TEACHING PRACTICES: A VEILED SYMBIOSIS BETWEEN INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION?

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SETTING THE SCENERY

The intensification of economic, political and cultural globalisation, which comes together with the advance and dissemination of information technologies, can be associated with diverse phenomena. If at the economic level, one can emphasize market fluctuation, increasing competitiveness and job scarcity (Magalhães & Stover, 2002), at the political and cultural levels, membership to the European community, cultural dissemination, as well as south-north, east-west migrations and wide-reaching conflict, social violence and poverty may be seen as impacting change over the Portuguese social elements as well as on its educational social policies.

One may say that the current educational (re)composition is developed around educational decision making by supranational forums, external to education (Antunes, 2008); the embodiment of a globally structured educational agenda (Dale, 2001; 2005) through the production of models, guidelines and programs by international organisations, such as the European Council, the European Committee and the OECD; and population and public opinion involvement in educational matters through public collective action (Antunes, 2008). Hence, if on the one hand a transnational system of competitiveness may impact the state role from above, due to the state's lack of decision making power at supranational level and due to its accountability compromise (Antunes, 2008); on the other, there is room for state mediation of schooling, whilst exerting its meta-regulation capacity and participating in the regulation process.

The state's ruling role is emphasized and transformed (Seixas, 2001; Barros, 2006) as the state compromises of accountability towards European educational political setting (Santiago et al, 2004) intertwine with states' meta-regulation power to intervene at national level. The state performs as one partner among other social entities (Barros, 2006) traditionally exogenous to education and that relate differently to "distinct referential(s), places and processes" (Barros, 2006a, p. 11). Therefore, new social educational policies arise in face of internationalisation requisites and pressures. The regulation of education through marketization and school managerialism (Stover, 2001) comes up as a result increasing the conflict between mass schooling in Portugal and the democratic possibilities of educational social success, in the framework of a European democracy that claims for equal opportunities for all.

Educational systems should be expected to promote equality of access and educational-social success. Though, Portugal as a semi-peripheral country within a conflicting world, did not manage to comply with the educational legitimating promises of ascending mobility and employment guarantee. These were its rightful arguments in its emission, first as a social right and afterwards within an economic rationality (Amaral, 2002) which assumed that greater qualification of the work force would assure greater
economic competitiveness (Mendes 1998; Magalhães & Soe, 2002). Schooling seems to carry more or less subtle ways of segregation, which are shaped by a model of educational success, which is built in articulation with life contexts where the market ideology is overvalued. Education's evaluative and regulatory concerns — embodied in school rankings, for example — emerge within this ideology, together with educational growing privatization and marketization. Its elitist mode is implemented, while the desirable principles of democracy are denied. Therefore, going against its principles, schooling may contribute to enlarge the abyss among social groups.

It is within this framework that educational problems have grown as a social concern in Portugal in the most recent years, in face of what can be seen as the growing awareness of the educational challenges brought about within Europe. It becomes clear that the exogenous dimensions, which embody change in the worldwide capitalist system, impact and are impacted by the country's endogenous dynamics of change. To be referred, in particular, the extension of compulsory education up until Form 9 (15-16 year olds) thus allowing greater variety of students to stay in school and follow studies to the university. As a result, school is faced with the need to confront an increasing, enriching heterogeneity, which comes up as an added difficulty. Therefore population heterogeneity in schools is frequently seen as disruptive, a problem to be dealt with. Another important feature that characterizes the Portuguese socio-political context and has a crucial impact in schools is teachers' historical conservative character and their will to be guided. These come as a result of almost 50 years of a totalitarian oppressive regime, which shaped and, somehow, still informs teachers' attitudes, behaviour and professional expectations and performance, (as well as it affects the population in general).

It is within this historical background and in the context of mass schooling that the tension between bureaucratic centralization and schools self-management emerged. The introduction of specific educational social policies, which stand on accountability and responsibility, which was justified by the attempt to implement innovative change in schools, has generated turbulence within the system and among its actors due to the imposition of great quantity of exogenously built status norms and rulings. These arise within the framework of state rationalization and reorganizing and the transformation of the model of public work and services, which have been implemented in Portugal, since 2005, by the Government, led by the Socialist Party, in the ambit of Public Administration Reform. Such reform has introduced crucial change in school life due to the alteration in teachers' labour relations — framed by the change in teachers' carriers and in the reform of the school management model (Stolero & Pereira, 2009).

In what concerns teacher carrier, the division of teachers into two hierarchic groups, in terms of professional category and responsibilities, the introduction of teachers' performance evaluation, and the imposition of national exams to access new concerns content based teaching knowledge, embody the source of conflict that has been lived in education in Portugal in the most recent years (ibid.), with undeniable negative impacts in schools' climate and pupils learning conditions. Such conflict emerges within the confrontation between the "new managerialism" in education (Amaral, Magalhães & Santiago, 2003; Reed, 2002) and teachers' loss of power to manage their careers, their work and the educational institutions - schools. Schools and their actors are confronted with the import of techniques, values and practices of the economic world (Soe, 2001), which are brought within schools under the arguments of efficiency, efficacy and academic excellence (Cortésio, et al, 2007), as well as it confronts a professional culture - resilience which has been present in the Portuguese teaching class (Stolero & Pereira, 2009).

To sum up, one can say that the context of schools' instability is characterized by the worsening of the tensions between regulation, control and autonomy, in a still recent framework of high levels of public monitoring and interest over schools and teachers' work together with the increasing growth of bureaucratization of teachers' work that might put at risk the human side of their pedagogic function (see graph 1).

The implementation of the project discussed in this paper occurred during this erratic unsettling period.

Graph 1

Context of the Project
Within the framework of the Worldwide Capitalist System

- [Diagram of the project context]

1 Currently it has been extended to form 12 (17-18 years old) for students that are now in Form 7.
In the next section we will reflect on data provided by teachers in order to understand the ways they interpret their professional role, as another aspect that intervened in the construction of the research project.

**Teachers have a say about their profession**

*The school and its population, a short overview*

The school where the project is being developed is located in a Portuguese city from the Aveiro district, in the country’s central region, that has got around 14,500 inhabitants. It is a semi rural semi industrial-commercial zone. It has got two secondary schools. One of them receives less favoured population and is not well placed in school rankings. The school involved in the project has good physical conditions and has got a good average position (70 out of 504) in school rankings/league tables (SIC/Expreso, 2009). It managed to keep up a fair position in the last few years. Teachers are all certificated and their average age is around 40. Taking into account the characteristics described above, one may say this school is a bit above average when compared with the whole of the Portuguese institutions of education.

Students’ subscription forms were used to characterize the school population. Data provided does not allow for the indubitable distribution of the secondary school population in the social classes suggested by Estanque & Mendes (2007): Employers, managers, supervisors, semi-qualified workers, non-managing technicians, proletariat, and low bourgeoisie. Though, we may say that 74.1% of the population is put together in a large group composed by “semi-qualified workers”, “non-managing technicians”, “proletariat”, and “low bourgeoisie” whereas only the remaining 25.9%, approximately, may be located in another large group, constituted by the other 3 categories, “employers”, “managers”, and “supervisors”. We faced similar difficulties when analysing primary school pupils’ data. Even within these limits, the analysis allows for tracing the picture of a population with scarce economic resources whose cultural capital, in many cases, is quite distant from the one the school seems to value.

Taking into account the analysis of data about the primary and secondary school families and pupils, one may admit that the school population has mid and mid-low income. Most parents educational qualifications are below Form 9 (compulsory education stage), even though some have reached Form 12, baccalaureats and degrees. Therefore we are dealing with a group whose characteristics are quite to be expected in a population who lives close to the urban areas.

**An analysis of the process and data collection**

A group of teachers volunteered to be involved in a project with the team from Porto and Aveiro Universities. They were aware of the projects’ intentions. They knew it constituted a work of research and action that would take place in their own school. We had the intention to constitute a “collective researcher” that would work in a line close to action-research. The project, itself, was aimed at analysing teachers’ possibilities to enact their relative autonomy in order to improve students’ educational success. Though, along the work, teachers’ lack of adhesion to the reflective process and to change their actions became very apparent. Their interest was mainly directed to the organization of training sessions. It was within this framework that the need to enlarge the participating group emerged. Research took a smaller role, being limited to the team of researchers from the university whereas teachers assumed the role of active and reflective participants in the process of training requested by them. Therefore, teachers became object of study instead of subjects.

Data that follows was collected in these circumstances. We made resource to open questions and brainstorming in order to analyse teachers’ representations about their socio-professional role as well as access their views about the way their (more or less conscious) practices contribute towards students’ success or lack of it.

We selected for this paper teachers’ answers to a two questions questionnaire about the “teacher job”: “What activities do you just carry out according to the rules/instructions you are given?”, and “what activities do you develop within schooling that you think you can somehow manage, that means, where you have some margin of action?”

After the first analysis, data was put aside by side and match up to teachers’ concepts of the “good student”.

**Examining some results**

We admitted that the use of opened questions to quest teachers, as teaching professionals, about those activities would help access their representations of their jobs. Among the 284 activities described as part of the “teaching job” it is to be emphasised that 32% relate to the work developed within the classroom and that 16.2% refer to the evaluation process. The same percentage appears in what concerns teacher bureaucratic activities. To perform Form guidance, which implies contact with parents or carers is referred in 8.1% of the answers and planning meetings in 7.7%. Only 1.2% answers mentioned decision making meetings, such as subject meetings or teachers’ class councils. Teacher-student interaction and the support given to students is only referred in 3.2% of the statements (See graph 2).

Therefore, according to teachers’ representations of their professional roles, one can admit that teaching, planning and evaluating are the three most valued aspects.

These activities are seen in diverse ways by the respondents. Whereas 59.2% of their answers report to activities that they consider of mere execution of the guidelines that are provided, 40.8% report to activities within which teachers can imprint their personal orientation, activities they can manage. Summing up their statements, one can verify that the reference to activities of execution is prevalent. Therefore their role of executors/doers who obey to instructions prevails in their professional role.
transforming/researching communities

Graph 2

Activities to be done and/or to be managed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>0%</th>
<th>10%</th>
<th>20%</th>
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<tr>
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</table>

It is now time to analyse the work situations where the two types of activity are seen by teachers as being involved. Once again we are faced with varied answers. As we referred, the most valuable activities in terms of application and management are the ones developed within the classroom, evaluation and planning, as well. The activities teachers think they can manage and the ones they think they must carry out may be taken independently. In the first case, in particular, one can verify that learning-teaching activities in the classroom are seen by most teachers (62%) as the ones they can have a say about. All other activities are not described as relevant (see graph 3).

Graph 3

Activities teachers think they can manage

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<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Planning meetings</td>
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<td>Evaluation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Form guidance</td>
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In what concerns the activities essentially seen as to be carried out (without personal management) 26.8% of the teachers include the bureaucratic and organizational ones, 22% include evaluation and 19.6% refer decision making meetings. 11.3% occurrences point out classroom teaching. Form guidance (8.9%) is point out as mere tasks to be carried out (see graph 4).

Graph 4

Activities teachers think they must carry out

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<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Form guidance</td>
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<td>Planning meetings</td>
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We raised earlier the possibility that teachers' answers would give room to build an understanding of their representation of their professional activities. If we admit this, we may conclude, as referred above, (see graph 2) the way these teachers see it, their work essentially consists of the teaching-learning activities, within the classroom. Hence, this will be their territory, the place where they have greater opportunity to use their "power to command" and "constrain" (Murphy, 1982). To be noted the lack of reference to activities that would allow teachers to take students socio-economic circumstances into account, such as Form Teaching and students support.

The amount of references to meetings as activities of mere execution (19.6%) is also interesting to emphasize. To be noted that these meetings are formally aimed at decision making, as it is the case of the teachers' class councils and subject meetings. Also to be questioned and reflected upon the fact that 8.9% of the teachers consider Form guidance and 11.3% consider Teaching as activities they just carry out.

If we put this data side by side with the characteristics attributed by teachers to the "good student", it becomes evident the way the use of power may tend to "normalize" students. Out of the 112 characteristics used to describe the "good student", 74 construct an "ideal type" (Weber, 1949), which corresponds to the student that "complies", "pays attention", is "responsible", has "good manners", is "well organized", "hard working", "committed", "proud" of his/her work, "humble", and so forth. Only 33 respondents describe the "good student" as the one who "is not satisfied with simple answers", "is active and reflective", or "is able to fundament his/her point of view".
Final Comments

This paper focuses, in particular, the characteristics of teachers who participate in the project, as one of the factors that condition its development. Thus, this constitutes an attempt to understand these teachers' values and attitudes in what concerns the "teacher job". We admitted that such comprehensive view would help access and interpret the unexpected phenomena of resistance we were faced with during the project, when teachers were confronted with the challenge to develop analytical and reflective attitudes toward their own practices. Such situation emerged as an added difficulty towards the desirable construction of the collective researcher which informed a project that aimed to be of action-research. Hence, we were very interested to identify possible causes of these difficulties.

Former work (Cortês & Stoeber, 1995) admitted that effective change in teachers' attitudes and practices would only occur within the conjuncture of a set of conditions. The characteristics of the training process were pointed out in particular. Training had to constitute an active process, where teachers participated, and had to focus questions of significance for the people involved. This was called the "training context". That same work also pointed out that the challenged did not diverge too much from teachers' habitus (cf. Bourdieu et Passeron, 1970). An analysis close to the Vygotskian concept of "zone of proximal development" (Vygotsky, 1978) was suggested, as it helped theorize that certain limits should not be exceeded so that "training could occur".

Such hypothesis of work is now supported by data analysis in the present project. The frustrated attempts to constitute the collective-researcher, and to put into action a theoretical and methodological framework of action-research became clear. It would have been very difficult to achieve with a group of teachers who see themselves mainly as doers and that have small awareness of the need and importance of projecting the ambit of their work beyond the classroom. It also showed the researchers the need to adapt their expectations and proposal of work, to imprint a methodological shift in order to get closer to teachers and develop profitable enriching work for all.

But data that was collected also seems to bring into evidence a third stream that was not taken into account in former work. It concerns the analysis of the impact of trouble som work context in a research project. In this case, during the whole the team dealt with a context of corporative struggle and professional turbulence in face of the measures taken by the Ministry of Education, concerning teachers carriers and new modes of school management. Measures that made them feel seriously penalized. This last feature remains as an alert as it is important to value the impacts of the social context characteristic when implementing a project that requests teachers to develop deep reflective processes and engagement in their attitudes and practices.

References

