# Towards a critical approach to the sociology of education in Portugal

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# Acknowledgement

# Contextualization

Is there a national specificity of the sociology of education in Portugal?

- Local variables: peripheral condition, late post-democratic consolidation of 1974
- International influences: theoretical and epistemological level and international challenges

The Portuguese sociology of education faces the sensitive composition of old and new problems that oscillate between a local, national and transnational scale

# Focus

To identify regularities and discontinuities across the process of affirmation of the sociology of education in Portugal, prospecting future horizons in three domains of activity:

- ➤ Teaching
- ➤ Research
- ➤ Intervention

# Method

- Interviews with sociologists of education published between 2011 and 2017 in the newsletters of the Sociology of Education section of the Portuguese Association of Sociology

- Documentary collection and organization of symposia about these themes, that have been published in the Journal of Sociology of Education

- Profile of the interviewees: Plurality of academic training, professional experience and institutional affiliations; mostly male and with initial and post-graduate studies in Sociology

# The teaching of sociology of education

# The past, the present and the future

- The teaching of sociology of education and teacher training: retrospective and reconfiguration

- The main themes in the teaching of sociology of education: the centrality of the school and the "other" educations

- The contributions of the teaching of sociology of education: "enriching the analysis of educational phenomena", "building a critical approach on the school and the classroom", "questioning practices and educational organizations".

# Understanding the past to build the present and plan for the future

| | DECADE OF 1970 | DECADE OF 1980 | DECADE OF 1990 | NEW CENTURY |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **POLITICAL AGENDA** | Revolution of April 1974<br>Model of "democratic management"<br>Education as a political priority | Law No. 46/86 (LBSE)<br>Global Reform of the Education System<br>DL No. 43/89 (Autonomy) | Desp. No 98-A / 92 (Student assessment)<br>DL No. 115-A / 98 (Regime Autonomy)<br>Expansion of higher education<br>Educational Territories of Priority Intervention (TEIP) | Adult education<br>Expansion of school clusters<br>DL n.º 75/2008 (unipersonal management)<br>External evaluation of schools<br>DL nº 79/2014 - R. J. H. Teaching<br>DL nº 74/2006 of 24 March |
| **TEACHING** | Creation of Sociology Courses<br>Creation of New Universities and Higher Education Schools<br>Integrated model of teacher education | Multiplying Sociology Courses<br>Expansion of New Universities and Higher Education Schools<br>Expansion of teacher training / Sociology<br>Professionalism of teachers | Creation of courses of interface with Sociology<br>Multiplying postgraduate training<br>Retraction of teacher education | Adequacy to Bologna<br>New teaching qualification rules<br>Expansion of postgraduate training<br>Decline in teacher training<br>Financed surveys |
| **RESEARCH: APPROACHES AND TOPICS** | **MACRO**<br>Educational system<br><br>Syndicalism, teacher professionalism, interaction in pedagogical contexts, (in) success and school curriculum, mass school | **MACRO**<br>Educational system and educational policies<br><br>Role of the State, educational policies (Sociology of educational policies) | **MEGA**-MACRO-MESO<br>Global educational policies<br><br>Globalization, globalization, europeanization, role of international organizations: educational evaluation, accountability systems<br><br>Higher education<br>Sociology of childhood | **MEGA**-MACRO-**MESO**-MICRO<br>Educational policies, organizations and actors<br><br>Regulation of public policies, school autonomy, adult education, comparative analysis<br><br>Sociology of educational organizations<br>Higher education and professional insertion<br><br>Other educational places: non-formal and informal education processes<br>Issues of gender, difference, cultural diversity, justice, excellence |

# Research in sociology of education

## Research regularities

- Over-determination of the research agenda by the political agenda (national and international)
- Effect of the "dual peripheral and initiatory condition" (Vieira, 2013: 6) of the sociology of education on the amplitude and plurality of approaches
- Permanence of social inequalities as a dominant research object, albeit with theoretical and methodological variants over time
- Prevalence of a sociology of the school and formal education processes, as well as qualitative methodologies

## Research challenges

- **Epistemological:** interdisciplinary dialogue
- **Theoretical:** reactualization and rejuvenation of the objects of the sociology of education
- **Methodological:** diversification and rearticulation of the scales of analysis and methodological creativity
- **Political-institutional:** institutional and academic culture based on scientific freedom and changing the dominant conceptions of utility and relevance of knowledge

# The sociology of education and the intervention in socio-educational contexts

## Recognizing the singularities of sociologist work

"The social sciences prove their social usefulness when they intervene with their own point of view ... to assure their relative autonomy vis-a-vis other symbolic fields ... The more standardized, the more socially irrelevant, or the more instrumented." (Telmo Caria)

"The credibility of the SE can only continue to be consolidated to the extent that it can impose limits on scientific reasonableness (in terms of deadlines, methodological designs, freedom to express results) in the acceptance of on-demand searches" ( Maria Manuel Vieira)

"The intensification of ties between the university and the institutions / associations / schools. By demonstrating the added value that we can give both in the equation and in the resolution or attenuation of the social problems felt in the real contexts we can sustain the affirmation of this disciplinary field. (...) communicate more and better with schools because it is working with them that change can be effective. "(Teresa Seabra)

"The Sociology of Education has accumulated results that have been fundamentally recognized and appropriated by the school context" (Sofia Marques da Silva)

# A public sociology

"A neutral, depoliticized sociology is an impossibility. An uncommitted or totally uncommitted sociology is an impossibility "(Licínio Lima)

"The strategies to make public the research results may have failed. Or there is also a greater investment by the teams and institutions themselves in designing communication and communication policies that can reach audiences - general or more specific." (Sofia Marques da Silva)

"For me the sociology of education has always and always been a political sociology of education, because sociological analysis has always had and always will have social and especially political implications. It is genetic, it is his DNA, it is his 'infantile disease', as Lenin would say ... " (Carlos Alberto Gomes)

"The commitment to society (and to political power) will therefore be to produce, make available, disseminate knowledge-products that contribute to informed action." (Maria Manuel Vieira)

"It seems to me that sociologists of education (and sociologists in general) have all too often forgotten to answer Howard Becker's question:" Which side are we on? " And this suggests that the belief in a supposed scientific neutrality has not yet been completely questioned. Moreover, without a public sociology (traditional or organic) one loses much of the usefulness and relevance of sociology "(Almerindo Janela Afonso)

## Possible intervention horizons

"The main competitors of sociologists in the school space are psychologists and social workers ... This has weakened the intervention of sociologists and suggests that they, in terms of traditional discipline specialization, invest not only in the SE but also in the sociology of the family. It might be possible to have a more precise idea of the activity of sociologists in schools ... The same procedure could be followed for other institutions where sociologists working in education or training work, such as municipalities or central government bodies." (Sérgio Grácio)

"Potentialities of a closer relationship between educational sociologists and social workers who are populating schools (social workers, socio-cultural animators, etc.) ... Sociologists who work as education technicians often face the difficulty to reconcile or to compose their scientific, ethical and deontological formation with their involvement in the institutions, especially when it collides with that institution." (Bruno Dionísio)

"In the permanent monitoring of the education system and in the evaluation of the implementation of public policies in education, these professionals can play a relevant role (...) the growth of the assistance dimension that the educational institutions are assuming, with the current economic and financial crisis , opens the field for the expert intervention of the sociologist - in the image of what is already happening in intervened educational territories (TEIP)." (Maria Manuel Vieira)

## Mapping Future Challenges

- Facing the role of education sociologist in the framework of a "singularist society"

- A more or less troubled relationship of the education sociologist with other professionals (social workers, psychologists, etc.)

- A job based on uncertain and precarious working conditions

- The political demand for effective and socially useful sociological intervention

- A *zigzagging* public sociology

- Recompositions and varieties of critique in sociology of education: inequalities, recognition of diferences, justice…

# Thank you for your attention

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