

SUMMARY OF EPIS PROGRAMS

EMPRESÁRIOS PELA INCLUSÃO SOCIAL

SOCIAL VALUE PROPOSITION

EPIS - Empresários Pela Inclusão Social - is a privately funded NGO, established in 2006, after “a call for social inclusion” from the President of the Portuguese Republic, and has more than 415 corporate and business associates. EPIS stands for “entrepreneurs for social inclusion”.

In their founding act, as a priority mission, the founding entrepreneurs established that EPIS activity should focus on education and more specifically in preventing academic failure and reducing early school leaving rates.

This option was based on the strong conviction that this is the starting point for the individual development of young people, having in mind their social inclusion.

EPIS wants to be a reference in the development, incubation and internalization of new methodologies to promote school success, the quality of education and training systems, the employability and professional insertion of young people.

EPIS Program Resources

EPIS programs are made up of the following resources:

METHODOLOGY. It has two blocks: a system of signaling students’ risk; a model of training / empowerment of students, with functional analysis, personalized intervention plan and intervention techniques - covering family, school and territorial surroundings.

COMPUTER PLATFORM. "Workflow" with all work steps, from signaling to grade loading, which allows paperless work anywhere.

IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERSHIPS. Contracts with partners to finance the program in schools. EPIS ensures methodological implementation and partners ensure human resources.

PROFESSIONAL MEDIATORS. The program is implemented by mediators, preferably with a psychologist or full-time teacher, who monitors about 65 students a year.

TRAINING PLAN, COACHING AND CONTROL. Implemented throughout the year, with the support of university professors and a team of internal coordinators, who also control the quality of the processes.

Training of 2nd and 3rd cycle students - MEDIATORS FOR SCHOOL SUCCESS

EPIS main project is “Mediators for school success”. It is an intervention program focused on empowering adolescents (12-18 years old) at risk of Early School Leaving (ESL) for school success and on achieving 12 school years.

The program is promoted by EPIS and other business associates. EPIS main stakeholders are: the Ministry of Education, more than 26 municipalities of Portugal (including Azores), at least 135 schools nationwide, 105 full-time mediators and about 490 volunteers from these partners. EPIS has an annual operational budget of about EUR 1 million, funded by donations from these business partners. The Ministry of Education's financial investment in this program in 2016 was around 2Million €.

The program targets non-performing adolescent students and the goal is for them to achieve school success in order to prevent early school leaving and motivate them to complete the 12 mandatory school years in Portugal.

We want to help students acquire skills that enable them to respond flexibly to the economic, social and technological challenges of the 21st century and to be more likely to have prosperous, healthy and happy lives.

It is a pioneer program in Europe on empowering adolescents through soft skills (non-cognitive skills), focusing on motivation for learning, peer interaction and systematic monitoring of achievements.

Training model

EPIS full-time mediators help students develop soft skills that will enhance their beliefs, self-esteem, conscientiousness (organization, responsibility, working hard), openness to experience,

extroversion, agreeableness and emotional stability. These changes will induce better school performances.

We want young people to spend more time in school, to complete more levels of education, to acquire the tools they need for a successful life, to be more tolerant and able to live healthy relationships with others, to become happy adults with good family relationships and integrated into their community. We want them to have meaningful and productive lives (the noblest goal of education for both parents and teachers).

The methodological principles of this program are:

- Non universality. Focus only on at risk students, selected by using risk analysis tools.
- Proximity. It is performed by full-time mediators at schools (teachers, psychologists social workers).
- Strong methodological approach. Empowerment focused on soft skills (non-cognitive skills), as a prerequisite for school success.
- Life cycle change. Applied during 2 to 3 years, in order to allow structural changes in the skill profile of students.

Implementation of this program on the field is done in two phases:

- Screening, with a tool to select students based on 4 dimensions of quantitative risk factors: (1) school performance, (2) social capital of student, (3) relationship with teachers/peers, (4) economic background of family.
- 360º Empowerment is a phase based on the same 4 dimensions, with routines/modules targeted for each student, applied outside the classroom in individual or small group sessions. Individual work starts with suitable working modules aiming the development of personalized plans for supporting and monitoring of students and family. In the two following years, these modules are worked individually or in small groups.

EPIS intervention model foresees the use of a set of strategies and techniques of a cognitive and behavioral nature that can be used effectively in counselling students considered to be at medium risk of school failure. The program includes the improvement of these students' soft skills based on evidence that those skills predict success in life. It also includes teacher training in behavior and classroom conflict management.

The mediators work with students aspects such as:

- Beliefs and values related to school;
- Behavior, self-regulation of attention and impulse control problems;
- Self-concept and investment in school;
- Relationship with peers - acceptance / social rejection;
- Relationship with teachers and authority figures;
- Troubleshooting and resistance to change;

Monitoring of students and families consists of comparing grades at the end of each school term with the ones from the previous schoolyear and making the necessary adjustments to interventions.

The outcomes are measured through (1) the increase of school success rates year-by-year, (2) the improvement and the increase of good grades (4's and 5's in a scale of 1 to 5), (3) and self-evaluation and evaluation of non-cognitive skills improvement.

Latest results in school success rates improvement of students in the program are:

- 2016/2017: 78% to 86%, in a portfolio of 1834 students (+ 7,4 pp)
- 2015/2016: 72% to 82%, in a portfolio of 2451 students (+ 9,5 pp)
- 2014/15: 60% to 74%, in a portfolio of 1127 students (+ 14,5 pp)
- 2013/14: 59% to 71%, in a portfolio of 1541 students (+ 12,2 pp)

In March 2017, a study was presented by Professor Pedro Martins - Queen Mary, University of London -, which focused on data from 2015 to 2016, based on a methodology, experimental evaluation, considered the gold standard in terms of accuracy and international acceptance that concluded that the students monitored in the program Mediators for school success increase the likelihood of non-retention by more than 10% (<http://qmulcgr.blogspot.pt/2017/05/can-non-cognitive-interventions-improve.html>).

Since 2007, EPIS programs have screened more than 35.000 students and selected about 22.000 to take part in the program.

Training of 1st cycle students - “SUCCESS GENERATION”

The 1st cycle of Basic Education is a period of critical learning (reading, writing, calculating, drawing, logic, reasoning, etc.). Not all students enter the first year with knowledge and skills in the above domains. There are even students who have not yet reached certain basic neuropsychological and socio-emotional skills that allow them to reach the goals set for the various years and periods of the first cycle.

The long-term consequences of these various types of illiteracy and innumeracy are socially and personally devastating and they seriously compromise the insertion in the job market, the future individual and family income, which are factors that promote social exclusion.

Some learning difficulties / obstacles emerge before the child enters school and if they are not recognized and remedied, they worsen and undermine all educational and life paths. These difficulties include, not only the classical illiteracy and innumeracy, but also visual illiteracy (ability to read charts and maps) and difficulties in the domain of cognitive control or executive functions.

Since 2013, EPIS is testing a methodology for "empowerment" of 1st Cycle students to promote school success for children at-risk bearing in mind the idea of prevention and with the objective of helping all students to enter the second cycle with skills for school success up to 12 years of schooling.

The number of 1st Cycle students accompanied by EPIS was in 2016/2017 of 1,200 children.

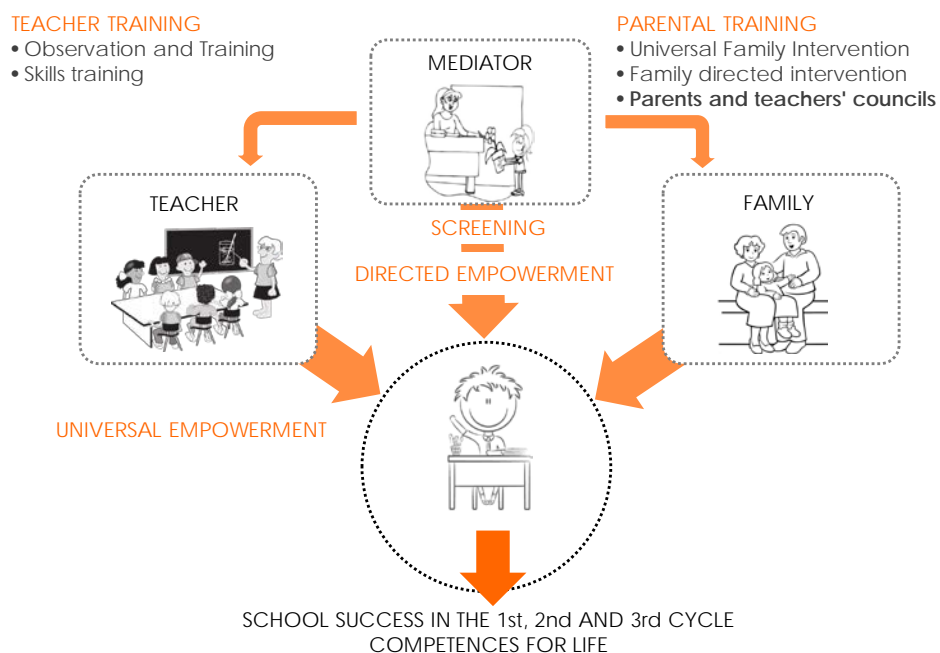
EPIS challenge is to provide all children in the 1st Cycle with the skills and knowledge to ensure their success until, at least, 12 years of schooling.

3.2. Training model

During the first cycle , four critical areas emerge associated with the improvement of skills / conditions which enable educational success that are the orientation / intervention axes in this pilot project: [1] Critical knowledge and skills (reading, writing, calculation and visual literacy); [2] Ability of expression (physical-motor and artistic); [3] Screening and support for physical / cognitive handicaps and [4] School Connectedness.

Believing that school success can be promoted if there is an effective and early screening that allows a more detailed and specialized evaluation of the cases of risk, followed by evidence-based intervention, a 3 phase model was developed:

1. **A SCREENING PHASE** for the early detection of a set of factors that promote school failure at the level of the 1st Cycle present in the Student, School and Family and that allows the selection of students and families for intervention, as well as the identification of aspects of the school and of the territory to activate institutional and community resources.
2. **AN INTERVENTION PLANNING PHASE** according to each student's risk profile.
3. **AN INTERVENTION PHASE** - Use of a set of strategies and / or techniques organized in step-by-step intervention scripts to ensure the acquisition or consolidation of neuropsychological competencies (eg, attention, working memory, self-regulation) , to train cognitive skills (reading, writing, calculating, abstracting, solving mathematical problems, interpreting texts), non-cognitive skills (eg, social skills, cooperation) and to distribute learning tasks throughout the day and week to promote learning and, consequently, school success and its quality (through monitoring and follow-up).



Model of student empowerment, from 1st to 4th year, within the scope of the program "Generation of Success"

Once the screening and its algorithm allow predicting success / failure and identifying the risk axes (Student, School, Family and Territory) and particular risk variables, including several basic psychological processes, Universal Intervention procedures (transversal procedures to be used by teachers in the classroom and in communication with the family) and Directed Intervention (for particular problems, namely basic psychological processes) based on cognitive-behavioral and systemic models have been developed. These procedures have been translated into protocols with the objectives, target variables, tasks, sequences, task execution times, number of sessions, materials to be used and contexts where the exercises are to take place. They were named Script EPIS.

EPIS Guidelines for Universal Intervention and Directed Intervention are available.

According to the intervention model, the mediator can also work in close proximity to the families of the students at risk, enabling them and promoting parental practices that promote school success.