

# Editorial

This number of the *Sísifo* Journal is dedicated to the theme of teacher education and was thought and developed in 2008. This was the year of all discontent for basic and secondary education teachers in Portugal. In 2008, responding to a call from teacher unions and from several spontaneous and autonomous movements, Portuguese teachers gathered twice for magnificent demonstrations and marched on the streets of Lisbon. The first demonstration was in March 8 and gathered about 100.000 teachers, that is, two thirds of the whole professional class. The surprise for such an unexpected level of participation would then be repeated in November 8, when by pressure from the base over the unions, teachers filled the streets of Lisbon for the second time. In this case, the participation rate was even higher, reaching three quarters of total number of teachers, who came to Lisbon in very difficult conditions from all over the country. Both the demonstrations took place in a Saturday and the number of participants was confirmed by convergent information from independent observers, namely the press, radio and television. After these forms of protest, teachers also held two nation-wide strikes (on 3rd December 2008 and 9th January 2009), with a participation rate of about 90%.

Before so eloquent proofs of discontent and revolt against the policies adopted by the Ministry of Education, it should be reminded that in September 2007 the Conference ‘Teacher professional development for the quality and equity of lifelong learning’<sup>21</sup> was held in Lisbon under the Portuguese

Presidency of the Council of the European Union. The background document to this conference expresses present problems driven either from demographic issues or from the growing complexity of the teaching profession to which correspond new roles, new demands and an extension of the scope of their Professional mission.

To address such a problematic situation there is the need for the improvement of teacher education policies and practices, which are recognized to be unsatisfactory all over Europe. As stated in the text, this investment in the quality of teacher education with desirable consequences on a better performance is indissociable from an effort to build a career attractive option. This objective implies to recruit the best candidates, persuade other professionals to become teachers, and dissuade experienced teachers from giving up their profession.

To sum up, the achievement of these objectives is only viable within the scope of one central objective: that of professionally motivating teachers by raising quality requirements and simultaneously investing in teacher education and in better working conditions. Four main principles are set out that should serve as a reference for educational decision-making: the profession of teacher should be highly qualified, it should be based on career-long educational processes, it should be a profession characterized by mobility and based on processes of work in partnership.

The work of the conference allowed to deduce three major policy challenges for decision-making:

- The first is giving the teaching profession new appeal. At stake is addressing problems of recruitment and renewal of teaching staff and overcoming the contradiction between the rhetoric regarding the key role of the teacher and the reality of a profession marked by defensive individualism, escape strategies, crisis of authority, and growing levels of suffering at work;
- The second corresponds to trying to contradict the problem of the school being invaded by social problems that originate outside the school. The growing processes of social duality and mass social vulnerability compel schools and teachers to perform “assistential” tasks that harm their fundamental mission and cause disruption in teacher professional identity;
- The third is related to the need to overcome the paradox between autonomy and control. Recent comparative studies at a European level evidence the emergence of new forms of governance which privilege the local level and school autonomy but which is paradoxically simultaneous with the strengthening of control and teachers’ perception of growing loss of professional autonomy.

In Portugal, the reasons for so high levels of dissatisfaction and revolt obviously drive from the form and the content of policies assumed by present ministerial team of the Ministry of Education. Teachers are

experiencing precariousness and unemployment, shortening of real salaries and heavier workloads, increasingly difficult career progress limited by a new career structure and a Kafkaian performance evaluation process.

The situation has evolved in such a way that it is no longer possible to restrict the debate to its technical issues. This case reflects the social and political outlines of a very unfair policy action. To educational science researchers and to teacher educators an important role is due in the clarification of present situation. Yet, surprisingly most of them by (ashamed or prudent) omission or (hasty) action assume a reverent attitude towards power and express (depreciative) value judgments about teachers. Teachers are seen as the “others”, towards whom there are no visible manifestations of solidarity. Can you guess why?

#### ENDNOTES

1. Cf. PORTUGAL 2007. Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the European Union. Conference “Teacher Professional development for the quality and equity of lifelong learning”. Lisbon, 27-28 September 2007.

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