Teachers' Roles in Curriculum Design in Portuguese Schools

NETWORK 3
Symposium
Teachers' involvement in curriculum design

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Since 2005, there has been a decentralizing trend in Portuguese curricular policy, emphasising the active role of teachers in the process of curriculum innovation. Flexible new curricula offer teachers spaces to manoeuvre in curriculum-making in their immediate contexts. However, the apparent extension of autonomy to teachers comes with attendant challenges.

- What have been trends and influences of this process?
- How do teachers represented themselves in this task?
aims

i) identifying the influences of European policies in the Portuguese curriculum;
ii) identifying the trends that shape Portuguese curriculum politics within teachers' involvement in curriculum design;
iii) understanding teachers' involvement in the development of the curriculum.
In the 1990s curriculum designers recognized the need for school education to take into account students’ diverse starting points in order to promote curricular justice (Connell, 1993).

Such recognition arose under the influence of international politics, and in particular, following the Recommendations of the World Conference about “education for all”,

And the increasing visibility of social multiculturalism.

The global training was attributed to the school as its main role. (Zabala, 1998).

School curriculum is not to be limited to the contents to be taught but to enlarge itself to situations that allow students to learn to live together and to live with others in order to “learn to be” (Delors et al., 1996)

The addition of Portugal to the European Economic Communisty, in 1986, challenges for the teachers’ role s in the curriculum.

In reference to Ball’s thesis (1992) about the cycle of the politics, we may categorize these ideas as belonging to context of influence and having repercussions in the conception of the curriculum that was prescribed at the national level.
trends that shape Portuguese curriculum politics and teachers' involvement in curriculum design

The view of the teacher as a curriculum constructor and decision maker was influenced by the ideas of international scholars that meanwhile were translated into Portuguese.

Worth referring to, for instance:

Stenhouse’s (1975) assertion about the significance of teachers (the “practitioners”)

Teachers assuming the role of “researchers”, Zeichner (1993)

Schön’s (1987) ideas about the importance of teacher reflection within action and about action,

Giroux’s (1988) view of the teachers as “transforming intellectuals”,

Banks’ (1989) avowal that the curriculum needs to produce the empowerment of students who belong to cultural minority groups,

the ideas of Fullan & Hargreaves (2000) about teachers’ team work and collaborative practices.
Understanding teachers' involvement in the development of the curriculum

- general questions:
  - what perceptions do teachers have about their role as designers and developers of the curriculum?
  - how far are intended policies from schools practices and teachers' perceptions?

The research question has been broken into four more specific dimensions:

- Teacher perceptions as local constructors of curricular policies;
- Teacher collaborative work with their peers to render concrete the local curricular policies;
- Teacher pedagogical practices to develop the curriculum;
- Ways in which teachers take curricular justice into account within their pedagogical action.
Understanding teachers' involvement in the development of the curriculum

○ **Instrument:**
  ○ a self administered survey.

○ **Sample:**
  ○ teachers in primary and secondary schools (K to 12). (N=214).

○ The occasional sample, grouped according to gender, academic background, and levels taught, has similar percentages to those presented by the Ministry of Education (2010), when characterizing the teachers in state education in Portugal.

○ Thus, around 82% are female, 18% male, 8.3% teach Pre-School age, 28.7% Primary Education, 23.6% Middle School, 15.9% in the 3rd Cycle whilst 21% teach Secondary School.
Main Results

- “Teacher roles as local constructors of curricular policies”
- Greater value is attributed to the compliance with curricular-pedagogical guidelines when compared to other items, namely the enactment of democratic ideals and the reflection about school action.
- This means teachers give more value to their action as agents of the set curriculum than their role as local curricular decision makers, even though this is prescribed by law.
Main Results

- “Teacher pedagogical practices to develop the curriculum”
  - All the items of this dimension are generally valued by all teachers participants
  - They are more valued than the items that relate to teacher’s role in defining school curricular local policies.
  - This reflects teachers’ lack of valuation of the item “Experiencing innovative pedagogical and didactical practices”.
  - Less value was given to the different pedagogical strategies by those teachers that were part of the Leadership Team, in comparison to the remaining teachers.
  - This response is contrary to that presented by the Form Teachers.
Main Results

- “The manner in which teachers account for justice within their pedagogical action”
- There is a tendency for the attribution of greater value to individual/personal action in relation to their peers.
- This tendency goes with the flow of teachers’ answers to privileged students and the item that addresses the adequacy of the educational proposals to students’ needs.
- Students’ needs are perceived by all teachers as a matter of low concern. This may mean that teachers have less capacity to intervene in specific areas.
- Certain incongruence stands out between the items relating to justice in the educational action and the inclusion of less fragility when it comes to curricular decision-making.
- An alternative interpretation is that teachers’ perceptions concerning the need for the central construction of the curriculum (by the Ministry of Education) are a warrant of equity.
Main Results

- “Teacher collaborative work with peers to render concrete the local curricular policies”
- we observed that the individual is more valued
- maybe this is because respondent teachers consider themselves better professionals than their peers.
- this situation seems to contradict Fullan and Hargreaves’s (2000) thesis of “interactive professionalism” as an important condition towards teacher collective participation in curriculum management.
Conclusions

- In the path of the European educational policies, Portugal has been adopting legal discourse that recognizes that the organization and the development of the curriculum must take into account the local characteristics.

- With this discourse, the educational administration intends to promote curricular practices that allow success for all the students, within the framework of global training that does not deplete in the acquisition of information related to subject knowledge.
Conclusions

- The research shows that the teachers who participated in the study do not mirror themselves as true curricular decision-makers (Leite & Fernandes, 2002).

- They seem to deal with a centralizing logic of the curriculum (Leite, 2005), complying to what is prescribed in the official documents.

- However, teachers get involved in processes of construction of curricular justice as they create learning environments that are meaningful for the students that live it (Ault, 2008), even when they do it more individually than collectively.
Conclusions

- As an answer to the research question *what perceptions do teachers have about their role as designers and developers of the curriculum?*, we may conclude that the enactment of a professional identity on the basis of teacher assumption of their role as real curriculum designers is still far from being achieved.

- Even though data relating to “Teacher pedagogical practice to develop the curriculum” shows a higher perception of their role, the main conclusion is still valid, when compared to the one they believe to have in what concerns the definition of local policies.
Thanks.