

## Other articles

# A look from within: Teachers' perspectives about the need for change at school

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**ABSTRACT:**

In this study<sup>1</sup> a survey was carried out of the most relevant functions and roles that teachers could play, in order to overcome different problems facing school today. A total of 13 teachers from primary and secondary-level education took part in the research, from various districts of the Central region. They all had vast teaching experience and had performed several functions throughout their professional career. The ideas generated resulted from their involvement in a process in which the *delphi* technique was used, aimed at arriving at a constructed consensus, after several reconsiderations and reassessments of the proposals expressed. As a consequence it was possible to identify and put into a hierarchy the aspects that should be made priority for change, as well as grouping them into the following categories or dimensions of change: reorganising the functioning of the school, with a view to it becoming centred on the pupil; improving teaching methods; increasing pupils' interest in school; bringing about closer school-families-community cooperation; endowing the school with material and human resources; encouraging holistic education; encouraging specialised teacher training; concentrating the teachers' activity on the lesson time and class management; the existence of a teacher-researcher in school.

**KEYWORDS:**

Teachers' perspectives, Primary and secondary teaching, School failure, Need for change, mudança.

## INTRODUCTION

Failure at school is not a phenomenon solely restricted to Portuguese society. In a review article on the issue of lack of school motivation, at international level, Hidi and Harackiewicz (2000) state that there is a growing tendency for a waning interest and negative attitude towards school, as the children progress in formal education. Nevertheless, in Portugal the problem has been more acutely felt and has reached worrying proportions.

As Canavarro (2007) says, “it is true that our country has witnessed a constant reduction in school drop-out rates and early leaving of school” (p. 9), deriving to a large extent from the fact that Portugal has benefited from structural funds from the European Union to improve the schooling of its population. However, the improvements and gains achieved have been slow and fall far short of what is desirable in the light of the magnitude of the investments made, keeping Portugal in a position of great disadvantage in comparison to most of the European Union States. According to OECD data (2005, cit. by Ministry of Employment and Social Solidarity, 2006), the average schooling of the Portuguese adult population is 8,2 years, which is well behind several countries, including Greece, Spain, Turkey and Mexico, and a considerable way from the OECD average of 12 years. This reality is not disconnected to the high drop-out and school failure rates. There are thousands of youths who reach 16 years of age without completing the 9<sup>th</sup> school year or who drop out of the education system without obtaining secondary-school qualifications, while under the age of 24. In 2001 the percentage of youths between 18 and 24 years who did not complete their secondary-school studies was around 45%, and 25% of these did not complete the 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle (Ministry of Employment and Social Solidarity, 2006). What makes the situation even more worrying is that, according to the same source, the

phenomena of repeated school years and pupils dropping out are not being reversed; on the contrary these percentages are on the up, especially with regard to secondary education. At this education level the repeated school year rate, from the academic year of 1996/97 to 2005/06, remained over 30%. There was a noteworthy drop only in the academic year of 2006/2007, in which the figure was 24.8% (GEPE, 2008).

These indicators leave no doubt that, notwithstanding the heavy investment by the European Union to raise the educational level of the Portuguese and the different reforms in the education system, the results achieved translate the dysfunctionality of our education system, legitimising and making even more pressing the three questions raised by Carvalhal (cit. by Abreu, 2002) in the conference entitled “A new Framework for the Education System in Portugal”, in 1998: “what social atavism has afflicted the Portuguese education system that impedes it from giving satisfactory answers to the needs and demands of people and society?”; “What has to change — change and not just reform — so that education (...) is in tune with the pace of today’s world?”; “What innovations have to be implemented, in thinking and in action, to make the education system produce the results expected of it, taking into account, on the one hand, the individual and collective needs and aspirations, and on the other hand, the resources channelled to it?” (pp. 14-15).

From the point of view of experts in education and related areas, who have dedicated themselves to in-depth analysis, research and reflection on the roots of the problem or the factors leading to the inefficacy of the education, it is possible to find, with widespread general agreement, the core of the difficulties felt, and which are linked to the conception of school and education that continues to be a prisoner of the industrial model, which is completely outdated to meet the needs and aspirations of people and

social organisations in today's world (e.g. Abreu, 1997, 2002; Ambrósio, 2001; Figueiredo, 2001; Marcelo, 2009; Oliveira, 2005; Papert, 2001; Resnick, 2001; Simões, 1979, 1981; Veiga Simão *et al.*, 2009). However, taking into account that this is the perspective of the education theorists and researchers and that the agents directly involved in the educational act hold knowledge through experience that cannot be discarded, we consider it useful, opportune and important to listen to the teachers who, from their point of view, can contribute to overcoming the array of problems that the schools are facing today.

## METHODOLOGY

The *delphi* technique to collect the data, was selected because it is a methodology that is especially suitable when the intention is to gather valid consensual opinions about subjects in relation to which there is no certain or exact knowledge, based on a restricted group of subjects, who are usually knowledgeable or experts in the matter under analysis (Borg & Gall, 1983).

This technique has the advantage of leading to results that truly reflect what the people involved think, given that it overcomes problems linked to persuasion from members of a group with greater authority or status, better oral communication skills, influence over the majority opinion, or even the intention of the group members not to change the opinions they expressed beforehand, or resist new ideas.

The *delphi* procedure consists of a discussion among all the members of the group that takes place whereby the participants remain anonymous, enabling the feedback to be controlled, and statistical processing of the answers (Guglielmino, 1977). The *anonymity* enables the influencing of socially dominant individuals to be avoided, leaving the group members free to reflect on and genuinely express their opinion. The controlled feedback reduces the likelihood of irrelevant or repetitive contributions, which takes attention away from the matter under discussion, or obscures it. The *statistics* with regard to the answers of the participants supply an index relative to the position of the group, generating the opportunity for each member to rethink their opinion, comparing the opinions of all the group members, thus providing a potential path to consensus. According to Dalkey and Helmer (1963, cit. by Guglielmino, 1977), controlled interaction gives rise to independent thinking by the participants, and helps them gradually form a reflected opinion.

### SELECTION OF THE DELPHI PANEL

The panel was made up of primary and secondary education teachers, who are taking Master's courses in Education Sciences, in the specialist areas of Education Psychology, Special Education, and Pedagogical

Supervision and Training of Trainers, at the Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences of Coimbra University. Most of the participants had already completed the curricular component of the aforementioned master's course, which endowed them with the status of experts, i.e. a capacity to think out educational phenomena in a more integrated and reflexive manner, resulting from the interactive pondering of the practical perspectives (deriving from their vast professional experience and direct knowledge of everyday school life, in exercising their role as teachers) and theoretical aspects (deriving from in-depth knowledge of the conceptual literature of Educational Sciences).

### PROCEDURE

The implementation of the *delphi* technique, as well as gathering the panel of experts in a given subject, calls for the need to draw up a questionnaire, based on the contributions of all the panel members, which is subsequently sent to all the participants in the discussion, for classification of the items, reintroduction of new items or exclusion of some of them, in line with the opinions expressed. Throughout the process, the questionnaires are reviewed and reworked several times, until a convergence of opinions is reached. This process requires three rounds (Guglielmino, 1977; Rothwell & Kazanas, 1992).

#### *Questionnaire 1*

An open question was presented to the members of the *delphi* panel, sent by e-mail and formulated as follows:

What functions/tasks/roles can be carried out by teachers (at pre-school, 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> cycles and secondary school level) which do not infringe on the work of other technicians/professionals, so as to contribute significantly to an improvement in the different problems that the school faces today (e.g. failure at school, behavioural problems, indiscipline, lack of motivation towards academic learning, poor cooperation between schools and families, etc.)?

Based on this question, each group member was asked to write a list of functions/tasks/roles, based on their experience and their knowledge of the relation at school, as well as their reflection.

#### *Questionnaire 2*

Based on the answers received, a global list was written out, which resulted in all the different ideas identified, and gave rise to a questionnaire containing 38 items. This questionnaire was then channelled to all the participants, taking into account each item in a Likert-type scale of importance, ranging from 0 (not at all important) to 7 (extremely important). It is pointed out that on this scale the median point is 3.5.

### Questionnaire 3

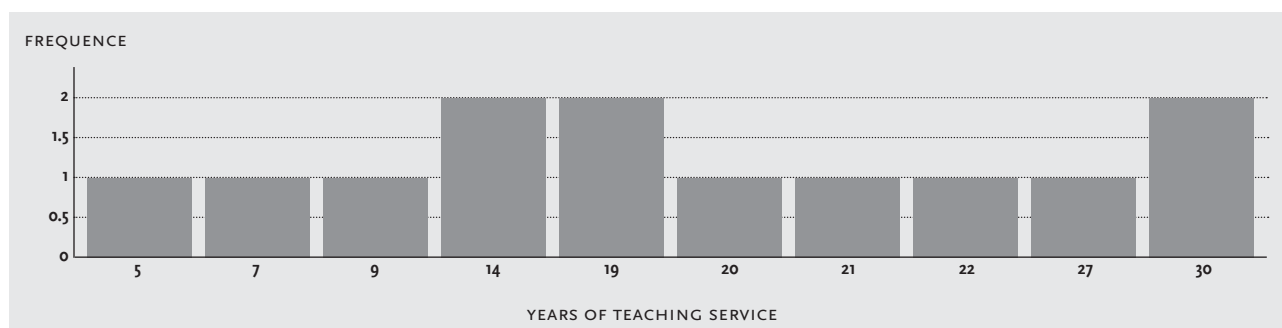
Having compiled the answers in questionnaire 2, the  $Q_1$  (first quartile),  $Q_2$  (second or median quartile) and  $Q_3$  (third quartile) values are calculated for each item and a third questionnaire is sent to all the participants, showing these statistics, pointing out the items that less than 25% of colleagues mentioned in identical fashion (marking them in orange), and adding 4 new items, proposed in the answers to questionnaire 2. In this third questionnaire the panel members were asked to reconsider their most divergent answers, so as to bring them more into line with the majority group, or alternatively to justify their opinions, if they decided to maintain the points attributed to the items of questionnaire 2, as well as re-

questing classification of the 4 new items.

### CHARACTERIZATION OF THE SAMPLE

The final sample was made up of 13 teachers who exercised their teaching activity in different councils of the Central Region or bordering areas (Coimbra, Penela, Miranda do Corvo, Lousã, Espinho, Ponte de Sor and Seia)<sup>2</sup>, who were aged between 27 and 51 years, and had an average age of 43. Female teachers predominate, with 10 women (77%) and only 3 men (23%). As for the years of teaching experience, the minimum number was 5 and the maximum 30, with an average of 19. Graph 1 shows that most of the subjects of the sample have a lot of experience in teaching, at least 14 years.

GRAPH 1 — YEARS OF TEACHING SERVICE OF SUBJECTS IN THE SAMPLE



As regards the professional category of the teachers, 5 belong to the *Quadro de Nomeação Definitiva — PQND* [Definitive Nomination Group], another 5 belong to the *Quadro de Educação Especial — PQEE* [Special Education Group] and 3 are part of the *Quadro de Zona Pedagógica — PQZP* [Pedagogical Zone Group]. All the teachers have at one point exercised or still exercise (academic year of 2006/07) supervisory positions, and most of them occupy 2 or more of these positions, which are as wide-ranging as: Special Education Team leader; Educational Support Team Leader; Chair of the Constituent Assembly; Chair of the School Assembly; Department Coordinator or Sub-coordinator; Coordinator of Class Supervisors; Discipline Delegate; Exam Secretary Coordinator; Teachers' Council Coordinator; Special Education Department Coordinator; Coordinator of the Central Region of PNESSST; and Coordinator of Repeat Year Night-School.

Most of the teachers (8) carry out their activity in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> cycles, 2 give support within the scope of special education, to the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> cycles, and just 1 teaches the 1<sup>st</sup> cycle, while one teaches in the 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle and at secondary level. This means all the teachers teach in primary education, predominantly in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> cycles.

The subjects that are taught can be broken down as follows: 6 worked in Special Education, 2 teach Natural

Sciences, 1 teaches Mathematics, 1 gives English lessons, 1 teaches Visual/Technological Education and another one teaches in the 1<sup>st</sup> cycle of Primary Education.

Based on the above description of the sample, one can safely say that the opinions of the subjects of the *delphi* panel are worthy of our full attention given that they come from people with long professional experience and in-depth knowledge of the reality in schools, afforded both by their years of teaching experience and the various supervisory roles they performed.

### RESULTS

From the first quantitative analyses, which focused on the answers to questionnaire 2, it was possible to see a considerable consensus and high level of value attached to all the items of the questionnaire. Effectively, it was seen that all the values of  $Q_1$  (1<sup>st</sup> quartile), apart from one item<sup>3</sup> were above the median point of the response scale (3.5), and that almost all the items (34)<sup>4</sup> obtained very high values of  $Q_3$  (scores of 5, 6 and 7). As well as these aspects, and also indicating convergence of consensus of the teachers' opinions, it is pointed out that the inter-quartile amplitude ( $Q_3 - Q_1$ ) of most of the items shows a low variability in the answers, and only 3 of them were above 2<sup>5</sup>.

We then presented a hierarchy of items of questionnaire 2, based on the classifications of the sample subjects, in decreasing order of importance attributed to each item. If we take into account that the points range can vary between

0 and 91 and that the classifications effectively obtained oscillate between 58 and 90, we can deduce that all the items were considered important.

#### ANSWERS TO QUESTIONNAIRE 2, LISTED IN ORDER OF IMPORTANCE

##### ITEMS WITH CLASSIFICATION BETWEEN 80 AND 90

- All schools should supply a Psychology and Guidance Service, an Educational Support/Special Needs teacher, and most importantly a social welfare officer.
- Endow the schools with new technologies, so that they become a reality and not a virtual asset.
- Monitor pupils with above average results who have behavioural and learning problems.
- Make parents and pupils accountable in the teaching-learning process.
- Coordinate teamwork with other teachers of the class, in order to create a curriculum adapted to the pupils in question.
- Encourage school/family and family/school interchange.
- Plan and implement tutorial programmes, especially for the more problematic pupils, which rarely takes place.
- Value the teaching component (more time to prepare the lessons, the essential role of the teacher, which is usually pushed into the background).
- Guarantee that the pupils are interested in school.
- Help in the preparation/maintenance of study and work techniques, adapted to the characteristics of the pupils.
- Guarantee the work of the pupils (of everybody), creating an environment that encourages quality in learning.
- Take part in intervention teams with families and guardians: suggest study monitoring techniques to be carried out with their children; carry out small training/clarification sessions on pertinent problems; intervene/cooperate in the rehabilitation of serious situations of academic failure/school drop-out, social care, etc.
- Construct specific didactic material.

##### Items with classification between 70 and 79

- Take part in pupil support rooms, which supply monitoring that is tailor-made/ongoing to a greater or lesser extent (depending on each case) in situations of: management of conflicts between peers and teachers; information/advice on emerging questions (e.g. sex education, eating disorders, addiction, etc).
- Encourage cross-subject initiatives.
- More specialised training (in the field, practical, workshops).
- Encourage education for the environment, for sustainable development, for health, etc.
- Improve teaching methods.
- Supervise study rooms.
- Relieve teachers of the excessive bureaucracy they are attributed.
- Implement or collaborate in the implementation of different learning/assessment such as by *portfolio*.
- Organise tasks (such as debates and assemblies), in order to develop a critical sense and responsibility in pupils.
- Carry out workshops and clubs: theatre, expression, etc.
- Provide more activities of an artistic nature, as a way of solving behavioural problems and discovering hidden talents.
- The Class Supervisors should have more time to dedicate themselves to the class in order to carry out activities and projects that contribute to the rounded education of the pupils.

##### ITEMS WITH CLASSIFICATION BETWEEN 60 AND 69

- Enliven a resource room.
- Encourage participation in debates, exchange of experiences, exchange of ideas on school and discipline problems, both internally (in the school), and externally (other schools, universities, museums, companies).
- Adult training.
- Supervision of experimental activities in and outside school, involving the children's guardians from time to time, taking advantage of their knowledge.
- Differentiated pedagogy carried out by two teachers in the same subject, monitoring the pupils in some subjects individually (implement teaching increasingly focused on the pupil).

- The researcher-teacher in schools would be an excellent chance to study certain situations and try out new practices.
- Introduce relaxation techniques for teachers to improve their concentration and enhance the academic performance of the pupils.
- Organise support lessons.
- Organise meetings with parents to share experiences and concerns (in small groups).
- Organise leisure activities in school (festivals, sports competitions, etc.) to motivate the pupils.

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ITEMS WITH CLASSIFICATION BETWEEN 50 AND 59

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- Prepare and manage a wide array of projects.
- More resources (physical, human and financial).

As mentioned above, and despite the high level of convergence of opinion, we sent the 3<sup>rd</sup> questionnaire to all the panel members to reconsider the answers that generated the most varied responses in the group. In this third round fewer questionnaires were returned (only 7), owing essentially, we believe, to the overload of work of the teachers, as they have to perform several roles in the exam season (end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> period). Indeed, this problem had been mentioned during the answering of questionnaire 2. Nevertheless, after analysing the answers we found that they did not change the proposals and consensuses

generated in questionnaire 2. As regards the items added to the final questionnaire, 3 subjects did not attribute points to them, and as such we did not include them in the analysis and reflection.

As mentioned earlier, considering that all the items produced are deemed to be pertinent, even those which obtained a lower score, and in an attempt to make the data more intelligible, we placed them into a small number of categories, so that we could then comment on them, articulating the teachers' suggestions with the ideas transmitted in the specialist literature.

CATEGORIES ESTABLISHED BASED ON THE DIFFERENT ITEMS

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REORGANISE THE FUNCTIONING OF THE SCHOOL, SO THAT IT IS CENTRED ON THE PUPIL

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- Coordinate teamwork with other teachers of the class, in order to create a curriculum adapted to the pupils in question.
- Help in the preparation/maintenance of study and work techniques, adapted to the characteristics of the pupils.
- Monitor pupils with above average results who have behavioural and learning problems.
- Plan and implement tutorial programmes, especially for the more problematic pupils, which rarely takes place.
- Take part in pupil support rooms, which supply monitoring that is tailor-made/ongoing to a greater or lesser extent (depending on each case) in situations of: management of conflicts between peers and teachers; information/advice on emerging questions (e.g. sex education, eating disorders, addiction, etc).
- Differentiated pedagogy carried out by two teachers in the same subject, monitoring the pupils in some subjects individually (implement teaching increasingly focused on the pupil).
- Enliven a resource room.

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IMPROVE TEACHING METHODS

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- Plan practical fieldwork and laboratory lessons.
- Improve the teaching methods.
- Organise tasks (such as debates and assemblies), in order to develop a critical sense and responsibility in pupils.
- Carry out workshops and clubs: theatre, expression, etc.
- Encourage participation in debates, exchange of experiences, exchange of ideas on school and discipline problems, both internally (in the school), and externally (other schools, universities, museums, companies).
- Supervision of experimental activities in and outside school, involving the children's guardians from time to time, taking advantage of their knowledge.
- Implement or collaborate in the implementation of different learning/assessment such as by *portfolio*.

#### INCREASE PUPILS' INTEREST IN SCHOOL

- Guarantee that the pupils are interested in school.
- Supervise study rooms.
- Organise leisure activities in school (festivals, sports competitions, etc.) to motivate the pupils.
- Organise support lessons.
- Guarantee the work of the pupils (of everybody), creating an environment that encourages quality in learning.

#### ENCOURAGE CLOSER SCHOOL-FAMILY-COMMUNITY COOPERATION

- Take part in intervention teams with families and guardians: suggest study monitoring techniques to be carried out with their children; carry out small training/clarification sessions on pertinent problems; intervene/cooperate in the rehabilitation of serious situations of academic failure/school drop-out, social care, etc.
- Encourage school/family and family/school interchange.
- Encourage participation in debates, exchange of experiences, exchange of ideas on school and discipline problems, both internally (in the school), and externally (other schools, universities, museums, companies).
- Supervision of experimental activities in and outside school, involving the children's guardians from time to time, taking advantage of their knowledge.
- Organise meetings with parents to share experiences and concerns (in small groups).
- Make parents and pupils accountable in the teaching-learning process.

#### ENDOW THE SCHOOL WITH MATERIAL AND HUMAN RESOURCES

- All schools should supply a Psychology and Guidance Service, an Educational Support/Special Needs teacher, and most importantly a social welfare officer.
- Endow the schools with new technologies, so that they become a reality and not a virtual asset.
- Construct specific didactic material.
- More resources (physical, human and financial).

#### ENCOURAGE HOLISTIC EDUCATION

- Encourage education for the environment, for sustainable development, for health, etc.
- Provide more activities of an artistic nature, as a way of solving behavioural problems and discovering hidden talents.
- Organise leisure activities in school (festivals, sports competitions, etc.) to motivate the pupils.

#### ENCOURAGE SPECIALISED TRAINING FOR TEACHERS

- More specialised training (in the field, practical, with workshops).
- Introduce relaxation techniques for teachers to improve their concentration and enhance the academic performance of the pupils.
- Adult training.

#### CONCENTRATE THE ACTIVITY OF TEACHERS ON TEACHING TIME AND CLASS SUPERVISION

- Relieve teachers of the excessive bureaucracy they are attributed.
- Value the teaching component (more time to prepare the lessons, the essential role of the teacher, which is usually pushed into the background).
- The Class Supervisors should have more time to dedicate themselves to the class in order to carry out activities and projects that contribute to the rounded education of the pupils.

#### THE RESEARCHER-TEACHER

- The researcher-teacher in schools would be an excellent chance to study certain situations and try out new practices.
- Prepare and manage a wide array of projects.

## DISCUSSION/CONCLUSION

The different aspects consensually proposed by the teachers who took part in the *delphi* panel, and which have been organised into the abovementioned categories, do not seem to differ from what the experts and researchers linked to the field of education have pointed out as essential in order to improve school education, and which we can summarise as follows: provide more wide-ranging and attractive education for the young, and as such enhance their chances of success; use teaching and learning support methods likely to bring about changes towards the desired direction; encourage more family and community involvement in the school life and vice-versa; organise specialised training for teachers and other educational agents, with a view to ensuring their better intervention.

As such, faced with the results obtained, some observations have to be made. The factors that are most cited by the panel members as likely to contribute to overcoming school problems, which are linked to the *reorganisation of the school functioning so that it becomes more centred on the pupil, with improved teaching methods, increased interest by pupils in school, and organisation of a holistic education*, point to a school model that is considerable different to that currently in place, and require changes that have not occurred. This explains the hotly contested responses to the usual political decisions made to face the serious problems of the education system, and which have included reforms which basically boil down to curricular reviews and updates of programmed content, implying “the permanent and almost exclusive focus on the curriculum” (Azevedo, 2001, p. 157). According to Abreu (2002), “instead of wasting time in this unfruitful direction, we should concentrate our efforts on the formulation of educational targets in operational terms and geared towards the development of the personality of the pupils” (p. 18).

The existence of the school, as a social organisation, is not justified in itself. The reason for it is to develop and educate people, groups and society, which means that before all else it has to participate actively, consistently and continually in the balanced and healthy development of its pupils. Therefore, the pupils necessarily must be the central figure and element in the educational process, which should be conferred maximum importance, as proposed by the teachers surveyed. It is an ethical obligation of societies considered democratic to safeguard, the conditions needed to ensure their success and enrichment as people for all their children and young, regardless of their condition and their difficulties, fulfilling the slogans recently adopted by the Anglo-Saxon countries: “*no child left behind*” and “*every child counts*”. Achieving this aim will only be possible when

in the educational process the characteristics and specificities of each pupil are seriously valued.

Along the same line of thought, Ainscow (1998) considers that the reform of the schools must involve a positive response to diversity, developing a culture of valuing individual differences and not homogenising the pupils, as has prevailed in our education system. The emphasis should not be on the acquisition of knowledge, but on the development of skills that imply the undertaking of significant and relevant tasks for the development of the potential of each pupil and their social well-being. However, organising the functioning of the school in order that it is centred on the pupil does not mean that the pupils should start working alone. That represents a limited vision and goes against the benefits that several research projects have found concerning the value of collective work. According to Ainscow (1998), most pupils learn better when they take part in activities that involve other people, as such enhancing their intellectual stimulation, confidence and team spirit. Likewise Isaac, Sansone and Smith (1999, cit. by Hidi & Harackiewicz, 2000) have found in pupils that lack motivation towards school learning, that working in the presence of other class-mates increases their situational interest. Within the scope of the studies on educational resilience, Waxman, Huang and Wang (1997, cit. by Canavaro, 2007), in comparing resilient and non-resilient pupils, also find that when the teaching was geared primarily towards the pupil, and not towards the activities, and when there was a strong teacher-pupil interaction, the differences between the two groups diminished<sup>6</sup>.

Optimising the functioning of the school also involves an effective leadership, geared towards meeting the needs of all the pupils. As such, it is important that, from very early, the pupil is monitored closely (and is able to identify children and young who are potentially at risk early, and intervene accordingly) and this monitoring is continued in time and geared towards supporting the progressive construction of their life project.

Another important factor, pointed out by the teachers as underpinning the ineffectiveness of the educational system, which we would like to point out, is linked to the unsuitability of the dominating pedagogical practices. According to several authors (e.g. Abreu, 1997, 2002; Amado, 2001; Dumazedier, 1995; Figueiredo, 2001; Oliveira, 1996, 2004, 2005; Papert, 2001) there has been an abusive use of the expositive method to transmit content. In contrast, the implementation of active methodologies, presupposing theoretical conceptions of a constructivist root, much more in line with the demands of life in today’s society, must prevail, as indeed happens in adult education. These undoubtedly present numerous advantages, the most noteworthy of which is the active involvement of pupils in the construction of knowledge, the development of the perception that they are agents



of their own educational process, and the consequent interest and motivation to undertake school learning and improve their ability to find out information and solve problems.

Inseparable from the use of active methodologies is the need to change the assessment methods, giving preference to the formative method in which the assessment is carried out with a view to achieving defined targets and not with a view to sanctioning or labelling pupils, which leads to undesirable stratification in the school. Without doubt, the presupposition is that “we are all different but we all have capacity; we all have ability to do something in life” (Abreu, 2002, p. 18).

Taking into account the proposal by the teachers, as regards the need to increase the pupils’ interest in school, in our opinion one important way to frame the problem is to ask ourselves about why a lot of pupils do not learn and lose interest in their school studies. From our point of view, as well as what has already been said, one profitable line of thinking in answering this question implies relativising the dominating perspective that tends to locate the crux of the problem in factors endogenous to the pupils, assuming that they have characteristics and attributes that prevent them from undergoing the normal course of learning. The overriding problem, as argued by several authors (e.g. Ainscow, 1998; Baptista, 1997), resides in the school, not yet being able to organise itself to ensure successful education is administered to all its pupils. Its organisation and its curriculum remain largely unchallenged in terms in their suitability for the diversity of pupils that attend it. As well as the improper transmissive methodologies, very often content is given that pupils consider boring and in relation to which they do not see any relevance or utility, and which is difficult to understand — a problem multiplied over numerous subjects.

Bringing about closer school-family-community collaboration, in order to provide support for children and the young and to allow the establishment of a stronger and more significant bond between school learning and the knowledge and skills needed in the world of work, must also be considered an important

factor to be improved to fight against school failure, as suggested by the teachers of the study.

With regard to supplying schools with more human and material resources, it should be pointed out that all the teachers considered it extremely important that all schools have a Psychology and Guidance Service, an Educational Support/Special Needs teacher and a Social Welfare officer. This translates the indispensable role that these support agents play in the undertaking of the school educational project. We believe that, with a view to increasing the quality of the services supplied at the schools, they would also benefit greatly from the participation of Education Sciences Graduates, who, in addition to providing support to the teachers in developing suitable methodologies to achieve the educational aims and to prepare educational resources, would play an important role concerning the proposal for a researcher-teacher and in the management and preparation of the different projects.

Another finding of this study is the teachers’ perception of the substantial obstacle to improvement in the quality of teaching constituted by the excessive occupation of their time in non-teaching activities, hindering their ability to properly prepare lessons and supervise the classes. Taking into account what we have been advocating to bring about better quality education, this aspect seems, in effect, to prevent appropriate monitoring and support of the pupils.

Finally, we point out that the teachers, who are well versed in the real situation in schools, proposed important ideas, in not ignoring the questions raised earlier, about *what has to change* and *what innovations have to occur* in the education system to bring about a release from the social atavism it suffers from. We cannot also fail to mention, in these final words, that the data collection methodology used (*delphi* technique) proved extremely apt for the goals we proposed. The use of this process is recommended in situations in which it is important to generate ideas and construct consensuses about the topics that need the right answers.

## ENDNOTES

1. Research carried out within the scope of the Psycho-pedagogical Centre of Coimbra University [FEDER/POCI2010-SFA-160-490].

2. One of the teachers of the panel did not teach in the academic year of the research, as she had been requested to carry out the role of Central Region Coordinator.

3.  $Q_3$  of the item in question — *Organising support lessons* — coincided with the median point of the answer scale.

4. Questionnaire 2 contained 38 items in total.

5. These 3 items are: (1) *The researcher-teacher in schools would be an excellent opportunity to study certain situations and try out new practices* ( $Q_3 - Q_1 = 2.5$ ); (2) *More physical, human and financial resources* ( $Q_3 - Q_1 = 2.5$ ); (3) *Organise support lessons* ( $Q_3 - Q_1 = 3.5$ ).

6. In this study the resilient pupils were defined as those who are relatively successful in the tests and in their daily school work, while the non-resilient ones failed in both aspects.

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