

ORGANISATIONAL MEDIATION COMMITTED TO *HUMAN AGENCY*

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In this paper, we will present the results of a portuguese research on the development of the social construction of autonomy, emphasising, within a context of interdependences and intersubjectivities the central role of *human agency*, committed to issues of organisational mediation and understood as participation, involvement and shared accountability of all of the people acting in a school organisation.

In the social sciences today we are witnessing the (re)affirmation of the analysis of human communication and subjectivity. The starting point can therefore be expressed as an articulation of the personal living contexts with the various social, political and professional contexts of individuals. This idea is combined with the idea that the problems and the dimension given to them do not derive directly from the situations, but also from the perception that those involved have of these situations. From this perspective, the resolution of any impasse depends on the possibility of a new framework or interpretation of the situation, that is, on the change and broadening of the field of view to other perspectives and to new information. Assuming the criticism of modernity and emphasising the loss of meta-narratives, we must consider the fragmentation and the plurality of worlds in order to open up to new realisations of society. Late modernity is not only a period of paradigmatic transition, but also a period of paradigmatic re-composition or recombination. Hence the need for the training of human beings to focus on the humanisation of human relations, acknowledging the tensions and potential threats of unrestrained and dehumanised capitalism and transforming it into a challenge of humanisation and development of individuals. These times of change and contradiction, where personal and social life and science search for new relations, lead, when thinking about organisations, to an increase in the importance given to people and their interactive dynamics, to culture and to (micro) powers, looking at the interdependence between autonomy and *human agency*. These interactionist approaches allow us to understand the work of organisational mediation as a translation and reinterpretation developed in

compromise. In organisational mediation, relational and communicational approaches, the ethics of affection and of relation, and the organisational and communicational acting of autonomous human agency are articulated. In turn, autonomous human agency requires the acceptance of the plurality of forms of rationality and a knowledge that is open to the actors. It presents a strong and cooperative culture based on the sharing of traditions, beliefs and values, together with flexibility and innovation to deal with the constant uncertainty, ambiguity and the unexpected.

In this light, we highlight the political dimension of education and emphasise the importance of individual action and collective education. As defined, *human agency* requires informed knowledge, willpower, freedom and responsibility, resulting in the development of a being who has willpower, is able to think and create, act, reflect and choose (in an appeal to the authorship of the self) in order to develop more creative autonomies with a higher degree of solidarity working for the community.

Training for university teaching: facing the challenge of *humanising scientific culture*

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The recognition that teaching requires specific training, not only in terms of the knowledge around which student learning is to be organised, but also in terms of the organisation of the curriculum and the processes of its development, namely the pedagogic-didactic work methods, has been commonplace in Portugal when we speak of teachers in basic and secondary education. However, with respect to higher education, this has not always been the case. For many of the social actors involved in this level of teaching, the idea that those who teach others, or even those who teach others to teach, do so because they know how to teach still has a stronghold. Therefore, for many years training was mainly regarded as an individual activity built based on experience (Leite, 2007). The discourse established by the Bologna process was accompanied by a discourse that holds that the paradigm that focuses on teaching should give way to a paradigm that focuses on learning. At the same time, in some university

institutions, activities and/or movements which focused on the pedagogic-didactic dimension, in the sense of creating the conditions for learning to be a teacher, began to emerge. The authors of this paper have mentioned this issue on several occasions (Leite, 2005 and Leite e Ramos, 2007).

The acknowledgement that social situations today are riddled by a complexity that requires that professionally competent teachers get involved in the conception and development of actions and projects that give meaning to the training of the students they work with has also contributed to this movement for change (Leite, 2006). That is, it is within the framework of these challenges that the need to acquire professional teaching knowledge capable of promoting, in teachers, the development of competences to deal with the situations that social changes have generated has been mentioned. The UNESCO (1998) declaration points in this same direction, by presenting a vision that calls for this level of education to answer to the demands of a world in constant change – as a result of globalisation and the new nature of information in the context of a *knowledge society* – and to intervene in emerging themes, such as globalisation, multiculturalism, virtualisation. What we are stating is that this declaration also defends attention to the student and to the student's learning and global education processes as teaching responsibilities. It is in the context of this understanding that we defend pedagogic-didactic training and actualisation, since it represents a sphere for accessing a knowledge and a living experience which, while configuring a positive change in teaching practice, can also confer a sense of *humanising scientific* culture, that is, of enabling a reflection on teaching as a profession that is realised in the context of human relations.

Acknowledging due caution in not bestowing on these actions a redeeming power but, rather, highlighting their mediatory nature, in this paper we describe research currently in progress at the University of Porto which aims to identify the possibility of these actions being configured as spaces for dialogue between *humanistic culture* and *scientific culture* – in the sense of helping to break through disciplinary barriers and focusing on pedagogic-didactic knowledge as a structuring element of responsibility towards the social dimension of university teaching.

The analysis of this movement and the actions that have been developed allows us to identify aspects which help us configure a space for dialogue between *humanistic culture* and *scientific culture*, to the extent that they enable a (re)contextualization of knowledge and practice.

Identities, cultures and elementary school teacher training: realities and challenges

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If we accept that the “knowledge society” is developing, we must also consider that elementary school teachers are key players in building a world in which the decisive issues of efficiency and productivity are well-matched with the communicational questions of human training and ordinary life. In fact, it is while children are at elementary school that conceptions and ways of access to knowledge are transmitted and acquired and with them the cognitive, affective and social processes that connect us to it. On the route toward the knowledge society the training of elementary school teachers in new molds is, therefore, an important dimension to invest in.

However, training elementary school teachers has revealed difficulties in transforming teaching practices and school cultures, which have been built up throughout years of organization of mass teaching processes. The gap between the challenges presented at that teaching level by the knowledge society and the real practices taking place in it is, the majority of times, something to be questioned.

In this communication we want to discuss ways of training teachers for elementary education aimed at the knowledge society, starting from the conceptions of teachers whose professional life and work we investigated.

From the theoretical point of view they are studies about teaching identity and school cultures, in whose environment we are emphasizing the perspectives of Woodward (2002), Claude Dubar (1995) and of the authors themselves (Tura, 2000; Lopes, 2002 and 2008), which we chose to identify and discuss the situations being examined. On one hand, it is considered that identity is constructed in a dynamic, continuous and inventive process, which in the current context contains a plurality of significations and referents and on the other that the