

Centro de Estudos Sociais, Portugal
WP3 Summary Report
Document Analysis at National Level

Portugal became a democratic country in 1974, after a long-lasting dictatorship which promoted four year basic schooling for all the population, ensuring that minimum literacy was accessible to a majority while only a very small educated elite had access to education at higher levels than that. This had an obvious impact on the development of the education system regulations since then. The Framework Law on the Educational System, dating from 1986 and which is still in force despite a frustrated attempt recently to replace it, is mainly focused on facilitating and ensuring access to education, as well as the democratic structure of schooling. As far as the intercultural dimension in education is concerned, there is no specific reference except for some principles that can be traced to it, namely the opportunity to learn two foreign languages and the promotion of values such as solidarity and cooperation. On the other hand, one of the aims of basic education is to develop the knowledge and appreciation of Portuguese values, identity, language, history and culture. However, every child is ensured the opportunity and the conditions for successful learning and schooling.

In addition, it puts forward the following aims: (1) to school free, responsible, autonomous and solidary people; (2) to develop the democratic and pluralist spirit, respecting others and their ideas; (3) to value the free exchange of opinions; (4) to educate critical, creative and participative citizens; (5) to contribute to a conscious reflection upon the spiritual, aesthetic, moral and civic values; (6) to educate young people civically and morally; (7) to decentralise schooling in order to allow a growing participation of the local communities; and (8) to develop the spirit and practice of democracy. As far as the intercultural education is concerned, the discourse in this law calls for the “safeguard [of] the national identity and heritage,” bearing in mind “the universalistic European tradition and the increasing interdependence and solidarity amongst all peoples in the world.”

A concern for a more democratic school ethos is, for example, expressed in legal documents by the regulation of the school community, such as parents associations’ and by establishing the rights and duties of pupils and teachers.

As far as the “intercultural dimension” is concerned, references to values such as respect for cultural diversity and solidarity appear more and more frequently throughout the official documents analysed, in particular, after the early nineties and slowing down in the 2000s. Furthermore, the Ministry of Education created a working group to study and to promote intercultural education in the 90s.

The “Board of Intercultural Education” aimed at developing particular strategies and activities in schools with a high rate of pupils with an immigrant background and high levels of school failure.

Dispatch 63/ME/91 (March 13, 1991) creates a new department called “Entreculturas” in the Ministry of Education, which is specifically concerned with and focused on ‘multicultural education’. According to this document, “Entreculturas” aims to promote an education that (1) values the human condition, (2) multiplies the opportunities for social, personal and educational success; (3) widens the field of initial and in-service teacher training, (4) mobilises society to civic and democratic education, by promoting it, and finally (5) opens new areas of cooperation and reinforcement of the international community. More specifically, this department intends to stimulate citizenship education and to contribute to a climate of acceptance of, solidarity towards, tolerance of and respect for the right to Difference.

Among a high number of strategies, it is relevant for our analysis to mention a few. For example, (a) the need to cooperate with higher education institutions in order to develop contents regarding intercultural education, and to promote their inclusion in teacher initial and in-service training; (b) to cooperate with the Institute for Educational Innovation (another department of the Ministry of Education) in order to develop contents to include in the Personal and Social Education and Moral and Religious Education syllabi; (c) to develop multiple projects dealing with specific communities, such as East-Timorese, Gypsies and Cape-Verdian children; (d) to include the intercultural dimension in two important projects, namely “Education for All” and the Inter-Ministerial Programme on Educational Success, analysed before. Another strategy is (e) to identify problematic schools in terms of racial conflicts and tensions. From all the strategies, one of them raises some doubts as far as its implementation is concerned. Community actions and activities are to be developed in order to promote “civic literacy,” especially in suburban areas. *This strategy is apparently quite narrowing, since it is meant to be implemented only in big cities and in their most poor and disadvantaged areas.* Finally, it is worth stressing the intention to carry out a survey in schools throughout the country on youngsters’ values regarding concepts such as tolerance and multiracial and pluricultural good “living together” interactions.

Dispatch 28/ME/91 (March 28, 1991) regulates the Gemination and School Exchange Programme. This document aims (1) to promote programmes of gemination (exchange between two schools), school exchange and school trips to foreign countries (especially from EU); (2) to stimulate education

towards free, responsible, autonomous and solidary citizens, who respect the Other and their ideas, are open to dialogue and that contribute to the valorization of knowledge and of cultural diversity; (3) to promote intercultural relations and create a consciousness of the European space; (4) to reinforce democratic values and contribute to the construction of a true “Citizens’ Europe”; and (5) to promote solidarity and cooperation between school population, families and institutions. The tools suggested are the promotion of cultural activities and school activities that bolster solidarity and cooperation between school population, families and institutions and the exchange of students and teachers as an interdisciplinary activity of pedagogical and cultural character.

These are currently the two main approaches to intercultural education in the Portuguese education system, either the development of a European dimension both in the school curriculum and through school exchange projects or the tackling of the increasing diversity within the student population. The former is more frequent in middle and secondary schools while the latter is more demanded in primary in middle schools as diversity decreases in the upper levels due to higher rates of failure among students with an immigrant or ethnic minority background. Both lines of action, however, are more prone to be undertaken within or more connected with extra-curricular, subsidiary and informal education.

Since 2001, the school curricula have undergone a reorganization including thereafter “Education for Citizenship” as a transversal area of education, replacing the former “Social and Personal Education”. As a specific strategy, three new compulsory subjects were introduced in the national curriculum for primary education: Project Work, Study Methods and Civic Education. The latter is meant to prepare responsible, active and critical citizens, by promoting their active participation in class, school and community life. It is also worth mentioning that documents addressing pre-school education in particular are very rich in terms of concepts and ideas relating to intercultural education and democratic and citizenship education. According to its Outline Law, dating from 1997, pre-school education is expected to promote contact amongst children from different social groups, respect for cultural heterogeneity and children’s awareness of their own existence as members of their community. However, national syllabi in secondary school are more specific about to intercultural education, mainly those directed at specific subjects such as foreign languages, geography, history and art. Finally, as stated above, it is to be noticed that the main feature of active citizenship in schools remains, according to national legislation, mostly focused on their democratic organisation.

Finally, a recent new strategy and tool that is important to intercultural education has been proposed in the 2001 reform when Portuguese as second language was offered to students with a different mother tongue. Furthermore, Portuguese is presented as a transversal area in all documents since 1989. However, the study of Portuguese as a foreign language has only been developed within the scope of Instituto Camões to be taught abroad and in higher education institutions.