back on the website for more news to be posted on this front very soon.