Born to fail? Some lessons from a national programme to improve education in poor districts

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Version of record first published: 20 Mar 2013.

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Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

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The article analyses the main benefits of a Portuguese programme, launched in 1996, which was designed to support schools in segregated districts (TEIPs). The first part of the article presents a theoretical framework, before moving on to the main features of the TEIP programme in contemporary Portuguese society and education. An explanation of the methodological procedures applied in the research is also included. In the second part of the article, the main results are discussed. In broad terms, the programme succeeded in reducing violence patterns and drop-out rates. On the other hand, an improvement in academic outcomes is slow and the links to local communities and the labour market are variable and, in both cases, highly dependent of local variables. In the conclusion, the authors systematise the opportunities and challenges of such a 'territorial approach' and point out some key factors in enhancing its success.

Keywords: schools; territory; Portugal; policies; equity

1. Introduction

While educational opportunities in general remain highly influenced by children's social backgrounds, inequality patterns vary between schools and between educational systems. In particular, the chances of unprivileged groups succeeding at school and improving their social positions depend on both organisational strategies and the systemic morphology. Accordingly, an important role of educational sociologists concerned with the social outcomes of their work is not only to measure and explain structural gaps but also to analyse the circumstances in which schools and educational policies may enhance the academic and life chances of those born in a poor milieu.

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Based on similar policies undertaken in France and the UK, the Educational Zones for Priority Action [TEIP] programme was launched in Portugal in 1996. It now includes 105 school clusters around the country (nearly 10% of all primary and lower secondary schools). The aim of the programme is to reduce social and educational inequalities through the creation of specific mechanisms to identify, support, protect and supervise schools in poor, segregated and marginalised districts.

This paper presents the main results of a research project carried out under the title of *TEIP Effects* (2010–2011) by a team of 10 researchers from the Centre for Research and Studies in Sociology of the Lisbon University Institute. Although the project entailed a wider scope, the present article focuses on the impact of the TEIP programme over three dimensions: (a) violence patterns and dropout rates; (b) students' academic achievements and pathways and (c) the school relationship with local communities and the labour market.

2. Theoretical discussion

Our research is concerned with a major debate in the sociology of education, namely the relationship between schools and the working classes in modern societies and the extent to which public policies and local organisations are able to change this relationship. Despite important improvements, academic achievement in Portugal is still highly correlated with social background, a fact that contributes to social reproduction (Grácio, 1997). In contrast to the upper and middle classes, many children from the working classes fail at school, for various reasons: they do not master school cultural codes, do not have the same support at home and are often involved in practices of resistance towards school authorities (Apple, 1995; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Coleman, 1966; Willis, 1977).

As Müller and Karle (1993) and Archer (1993) have stated, it is not only socio-economic features that matter in explaining the intensity of reproduction but also the socio-institutional configuration of each educational system, which introduces particular patterns into the relationship between educational career and social class. For instance, while a more comprehensive and less competitive system in Scandinavia is associated with longer educational careers and lower inequality patterns, intergenerational reproduction through education was sustained by centralised and elitist curricula in France (and in Southern Europe), by an early separation of academic and vocational tracks in Germany and by 'circuits of schooling' with unequal resources and prestige in the UK.

Other studies have found empirical evidence that schools may actually make a difference, especially concerning the educational involvement and success of working class students (Fernández, 2004; Warren, 2005). Despite the variability among studies, certain key features have been identified as

the means of generating such process: (1) strong leadership, focused on learning patterns; (2) pedagogical strategies, institutional norms and autonomy; (3) teacher stability, cooperation and consensus on higher order skills; (4) student and family involvement and responsibility and (5) social capital and community ties.

In relation to features (1) and (2), foundational studies on 'school effects' were used by neo-liberal policies in order to defend private schools, parental 'free choice' and the dynamics of competition (Gewirtz, Ball, & Bowe, 1995). However, regarding features (3)–(5), recent studies have also shown certain weaknesses in the neo-liberal models, thus supporting new models of governance within the public network (Fernández, 2004; Santizo & Martin, 2009).

Thus, a serious examination of organisational and non-organisational factors is decisive in identifying the schools that are actually failing (Downey, von Hippel, & Hughes, 2008). On average, children perform better in schools where middle-class pupils are in the majority (OECD, 2004, 2010). This gap is also reinforced by spatial segregation as most working-class children dwell in poor neighbourhoods (including ghettos). This means that their difficulties in succeeding within the educational system are usually increased by the fact that they attend poor and unstable local schools, with less intellectual stimulation and fewer resources (Anyon, 2005).

It is sensible to complement our analysis with a neo-institutional approach (Burns & Flam, 1987; Meyer & Rowan, 1977) in order to explore how any school is a complex result of their changing relations with the environment, including isomorphic and distinction strategies. In more centralised systems, this relationship with the environment relies strongly on complex interaction with the administration.

Recognising the high-academic performance and low-inequality rates in some countries where the state maintains a school policy of strong intervention and hands-on administration, as in Finland or Korea, in contrast to the modest scores of more liberal systems, the OECD (2010) now emphasises the importance of strengthening school autonomy, and parent and teacher involvement in training and assessment, irrespective of the public/private ownership of schools.

The studies mentioned above were important for the emergence of new educational policies focused on supporting schools in poor areas, such as the TEIP in Portugal. This programme was inspired by other European initiatives, e.g. the French *Zones d'Éducation Prioritaire* and British *Education Action Zones* (EAZ), and it was partially funded by the EU. The core aim of these programmes is to improve facilities, services and resources and develop specific strategies in schools located in segregated areas, as a means of overcoming their 'environmental deficit'.

However, studies in France (Benabou, Kramarz, & Prost, 2004; Van Zanten, 1990) and the UK (Power & Sharon, 2001) have shown that schools

involved in these programmes have hardly improved their scores in national tests and there is no evidence of a significant strengthening of children's opportunities in achieving a university degree or a better socio-economic position. Even if the additional economic support has solved certain immediate organisational problems, it has not removed the learning deficits in these areas and, in some cases, inclusion in the programme may have actually contributed to the stigmatisation and segregation of schools (and zones).

Reid and Brain (2003) argue that the low impact of the EAZ in the UK is partly connected with the political tensions and paradoxes brought about by the eclectic and unbalanced political framework (neo-liberal, social-democratic and communitarian approaches) of the Third Way. There was a switch from a focus on structural inequalities to a more 'pragmatic' orientation that had an impact on the projects' strategies, in particular a devaluation of issues such as empowering the local communities and developing more inclusive governance processes or, again, promoting pedagogical and organisational innovation to provide a central focus on raising school scores and building social capital. Gamarnikow and Green (1999) also point out that this focus on social capital seems to overlook the fact that poverty and exclusion are products of structural inequalities, particularly at the economic level, and not attributes of individuals, families and communities. Moreover, the EAZ strategy of building social capital consists of creating networks of professionals and institutions (providers). Not only the social capital of working-class families and communities but also their values and attitudes tend to be conceived as obstacles, entailing the return to a deficit approach towards inequalities in education, thus undermining the possibilities of empowerment.

The modest effects of this 'territorial approach' – in the US, too – led Anyon (2005), Raffo and Dyson (2007) and Gulson (2008) to wonder about the effectiveness of soft, localised strategies as a means of tackling structural trends, in capitalist societies. In this point of view, the educational failure of working class children is somehow inevitable, unless there is an integrative shift in policies on the labour market, urban areas and education. However, one may wonder if a shift in educational structures, and particularly the manner in which certain key resources are distributed and managed, may have an impact on the climate in schools, the students' achievement and community involvement. Instead of arguing against all zoning policies, it is worth focusing on the actual impacts of each programme, considering their specific characteristics, the local contexts where the programme is applied, the educational system and the social structure in which they emerged.

3. The national context and an overview of the TEIP programme

In the last 50 years ago, Portugal has undergone a dramatic change, from a rather closed, illiterate, traditional and rural society to the present situation

in which most people live in the city, are not poor, complete at least 9 years' schooling ('basic education') and work in the service sector – although the great majority do not have professional jobs (Viegas & da Costa, 2001). Around Lisbon and Oporto, there is a certain amount of big industry, though it has recently been affected by global competition, especially from Asia. The revolution and adoption of a democratic system in 1974 and membership of the EU in 1986 were important turning points in a pervasive and continuous process of social change. Since the 1990s, a number of concerns have emerged, in particular in relation to poor living conditions and increasing unemployment, especially among the descendants of immigrants (mostly from the African ex-colonies), though also among the children of Roma and other native working-class families. These different groups have concentrated in certain urban and suburban areas, where many of them have built their own house, not always with a permit. Since the 1980s, legalisation and rehabilitation projects have improved living conditions but have not tackled the concentration and segregation trends in these areas.

The educational system has also developed considerably during recent decades, on a bureaucratic and centralised model, with a high degree of state ownership and control (more than 80% of pupils attend state schools). Over the last decade, governments have firmly focused on controlling results and re-centralising decisions. Yet, at the same time, it has been assumed that, to reach these goals, schools must have the additional responsibilities and autonomy necessary to enhance active community participation (Afonso & Lima, 2005; Barroso & Afonso, 2011). An important feature was the reorganisation of the educational network through the creation of school clusters, which were usually composed of a secondary school and a number of primary schools and kindergartens within the same zone, with them all sharing a unified project, board and principal. The explicit aim was to promote territorial strategies, integrating educational stages, while it was also included in a rationalisation policy. On the one hand, the design of the clusters was imposed by the administration and did not always take the local relations into account. On other hand, the measure was accompanied by the centralisation of power in the figure of the 'cluster principal', as the manager responsible for implementing the national plans and attaining the goals expected.

From the eighteenth century to the 1960s, compulsory education was limited to four years and state investment was scarce (Teodoro, 2001). Early dropout remains a serious concern, especially since compulsory schooling was recently extended to 12 years. Around 40% of the young people (the large majority from poor backgrounds) repeat years during their basic education and dropout of school before completing their upper secondary education (CNE, 2010). Even so, the development over the last four decades has

been radical and, according to PISA assessments (OECD, 2010), students' skills improved considerably from 2000 to 2009.

This social and educational situation set the stage for the creation of the TEIP programme, which was launched in 1996 by a Socialist government. The programme aimed to enlarge school resources in segregated areas by providing tools normally not available in state schools, in particular by allocating more equipment, teachers and other educational experts (e.g. psychologists, social workers and mediators). The specific aim was to: (1) enhance learning processes and reduce dropout rates; (2) create vocational courses and (3) articulate school with local communities (Dispatch 147-B/ME/96). Thirty-five school clusters located in poor suburban areas around Lisbon and Oporto were invited to create their own local projects to achieve these goals, with extra economic support and advice from the administration. Curiously, violence problems were absent from the programme guidelines, though all schools were simultaneously involved in a programme called *The Safe School* (Escola Segura), which was implemented by a police department.

Beginning in 2006, after some years of political disinvestment by right-wing governments, the TEIP programme was reviewed and expanded, under a new Socialist administration that was committed to system rationalisation and accountability. It established four main priority areas: (1) the quality of school careers and achievement; (2) failure and dropout rates; (3) the transition to the labour market and (4) schools as educational and cultural agents within local communities (Ministry of Education, Dispatch 55/2008). The number of school clusters involved has increased to 105, has spread to all regions (except the islands of the Azores and Madeira) and now encompasses around 10% of the state schools.

A recent quantitative report – compiled by the administration office that runs this programme (DGIDC, 2010) – showed that, in broad terms, the programme was succeeding in reducing violence and dropout rates, though there was no great evidence of improvement in academic achievement: the scores in national tests remained well under the national average. This was explained by the concentration of resources on psychology and social service experts. In response, the administration has recently focused on supplying schools with extra teachers. The report also mentions that local partnerships have often been merely formal and the relationship with local communities remains weak, on account of misconceptions on either side. While many school professionals still maintain negative conceptions and feelings towards local populations, most families, in turn, are not relying on the schools to improve their children's lot.

Although official data on national assessment scores, violence and dropout were obviously useful, the main goal of our project was to develop a qualitative framework in order to understand how the TEIP programme was changing the pupils' schooling experiences and achievements, the

organisational climate and dynamics and the school relations with local community.

4. Methodological procedures

To achieve such goal, we needed to explore the unity of the local projects composed of a singular set of specific actors and actions (Stake, 1995). Accordingly, the development of case studies was seen as the most appropriate methodology. In each school cluster, after a characterisation of schools involved, local environment and TEIP intervention project, the analysis was focused on three dimensions: (1) *pathways and learning patterns*, considering categories as students' dropout, violence, scores in internal and national assessment, orientation and transition to the labour market; (2) *relationship with local community*, including teachers', parents' and local agents' involvement in project design and in school development and (3) *organisation and pedagogical practices*, exploring school leadership, climate, planning, self-assessment, management, as well as teachers' conceptions, practices and methodologies.

From DGIDC (2010), we acknowledged that TEIP programme was having great effect in certain zones, though not in others, so we aimed to identify the critical factors in its success or failure. The first stage of our project was to provide an overview of the 105 school clusters, mostly based on the statistics available and school evaluation reports (by the General Inspectorate of Education). From this initial analysis the following typology of the zones in the TEIP programme emerged: (1) *rehab* and exclusion urban zones; diffuse peripheral zones; (3) heterogeneous urban zones with social inequalities and conflicts and (4) poor rural zones. Considering each type, in combination with geographical position, organisational structures and academic scores, and excluding zones included in the programme after 2008 (considered too recent to produce impacts), seven school clusters were selected, in order to reflect a wide variety of situations (see Table 1).

In each case, our empirical data included:

- *Content analysis* of school and municipality reports, projects and statistics;
- *Surveys*: one covering 50% of the teachers and the other 15% of the students' families, both using random samples;
- *Interviews* with the principal, the local project supervisor, the external consultant and three local partners (including the parents' association president);
- *Focus groups*: one with teachers from different grades, another with department coordinators, a third with professional staff included in the programme (social workers, psychologists, etc.) and a fourth with students (group delegates) from different grades;

Table 1. Profile of the seven school clusters selected as case studies.

Case Study	Project start	Territorial type	Geography	Academic scores[a]	Organisation and leadership	Dimension[b]
A	1996	Rehab and exclusion	Oporto suburbs	High	Dynamic	Average
B	1996	Rehab and exclusion	Lisbon suburbs	Low	Unstable	Small
C	2006	Rural	Centre, near the border	Average	Stable	Small
D	2006	Diffuse	Southern small town	Low	Weak	Average
E	2006	Heterogeneous urban	Inner city of Braga	High	Participative	Large
F	2008	Diffuse	20 km from Lisbon	Average	Stable	Large
G	2008	Heterogeneous urban	Inner city of Lisbon	Average	Unstable	Average

[a]The classification is based on a comparison between all 105 schools clusters included in TEIP programme, so that high academic scores in these contexts are actually near the national average, while low academic scores are clearly in the lower national rank.
[b]Large, more than 2000 students and Small, less than 1000 students

- *Field notes*, including comments on special events, school buildings, ways of organising time and space, local interactions and informal talks.

In sum, 242 local actors were interviewed (30–50 in each case), 1371 survey responses were received from parents (13% of the population) and 663 were obtained from teachers (69% of the population), with a balanced distribution between schools. The interviews were taped and analysed. The average duration of the interviews was 75 min for individual interviews and 2 h for group interviews (95 min in students' groups).

In the remaining pages, some of the key results are discussed, concerning three topics: integration and conflict; academic achievement; relations with local communities. Besides the importance of these dimensions in official standards and discourses regulating the TEIP programme, our theoretical discussion has shown how to tackle such three issues (in an integrative way) is vital to reduce social inequalities and especially to foster the opportunities of working class children.

5.   More activities and services, less dropout and violence

An initial observation of TEIP local projects clearly indicates that an increase in socio-educational activities and services takes place (see Table 2) – in line, for instance, with the 'full service extended schools' in British poor districts (Raffo & Dyson, 2007). These supplementary initiatives concentrate on two main areas: (a) pupil integration and support services, involving teachers, psychologists and other professionals, with the main focus on pupils with academic and/or behavioural problems; (b) extra-curricular activities, organised by teachers, animators and other professionals, usually as specific clubs, teams, corners, courses or events. Although the second area includes more initiatives, most are not so intensive: the first actually uses more resources.

According to previous studies (IIE, 2000), these two axes were developed from the beginning of the TEIP programme. However, it is important to stress that other areas within local projects are also growing, especially organisational intervention, and action for pedagogical and academic improvement, reflecting increasing pressure from national authorities for an improvement in organisational structures and academic achievement. Finally, a number of community initiatives are also supported by this programme, though this is not a core dimension of any of the seven case studies, either in terms of the number of initiatives or the resources, and the number has not increased from the 90s.

This orientation appears to be effective in reducing dropout rates and violence patterns in the seven school clusters, although there are variations

Table 2. Supplementary actions taking place in seven school clusters, in 2010/ 2011, on the behalf of TEIP programme and funds.

Case study	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Organisational intervention							
Self-evaluation and organisation	1	2	2		1	2	4
School buildings				1	1	1	
Pedagogical and academic improvements							
Pedagogical practices[a]	1		2	1			4
Math and language reinforcement		1	5	1	2	1	1
Sciences experimental programmes			1		1		
Merit recognition[b]							1
Pupils' integration and support services							
Special needs[c]					1		
Multicultural integration	1		1		2	1	1
Playgrounds animation	1			1			
Support to pupils and families	4	4	1	2	2	2	2
Security and prevention[d]	1		1		1		
Extra-curriculum programmes							
Thematic clubs, projects, etc.	10	2	6	2	5		7
Community activities							
Local community involvement	2	1	2	3	1		3

[a]*Pedagogical practices*: pedagogical fragmentation taking into account the differing needs of students, pedagogical partnerships inter-class and inter-disciplines; diversification of contexts and practices (thematic rooms, projects, study visits, local events.
[b]*Merit recognition:* public delivery of diplomas and prizes of merit, publishes exhibition of student work, encouraging the participation of students in national competitions (e.g. math olympics, photography, music, etc.).
[c]*Special needs*: tutorials for individualised monitoring of students with difficulties, definition of individual working plans, special education teachers, diversification curriculum offer with the opening of courses that emphasise learning processes in a professional context, etc.
[d]*Security and prevention*: contracting of mediators, designation of tutors, contracting of sociocultural animators; sanctions framed in community service; shared responsibility between students, as well as implementation of solutions on their educational background and professional future.

between local contexts and the internal data are not particularly rigorous, especially concerning longitudinal data. This is due to the indicator design and the fact that the measures appear to vary between schools and between years.

Considering dropout, the rates decreased in the seven clusters from 2007 to 2010 and are now minimal. In our survey, most teachers considered that dropout has fallen during the last three years and the TEIP project was an important contributor to this development. More than 80% expressed this view in cases A and C, while the percentage was less than 50% in cases B and G, though in these clusters there was a high rate of teachers (more than 20%) who had been recently assigned, so they were unable to make a comparison with the previous situation. The field research allows us to associate the dropout reduction with integration and support services in particular, as

many pupils (and some families) expressed the importance of having experts following their careers and helping them at stressful moments. Certain extra-curricular thematic programmes were also mentioned as an important strategy for improving young people's continuance and motivation in school, especially when they do not like regular classes and systematically fail the tests. Moreover, the general attitude of avoiding retention, by creating reinforcement activities and vocational training programmes (see below), is also an important factor in the reduction of dropout levels (Stearns et al., 2007).

We may wonder if recent dynamics such as the youth labour market crisis or the obligation for families to keep their children in school if they are to receive social benefits, are not of importance in the decrease in dropout rates. Moreover, in segregated zones, many students repeat years during their basic education, so they may actually be in school until the age of 16 (legal requirement), though this does not mean they actually finish their basic education (ISCED 2). The new legislation (from 2008) extended compulsory education to include upper secondary education or at least attendance until the age of 18, which creates a new challenge for these schools.

With regard to the climate in schools, the administrative data are not rigorous either. However, the survey of teachers and parents shows a clear perception of a decrease in violence patterns in the classroom and playground

Table 3.   Parents' perceptions on the school climate evolution.

Case study	D	F	C	E	A	B	G	Total
*Misbehaviours in classroom**								
Increased	31.9	20.5	32.5	27.7	21.3	28.9	34.5	28.6
Maintained	37.2	39.7	38.2	37.9	29.2	31.1	33.9	36.0
Decreased	30.9	39.7	29.3	34.5	49.4	40.0	31.6	35.3
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
*Violence in playgrounds***								
Increased	28.7	19.9	31.7	18.0	17.2	26.4	32.7	25.4
Maintained	37.2	41.7	38.1	44.3	39.1	37.4	34.6	39.1
Decreased	34.0	38.4	30.2	37.7	43.7	36.3	32.7	35.5
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Insecurity around schools***								
Increased	37.4	30.5	25.3	25.5	15.7	20.5	24.4	25.8
Maintained	41.8	47.7	45.2	44.2	44.9	51.1	53.0	47.0
Decreased	20.9	21.9	29.6	30.3	39.3	28.4	22.6	27.2
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Teachers' absenteeism***								
Increased	5.9	8.7	5.9	5.7	3.4	10.5	11.1	7.4
Maintained	56.5	47.1	46.2	41.1	38.2	38.4	48.8	45.3
Decreased	37.6	44.2	47.9	53.2	58.4	51.2	40.1	47.2
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Survey to parents.
Notes: Qui-square meaningful $*p <= 0.000$; $***p <= 0.05$.

Table 4.   Teachers' perceptions on the school climate evolution.

Case dtudy	D	F	C	E	A	B	G	Total
*Relations between students**								
Better	57.6	38.8	67.1	60.0	78.6	38.9	34.1	54.1
Maintained	28.8	43.1	22.4	23.1	12.5	29.2	25.3	26.2
Worst	–	6.0	7.9	3.8	2.7	18.1	13.2	6.9
Does not know	13.6	12.1	2.6	13.1	6.3	13.9	27.5	12.7
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
*Relations of students with teachers**								
Better	51.5	44.0	65.8	55.4	71.4	43.1	30.8	52.2
Maintained	30.3	36.2	21.1	26.9	18.8	16.7	25.3	25.5
Worst	4.5	7.8	10.5	4.6	4.5	27.8	14.3	9.7
Doesn't know	13.6	12.1	2.6	13.1	5.4	12.5	29.7	12.7
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
*Students' absenteeism**								
Better	62.1	50.9	78.9	66.2	84.8	34.7	34.1	59.9
Maintained	22.7	30.2	11.8	16.2	9.8	31.9	27.5	21.0
Worst	1.5	5.2	2.6	2.3	–	19.4	3.3	4.4
Doesn't know	13.6	13.8	6.6	15.4	5.4	13.9	35.2	14.8
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Survey to teachers.
Notes: Qui-square meaningful $*p <= 0.000$; $***p <= 0.05$.

(though not around schools), as was confirmed by the pupils' focus groups. This was specially so in cases A, B and F and not so much in cases D and G, which reflect differences between local projects and contexts (see Tables 3 and 4). While in cluster D, the school leaders present some difficulty in gaining authority, cluster G was the last to enter the programme (in 2008) and, in 2010/2011, was experiencing a massive building rehabilitation process, so we may expect a reduction of violence in the coming years.

Violent incidents within the school are now systematically registered (i.e. the events and disciplinary procedures are reported to the central administration). This has increased the debate about the criteria underlying both the classification of behaviour as 'violent' or 'undisciplined' and the responses applied to address the issues.

The general improvement can be explained by an increase in integration and support services. In the seven school clusters, a special office was created, involving teachers and other experts, in articulation with the Safe School Programme (see above) to prevent and intervene in violence problems. Moreover, the increase in extra-curricular activities (some of them taking place in the playground during breaks) and decrease in both student and teacher absenteeism (see Tables 3 and 4) were important elements in the promotion of a more regulated and stable school environment.

Previous research on TEIP projects had already identified the importance of recognising both the cultural differences between students and the

knowledge that is required by schools, as a way of reducing failure and dropout. It had also recognised the importance, as an educational component, that extra-curricular activities assumed in these contexts (Canário, Alves, & Rolo, 2001; Stoer & Rodrigues, 2000).

6.   The struggle to improve academic achievement

With respect to academic improvement, the evidence requires a more complex analysis and suggests wide variation between schools in the TEIP programme (Table 5). A comparison between 2007 and 2010 indicates a slight increase in scores in internal assessments, leading to a considerable reduction in repetition rates. However, in the national assessments, there were developments in both directions. In clusters A and E, scores increased and are now near the national average. But, in case B, the scores are very low and actually fell in the last three years. In cases D and F, there was a significant improvement in ISCED 1b (the last 2 years) but, in fact, a decrease in ISCED 2. Unfortunately, school cluster C did not provide us with information in the same categories for comparison with the others and, in case G, the school cluster was expanded in 2008 to include some new schools, so the data from 2007 and 2010 are not directly comparable.

Our teacher survey presents a more optimistic scenario, though it confirms the variation between cases (Table 6). In cases A, C and E, most teachers consider that learning abilities have improved during the last three years. In the other four clusters, teachers' perceptions on this topic are divided: especially in case B, there is a significant group (20.8%) that considers student learning patterns and internal classifications are actually decreasing. While, in cases A and C, most teachers consider the TEIP programme a decisive factor in boosting learning ability, in the other cases the most common perspective among teachers was that the TEIP was 'occasionally positive', that is, it helped to solve some specific situations but not to fix the broad issue.

Improving academic achievement was a central goal (it actually appears to be a necessary condition for approval and funding by the central administration). In all local projects, some initiatives were directly oriented towards this goal. Variations in the development of schools are to be interpreted in relation to pedagogical leadership, strategies and practices.

Clusters A and E are characterised by a dynamic and stable leadership, concerned with improving learning patterns and actually supporting innovative practices. Hence, the traditional pedagogical model based on teachers presenting contents and students taking notes or completing individual exercises is being exchanged for a more dialogic model that includes projects, team work, problem solving, debates, etc. The library and 'maths room' are important places where students may work and study under supervision or be involved in other meaningful activities. The students' work is often

Table 5. Academic scores recent evolution, both in internal and national assessments (%).

Case study	D		F		E		A		B		G	
Year	2007	2010	2007	2010	2007	2010	2007	2010	2007	2010	2007	2010
Students approved in internal assessment (%)												
ISCED 1a	–	92	86	87	98	–	98	97	82	81	94	92
ISCED 1b	73	81	81	89	88	–	92	95	73	74	84	73
ISCED 2	78	81	77	78	86	–	74	81	73	85	77	76
Students approved in national assessment tests (%)												
Math ISCED 1a	72	71	49	73	94	95	89	87	67	82	–	76
Port ISCED 1a	81	83	73	85	96	92	86	91	67	87	–	80
Math ISCED 1b	68	90	62	64	84	78	76	85	33	15	–	75
Port ISCED 1b	87	92	80	82	95	93	95	93	72	47	–	87
Math ISCED 2	28	48	40	18	61	80	42	97	4	3	–	–
Port ISCED 2	74	29	79	48	93	81	72	94	61	21	–	–

Source: School clusters official documentation.
Notes: ISCED 1a: the first 4 years; ISCED 1b: the last 2 years.

Table 6. Teachers' perceptions on learning improvements, during the last three years (%).

Case study	D	F	C	E	A	B	G	Total
Pupils' learning patterns[*]								
Increased	59.1	46.6	76.3	67.7	88.4	43.1	30.8	59.9
Maintained	18.2	35.3	14.5	12.3	3.6	20.8	26.4	18.6
Decreased	4.5	2.6	3.9	4.6	2.7	20.8	6.6	5.9
Doesn't know	18.2	15.5	5.3	15.4	5.4	15.3	36.3	15.7
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Internal classifications[*]								
Increased	62.1	54.3	76.0	64.6	85.6	43.1	34.1	60.8
Maintained	15.2	23.3	10.7	12.3	4.5	18.1	22.0	15.0
Decreased	1.5	2.6	6.7	3.8	0.9	20.8	6.6	5.4
Does not know	21.2	19.8	6.7	19.2	9.0	18.1	37.4	18.8
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Pupils' involvement in school initiatives[*]								
Increased	75.8	64.7	85.5	76.2	86.6	69.4	47.8	72.4
Maintained	7.6	20.7	10.5	5.4	6.3	15.3	17.8	11.8
Decreased	3.0	0.9	1.3	3.1	0.9	1.4	4.4	2.1
Does not know	13.6	13.8	2.6	15.4	6.3	13.9	30.0	13.7
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Survey to teachers.
Notes: Meaningful chi-square [*]$p <= 0.000$.

presented to the community through exhibitions and public events. Moreover, if all cases are characterised by an increase in extra-curricular activities, in cases A and E, these activities are connected with the dynamics of the national curriculum: they support students in developing important skills for success in the core subjects.

In contrast, in cases B and D, the creation of extra-curricular activities appears to be important in reducing violence and dropout rates, but it is seldom connected with regular curriculum development. Most classes are still based on the traditional pedagogical models, so students may remain at school due to extra-curricular activities or support services but may not actually be improving their academic abilities. In these cases, a 'double regime' (regular vs. vocational tracks) emerges and the gap may actually generate tension and conflict between teachers, especially since the leadership in the school is weaker and less stable.

Cases C, F and G are more complex. On one hand, case C is a rural school cluster where traditional patterns are still dominant but, according to the situation, teachers and students actually note some pedagogical progress with the adoption of active methodologies as team work, projects and debates (though in comparison with urban patterns, they appear to be weak). Cases F and G, both have more than 2000 students and a divided staff. As some school leaders have stated, a pedagogical change is necessary but will

take longer, so the effects may emerge in the next few years. Though this is a valid argument and analytical caution is actually required, we still emphasise that the pedagogical leadership and innovation trends are clearly weaker than in cases A and E. Indeed, some improvement may occur, but hardly with the same impetus for pupils' achievement.

7.   The missing links: community and labour market

Beyond the decline in dropout rates and the slight rise in academic achievement, advances in the other two goals of the TEIP programme appear to have been weaker and, in some cases, even uncertain.

Action to establish schools as a platform of local development is scarce (see Table 2), the resources allocated to it are low, and there are no (national or local) indicators to measure developments in this domain. The national administration offices, regional supervisors and school authorities appear to neglect this goal and have increasingly focused on improving academic performance. A common idea among these actors is that enhancing young people's educational careers is also a way of working, in the long run, towards the development of local communities. They hardly understand that promoting the educational success of some of their pupils may lead to their leaving the community to attend university and follow a professional career, or that the distances between schools and communities may be an enduring cause of failure among their children. As Warren (2005, p. 133) has stated for the American situation, 'the fates of urban schools and communities are linked, yet school reformers and community-builders typically act as if they are not'.

According to the official TEIP standards, a different relationship with the local communities appears not only as a major goal but also as a required basis for local intervention. The schools and administration appear to interpret this demand merely as a request for formal partnerships with local institutions. Actually, all the TEIP projects include a network of institutions working within their zones, e.g. municipal offices, health services, police departments and parents' associations; many of them also include local companies, public services and community-development programmes. Partnerships with national foundations and universities are also increasing.

In line with previous studies (Canário et al., 2001), our interviews with the school partners have shown very different levels of commitment. In cases A and E, the number of partnerships is higher and the involvement of some of them in educational affairs is increasingly pervasive, leading to a cooperative model. In the other cases, the partnerships are reduced to specific actions, for instance, providing practice for pupils in vocational training or participating in special school events. This evidence confirms the idea that a stronger connection with local communities is a key enabler of academic improvement, and it challenges the idea that specific action aimed at

this goal would be a more accurate way of achieving it. Participative and dialogic leadership in schools appears to be the key element in involving other local actors.

Still, the common reduction of communities to local institutions represents a strategy implemented by the administration and school authorities to actually expand their power over local populations, instead of enhancing their participation and thus generating social capital (Warren, 2005). This is especially the case in segregated zones that have traditionally tense relationship with official agencies and formal procedures. As the parent survey made clear (Table 7), families' knowledge of and participation in organisational life and decision-making processes are still very weak (a little higher in cases A and E) and their contact with school is usually based on the (highly variable) relationship with their children's teacher. Despite its formal

Table 7. Parents' relation with schools.

Case study		D	F	C	E	A	B	G	Total
TEIP project	Participation	–	3	5	2	3	–	4	3
	Acknowledge, no participation	19	19	25	23	31	13	24	22
	Ignorance	81	77	70	75	67	87	72	75
	Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Relation with parents' association	Member and participant	8	12	14	12	7	11	11	11
	Member, not participant	7	8	8	31	8	6	10	12
	Not member, but informed	62	67	64	54	83	43	65	62
	Not member, nor informed	7	0	0	0	1	11	4	3
	Ignorance	16	12	14	4	1	28	10	11
	Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Participation in any school activities?	Yes	24	34	49	39	49	25	36	38
	No	76	66	51	61	51	75	64	63
	Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Frequency of contact by teachers, during the last year	Never	39	46	22	51	34	29	35	37
	1 or 2 times	31	36	48	32	31	42	36	37
	3 to 8 times	16	14	21	11	28	21	22	18
	More than once each month	14	5	9	6	7	8	7	8
	Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Survey to parents.

standards, the TEIP programme was unable to challenge this traditional pattern.

Even within school organisations, the TEIP projects were designed by a small and influential group, usually the board and a group of teachers in their confidence, so the rest of the staff did not participate in the discussion of local strategy and action. They were usually only involved at the implementation stage. The survey of teachers showed that only 7% participated in the project design (the rate was a little higher in cases B and C, but these are smaller clusters) and 21% were consulted about the project. However, just 13% are not participating on a weekly basis in some project activity and 53% dedicate more than 10% of their working time to implementing the project. Focus groups with teachers have shown that this asymmetry generates some criticism among the staff, especially in school clusters where the leadership is not so strong or stable. Accordingly, most teachers feel that the TEIP project was imposed on them, both by the national administration and local authorities.

With regard to support for the transition from education to work, an important improvement in all the case studies was the creation of vocational training courses as a way of completing basic education and developing some occupational skills. Although such courses are actually valued by school authorities as a way of reducing failure and dropout rates, as well as by some students as a way of starting a working career, field research has often observed that it is an option for a small proportion of students (10% in some cases, less in others), usually only those who have experienced repeated failure and/or behaviour problems in the regular courses. Thus, many students and teachers, as well as local institutions, have a negative idea of vocational courses and their participants, which poses a powerful challenge for successful transition to the labour market.

Unfortunately, both local and national indicators on these vocational training programmes are scarce, a fact that reflects the secondary role assigned to this goal. A systematic follow-up of the students enrolled would be of great use in order to objectively measure the impact of vocational paths on their academic lives and their transitions to the labour market.

8. Conclusions

In broad terms, our study has shown that the TEIP programme was of importance in the reduction of violence and dropout patterns in the poorest Portuguese districts and in the improvement of academic achievement, despite (in the latter case) wide variation between the school clusters. Concerning the goals of facilitating school-to-work transitions and developing local communities, the programme has registered some interesting experiences, though there is no evidence of profound changes.

To tackle these issues in a sustainable manner, important organisational transformations are needed – a critical aspect that different researchers have pointed out in the TEIP programme. Without serious transformations in the planning and monitoring processes (Canário, 2009; Canário et al., 2001; Carvalho et al., 2009), in the relationship between pedagogy and the local communities (Bettencourt & Sousa, 2000) and in the organisational network covering different local and national actors (Sarmento et al., 2000), there is a risk that, ultimately, the programme will merely be a palliative measure. As Gamarnikow and Green (1999) or Reid and Brain (2003) note about EAZ policy, the TEIP programme has also taken a pragmatic approach, with the focus on raising school scores and building institutional networks of professional providers.

Although we can agree with such criticism, we could also see that some schools now have a more consistent strategy for planning and monitoring their activities and results; they are more open to other local actors, even if they must be 'pragmatic'; there are new professionals and organisational bodies in schools; and new pedagogical strategies are being tested. These developments could stimulate innovation in the whole system, although such movement has been blocked by current rationalisation and re-centralisation policies.

It is curious that, according to official standards, violence reduction is not presented as a goal of the TEIP programme, which shows the importance of informal policy appropriation processes, especially through the daily interaction between local leaders and administration offices (Bowe & Ball, 1992). Nevertheless, we must not underestimate the importance of reducing violence and dropout rates, especially at a time of economic crisis, when social ties in the more segregated districts become a very delicate issue. The illusory character of school integration without academic success may actually emerge in some situations, reducing resistance to school and thus legitimising inequalities, while in others – especially those with strong leadership, a clear strategy and community bonds – the programme actually supports an increase in learning patterns and successful schooling careers.

Thus, although all schools in poor districts may need supplementary support, the TEIP programme appears to be particularly effective in schools where the organisation is not failing (Downey et al., 2008). This pattern may generate new asymmetries between urban schools. Accordingly, to succeed in different local contexts, the administration should consider the heterogeneity of the school network and should preserve the openness of the programme, simultaneously developing stronger intervention in unstable or closed schools.

Another important issue to be addressed is the fact that the TEIP initially adopted a 'territorial approach' but was increasingly appropriated as a way of solving organisational and pedagogical problems. If avoidance of the 'politics of place', in Gulson's sense (2008), which is actually more expensive and politically dangerous, constrains the goal of creating a new relationship between schools and poor communities, we may wonder if it does not also compromise

the possibility of a more sustained increase in educational achievement. As Raffo and Dyson (2007) pointed out, the ability of these programmes either to simply mask structural inequalities or to effectively challenge them depends both on their internal configuration and, most of all, their integration into wider policies, where they exist. Hence, articulation with territorial and social inclusion policies could improve the outcomes of the TEIP programme.

Acknowledgements

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