School evaluation and the improvement of curricular processes: which relations?

Figueiredo, Carla (cfigueiredo@fpce.up.pt); Faculdade de Psicologia e de Ciências da Educação da Universidade do Porto, Portugal

Leite, Carlinda (carlinda@fpce.up.pt); Faculdade de Psicologia e de Ciências da Educação da Universidade do Porto, Portugal

Fernandes, Preciosa (preciosa@fpce.up.pt); Faculdade de Psicologia e de Ciências da Educação da Universidade do Porto, Portugal

The past 20 years have been prolific in educational guidelines related with school education in Europe (Commission of the European Communities, 2007). Associated with these, many European bodies have produced documents containing recommendations for nations to ensure the quality of curricular practices, most of them advocating for a different curricular approaches and diversified pedagogical practices (OECD, 2010; European Commission, 2012; European Union Council, 2011; 2013).

These guidelines led to the establishment of quality standards to be fulfilled by educational systems, and led many European nations to establish accountability systems as a means to ensure the standards fulfilment, being the most common of all the school evaluation (SE) processes (Faubert, 2009). SE is considered as a good asset to obtain valuable knowledge on the work developed in schools, and a valid starting point for the implementation of improvement measures and solving the problems identified (Commission of the European Communities, 2001; Devos & Verhoeven, 2003; Hofman, Dijkstra & Hofman, 2009; OECD, 2012; 2013; Schildkamp et al, 2012). It was in this sense that Portugal adopted SE, having launched in 2006 a school external evaluation (SEE) process.

This presentation addresses the issue of whether Portuguese schools effectively use the information provided by SEE to act upon curricular processes and develop a better teaching and learning process.

Data was collected in 10 Portuguese schools through semi-structured interviews (Bogdan & Biklen, 1994) with school headmasters, and focus group interviews (Greenbaum, 1998) with the self-evaluation teams and department coordinators. Also, schools' structural documents, such as the educational project, the improvement plan and also the SEE report were analysed.

The analysis revealed that schools do use the results from SEE to perform some improvements, but these interventions seem to just stay at the surface of the question. That is, the actions taken based on the SEE results are mostly at a documental level, in terms of the production of plans, reports and other documents to register the work that is being planned and developed in schools; and at an organizational level, in terms of a certain change in planning meetings and peer work, in a more formal way as a means to legitimate the already established informal practices. There are also some traces of actions at the curricular processes level, corresponding mostly to curriculum articulation practices between different subjects and different school years.

Introduction

The debate about quality is not a new one in the field of education. Since the end of the 20th century that many researchers, policy makers and practitioners have been discussing and defending the need to ensure that educational systems worldwide provide schooling of excellence and, therefore meet quality standards.

This discussion is the result of a series of political and social changes, which seem to have started with the major phenomenon of globalisation, as well as changes in the modes school governance, namely with the decentralisation of power and more autonomy granted to educational institutions.

On the one hand the globalisation, with free circulation of information, made nations aware of their surroundings and as result, aware of their place in the world. On the other hand, this awareness made comparison possible and revealed that some countries seemed to be far behind others in many different matters, education included. Alongside, the establishment of what is call by "knowledge society", made countries struggle to reach the best levels possible in their educational systems. And this all culminated in greater competition and, therefore, led nations to develop and adopt new strategies to overcome this situation. Amongst the measures taken is possible to find some regarding quality assurance, seen here as a means to boost the development and improvement of educational systems.

The changes in school governance raised other type of concerns, namely with the quality of education in less regulated system. In their turn, these concerns encourage the adoption of new modes of regulation, such as, again, quality assurance processes. One of the most common quality assurance system adopted in Europe is school evaluation (SE). Some countries opted for a system of external evaluation, others preferred to internal evaluation processes through self-evaluation, and some opted for a mixed approach, combining both external evaluation and self-evaluation, which is the case of Portugal. Despite the type of evaluation adopted, they all seem to aim in the same direction, to improve the quality of the educational service provided and to promote de development and results of school education.

Although it is not yet complete clear what is meant by quality when the issue is education, there is undeniable that it applies to school's performance, which relegates to attention paid to students achievement rates; to the provision of educational service, which entails teachers' pedagogical practices in and out of classroom, and to school management processes and school leadership. Meaning that whichever quality assurance mechanism is in place, it needs to address these matters, school evaluation included.

It is, therefore, expectable that SE systems cover the whole range of key aspects in education with, maybe, particular emphasis on the issues related to the teaching and learning, i. e., the curricular practices. This processes are of great relevance to the success of education, since is through them that students develop and acquire the knowledge and skills necessary. The curriculum and the practices associated with its development constitute a major part of school education. They comprise not only the content to be taught in each discipline, but a set of pedagogical approaches – curricular practices – used to teach the contents. Being so, school evaluation process should take the curricular part of school education into careful account, as it craves to promote the best quality possible.

Assuming all of this is true, it seem rather important to understand the relationship, if any, between the SE and the improvement of curricular processes, particularly in the perspective of school members. This is the question addressed in this paper, parting from the case of Portugal and focusing particularly on the school external evaluation process.

Theoretical considerations between curricular processes and SEE

It is already been said that school external evaluation processes and curricular processes share a bond. This section tries to explore the two processes are connected with each other.

A first consideration to be made is about what is currently perceived as the curriculum. The concept of curriculum, as to many other concepts, evolved throughout time. The curriculum was firstly conceive as a structured programme setting the disciplinary contents, learning goals and teaching methods, an idea that evolved into perceiving the curriculum as more flexible and comprehensive, taking into consideration the learning experiences, the contexts and the students (Miller and Seller, 1985; Doyle, 1992; Pacheco, 1996; Leite, 2002; Fernandes, 2011; Biesta, Priestley and Robinson, 2014). Nowadays it is possible to say that the curriculum is an open project congregating the basic disciplinary contents defined as essential for learning, but going beyond them. It contemplates also room for the adaptation and contextualization of the curricular contents regarding contextual factors (Fernandes *et al*, 2012). It is this conception that this paper addresses the issue of curricular practices, which are an organic part of the teaching and learning process. And being so, playing such an important role in school education, the curricular practices have experienced a number of changes and challenges. These are the result of the own political and social changes that transformed education as a whole. Societies are dynamic and go through a constant process of evolution and change. As a result, all social services and elements that constitute any society, are also target of changes. School education is bound to be influenced by the cultural and political discourses and orientations, and to adapt to them in the best possible way. In recent years there have been many debates around school education, mostly focusing on its quality and on the need to ensure the best educational service possible to meet the social demands and needs (The Economic and Social Committee, 2000; European Union Council, 2009; Faubert, 2009; European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2015). And as a result there can be found a number of recommendations for improving and transforming curricular practices to: 1) prepare students for an active life in society, and to provide the conditions to develop a the necessary skills and competencies (European Parliament and Council, 2001; European Parliament and Council, 2006; Commission of the European Communities, 2007); 2) ensure that students have the necessary characteristics to meet the labour market demands (Toner, 2011; European Commission, 2012); and 3) ensure that contents are taught in a meaningful way so that all students can learn at their own pace (OECD, 2010; European Union Council, 2011; European Commission, 2012b; European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2012; Kärkkäinen, 2012; European Council, 2013). It is in this context that the connection with school evaluation can be found.

Evaluation, much like the curriculum, has also experienced an evolution during time in both its meaning as well as in its form. If a first approach to evaluation, in education, was limited to assess students' knowledge and mastery of curricular contents and, therefore, related to performativity, throughout time this vision became obsolete. The process of evaluation was expanded to evaluate teachers, headteachers and the institution itself. The progression in terms of educational evaluation is due to a number of political, social and economic reasons. Nonetheless, according to the literature, the main reason to evaluate schools is related to quality assurance. And this quality is perceived in all aspects of school functioning, from academic results to curricular practices and school management. It is believed that SE has the potential to ensure and promote this quality, and can be a strong ally for individuals and institutions (Guba and Lincoln, 1989; Leite, Rodrigues and Fernandes, 2006). At the same time, school evaluation constitutes also a counterpart of some specific changes in the modes of school governance, such as the decentralisation of powers and schools autonomy. In this scenario SE becomes a tool for assuring a

good use of the new powers given to schools and its adequacy to the goals set for education (Reezigt and Creemers, 2005; Plowright, 2007; Sun, Creemers and Hong, 2007; Campbell and Levin, 2009; Coe, 2009; Hofman, Dijkstra and Hofman, 2009). It is also believed that the research component of evaluation can provide valuable information for everyone involved and interested in school education, and can inform possible interventions towards improvement. Moreover, this feature of SE can help to identify the main aspects, both positive and negative, to understand what is not being achieved and why, and more importantly, to find alternatives for solving the problems (Reezigt & Creemers, 2005; Coe, 2009). For this reason, SE seems to create the basic conditions for action (Reezigt and Creemers, 2005; Plowright, 2007; Sun, Creemers and Hong, 2007; Campbell and Levin, 2009; Coe, 2009; Hofman, Dijkstra and Hofman, 2009). It is precisely at this point that SE and the curricular processes are related. On the one hand, there are demands concerning these processes in how they should be conceived and developed and what should be achieved; on the other hand, ideally school evaluation gathers information that allows to ensure that the demands are being considered and if not, why and how to overcome it.

The curricular processes in the school external evaluation, in Portugal

Throughout the previous section we've argued that school evaluation processes should contemplate the totality of school's reality, including attention paid to curricular practices. Accepting that, and considering that this paper focuses on the case of Portugal, it seems logical to present some details on this matter.

A first aspect to be addressed relates to the main aim of SEE, in Portugal. According to the official information provided in the General Inspectorate of Education and Science website[17], SEE aims at promoting the progress of students' learning and students' results, through the identification of strong features and areas of priority intervention in school's work.

The Portuguese process of schools external evaluation combines a set of different techniques to collect and analyse information. A first step is dedicated to statistical analysis of pupils' academic results. A second step is the analysis of key documents provided by the school clusters, such as the educational project, the statutes, the presentation document, the self-evaluation report, and other relevant documents. The third step is a visit to the school cluster, lasting an average of 3 days, during which the evaluation team gathers information directly with the community and observes the infrastructures. Most of the time of the visit is dedicated to conducting interviews in panels with different school actors, grouped by the role they play in school functioning. The interviews cover a range of aspects outlined in the evaluation framework.

The framework serves as a guide for the process of evaluation, to be followed by the teams. In this document are stated the domains, indicators and items to address and answer to through the SEE. It is the framework that allows the team to develop the evaluation process, focusing on what is considered to be essential in schools' functioning. The framework covers three main aspects: 1) results; 2) provision of the educational service; and 3) leadership and management. This is particularly evident in the domain *Provision of the educational service*, has represented in figure 5.
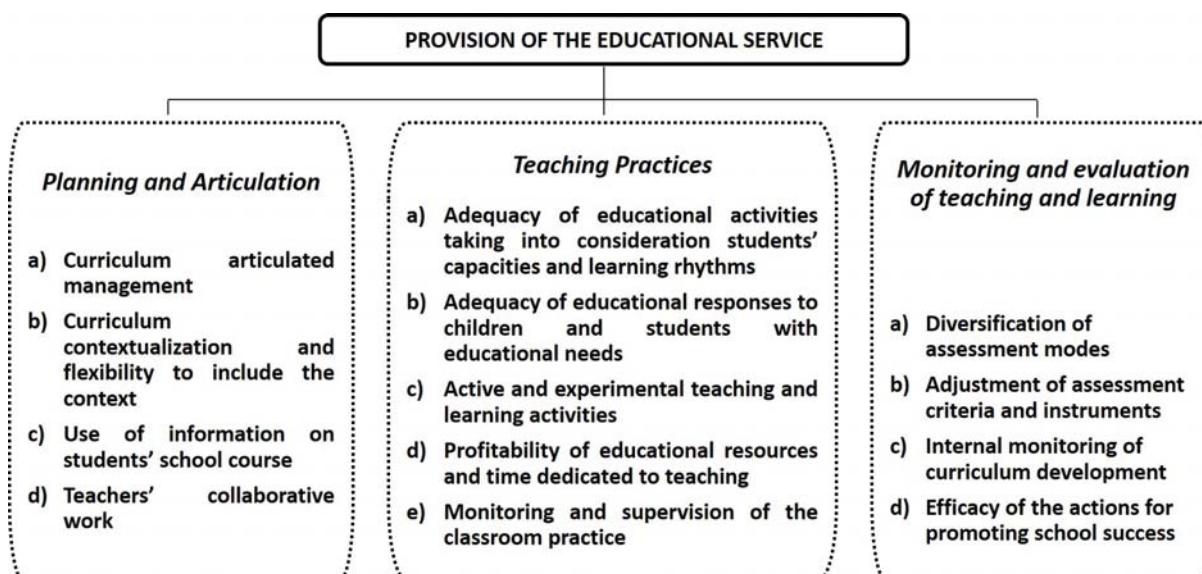
---

[17] http://www.ige.min-edu.pt/

Figure 5

There are other important aspects under attention during the SEE, which are not of curricular nature, but for the purposes of this paper we are only focusing on the ones that relegate to curricular practices.

By the end of the evaluation process, the team produces a report in which are presented the conclusion of the above described activities and a classification is given to each of the three domains. Also, some recommendations are made through the identification of strong features and improvement areas. The final phase is of the responsibility of schools, which have to produce an improvement plan, addressing the problematic areas and planning the actions to solve the problems identified in the SEE.

Based solely on the process and the framework, and bearing in mind the primary goal of SEE in Portugal, it seems possible to assume that the evaluation also aims at promoting the improvement and progress of curricular practices. Nonetheless, this relationship may not be that clear, and impact of SEE in the development of improvement measures seems yet to be fully understood. Here lies the justification for this study, which intends to identify the actual measures taken, if any, in schools as a result of school external evaluation, from the point of view of the educational institutions.

Methodological procedure

The methodological approach followed a qualitative orientation for gathering and analysing the data. The data was collected in 7 school clusters in the Portuguese continental territory, chosen according to pre-established criteria. In these school clusters the data collection had two phases: one of field work, through interviews and *focus groups* with key informants from school clusters selected for this study; one dedicated to documental analysis.

Field work

Selection of school clusters and key informants

Having the main intention of understanding relationship between the SEE processes and the improvements made in curricular processes, a first criterion for schools' selection was that they were target of external evaluation in both SEE cycles. A second one was to identify schools which have improved and schools which have worsened or maintained their classifications, from the first SEE cycle to the second SEE cycle. This criterion could reveal the impact of SEE in the improvements made or, otherwise, not made.

The process of selection started with a search on the General Inspectorate of Education and Science website of all the schools that were evaluated in both SEE cycles. This resulted in the selection of 53 school clusters, 37 which have improved and 16 that either maintained the classifications or had lower classifications from the 1st to the 2nd SEE cycle.

From these 53 school clusters a new search was made focusing on the ones that had the biggest increase in the SEE classifications and the schools that had the biggest decrease in the classifications. This process resulted in the selection of 11 schools, which were invited to be part of this study. From the 11 schools selected, only 7 accepted the invitation, 4 which showed an improvement in the SEE classifications and 3 that lowered the classifications.

Regarding the key informants, and recalling the aim of the study, it seemed that the best option was to hear members of the school staff that had: 1) experienced school external evaluation; 2) a prominent place in school organisation and, therefore, play a part in the definition and implementation of any improvement strategies. It was considered that the school members who better suited these criteria were school Head teachers and school Heads of Department.

Gathering and analysing the data

The data was gathered through semi structured interviews with the Headteachers and through *focus group* interviews with the group of Heads of Department of each of the 7 school clusters.

The interviews, though semi structured, as well as the discussion in the *focus groups*, followed a pre-determined script which covered a range of different aspects related to SEE and its effects in the implementation of improvement measures. In general, the scripts developed around 1) the overall perception on the school evaluation policies and processes; 2) the main effects, positive or negative, that school evaluation brought to schools; 3) the advantages and disadvantages of school evaluation. A note should be made that the scripts, although pre-determined, were not closed to changes. In many occasions the flow of the conversation brought other aspects to the interviews (Bogdan & Biklen, 1994) and *focus groups* (Greenbaum, 1998).

The interviews were conducted in the school clusters' headquarters, place familiar and comfortable for the interviewees, aiming to establish a friendly environment for the conversation to occur. The audio of the interviews was recorded, and later transcribed to text for analysis purposes.

The analysis was made through a process of content analysis Krippendorff (2003), using the software NVivo 10. An analysis framework was developed for this process, accordingly with the interview scripts. Nonetheless, the framework was open to adjustments, which was made to meet the nature of the data and information gathered. In this paper the focus in on the data regarding the changes resulting from SEE at curricular levels.

Documental analysis

The field work was complemented by a process of documental analysis. This process enabled the identification of some specific measures undertaken or to be implemented in the school clusters, as a result of SEE. The documents chosen are the ones which are a direct consequence of SEE processes, namely, the improvement plans. The analysis focused on the strategies related to curricular practices. Also, attention was paid to the SEE reports in order to identify what was recommended in terms of the curricular processes.

The results of this study are presented and discussed in the following section.

Data presentation and discussion

By the end of the analysis it was possible to draw some conclusions on the relation between the school external evaluation processes experienced by the schools in this study and the improvement measures in terms of curricular practices. The data from the different sources are very consistent and in line with each other as the following subsections will demonstrate.

A first aspect to address in this section regards to the recommendation for curricular practices, present in the SEE reports. The reports from the 1st SEE cycle covered, in terms of the curricular practices, areas such as the curricular articulation between disciplines and school levels; the processes of classroom supervision and monitoring; and experimental teaching and learning strategies:

> «The inexistence of an articulated curricular management process between all school levels» (AGE 10_1SEE Report)

> «The diminished articulation between departments and school levels» (AGE 2_1SEE Report)

> «The weak interdepartmental articulation» (AGE 3_1SEE Report)

> «The fragile curricular articulation between the different school levels» (AGE6_1SEE Report)

> «The inexistence of a structured, systematic and intentional process of classroom supervision» (AGE 3_1SEE Report)

> «The inexistence of monitoring for the classroom practices, which does not contribute to knowledge and the development of practices able to help students at risk» (AGE7_1SEE Report)

> «The inexistence of direct supervision and observation of classroom practices» (AGE5_1SEE Report)

> «The lack of classroom supervision and monitoring» (AGE6_1SEE Report)

> «The insufficient experimental teaching in sciences…» (AGE 2_1SEE Report)

Regarding the second cycle of SEE, there is a generalised trend in the reports' recommendations, which is related to the *classroom supervision practices.* All reports from the 7 schools emphasised schools' need to create, implement or, in only two cases, the consolidation of supervision processes.

«The monitoring and classroom supervision as a strategy for teachers' professional development» (AGE4_2SEE Report)

«Monitoring and supervising the classroom practices, hence promoting and improving the professional development [of teachers]» (AGE5_2SEE Report)

«The implementation of generalised classroom supervision mechanisms, able to identify and disseminate good practices and the systematic reflexion about the implemented strategies» (AGE6_2SEE Report)

«The promotion of planned and systematic classroom supervision procedures, as a strategy for professional development, for improving the quality of planning and for dissemination of good practices» (AGE7_2SEE Report)

«The consolidation of classroom supervision dynamics as a means for [teachers'] professional development» (AGE2_2SEE Report)

«The monitoring and classroom supervision practices, as a means of sharing knowledge and experiences, of generalising the best practices and, consequently, contribute to [teachers'] professional development» (AGE3_2SEE Report)

«The generalisation of the observation of teaching and learning activities as a means for improving the educative action and [teachers'] professional development» (AGE10_2SEE Report)

There were no significant differences between school clusters which improved from the 1st to the 2nd cycle of SEE and schools that had lower classifications in the second external evaluation. However, in the first cycle, only four schools were advised to develop such processes. Which led to two questions: 1) is the classroom supervision a generalised flaw in schools functioning?; or 2) is it a somewhat renewed concern to which evaluation agencies and politicians are now paying extra attention and, therefore pressure schools to do it?; and even, 3) and if it was already a problem for some schools in the 1st SEE, why did it remained in the 2nd cycle? Nonetheless, all of the schools in this study seem to have failed or, at least, to not have achieved the desired level, according to the SEE conclusions.

The other recommendations cover different aspects of curricular practices, such as the adoption of experimental practices and project/research based methodologies and the curricular articulation.

«Use, in a more systematic way, active and experimental teaching and learning methodologies, aiming to create more stimulation and meaningful learning opportunities» (AGE 4_2SEE Report)

«The adoption and generalisation of active methodologies and project methodology as a means to value the teaching and learning processes» (AGE5_2SEE Report)

«To consolidate and reinforce the curriculum articulation practices… in order to support learning and improve results» (AGE10_2SEE Report)

Looking at the information on SEE reports, it is interesting to notice that few, if not none, recommendations are made towards the actual teaching and learning practices inside classrooms. The only evident concern regards to experimental approaches. So a question arises on how deep is the evaluation in terms of classroom practices? And, consequently, how can it help to improve them?

The relationship according to the documents

It was previously mentioned that schools are obliged to produce an improvement plan as a consequence of the SEE and to respond to the school external evaluation report. It was, therefore, expectable to find explicit links between what is stated in these documents and the SEE reports. A note should be made here that, since the improvements plans are an obligation only in the 2nd SEE cycle, it was not expected to find references to aspects from the 1st SEE report.

For the 7 schools in this study, improvement plans revealed two main aspects to be improved, regarding mostly the organisation of teachers' work. These aspects are related to improving the articulation between school years, departments and disciplines, and with the processes of classroom supervision. There are also some actions planned regarding classroom activities which are mostly dedicated to increase the experimental classroom practices.

There were two actions regarding the experimental activities and project based methodologies from two school clusters:

«Action 2 active and experimental teaching and learning processes» (AGE4)

«Priority 2 to expand the use of experimental and active teaching and learning practices and project driven activities» (AGE5)

Two schools included actions towards curricular articulation:

«Action 3 the integrated [articulated] development of the teaching and learning process and systematisation of class workplans» (AGE6)

«Priority 2 to improve the vertical articulation between the different learning cycles, mostly regarding the disciplines of Portuguese and Mathematics» (AGE7)

The supervision of classroom practices is the most common theme in the improvement plans:

«Priority 3 to promote practices of classroom supervision in students' assessment» (AGE5)

«Action 3 classroom supervision practices» (AGE4)

«Action 4 teaching and learning supervision» (AGE3)

«Action 4 to implement measures for supervising teaching and learning in classroom» (AGE6)

«Priority 4 classroom supervision – to improve pedagogical practices» (AGE7)

However, it is interesting to notice that, despite the fact that classroom supervision was identified as a problem in all schools, only 5 schools included actions addressing this matter, in their improvement plans. A question arises from this on the whether schools are resisting supervision, and why is that.

What the data shows, regarding the documents, is that there is a strong relationship between what is expressed in school external evaluation reports and what is included in the improvement plans. Nevertheless, these plans also reveal some kind of restraint, from schools, to address a pressing matter, the one of classroom supervision.

The relationship according to the Headmasters

When asked to identify some changes and improvements made in the curricular processes, as a result of SEE, the Headmasters discourse is in line with one from the documents. Headmasters identify as main improvements matter of classroom supervision practices, which started to be implemented or are planned to be started in a near future, very much like the recommendations in the SEE reports.

> «… regarding classroom supervision we are trying. Almost all our classes have two teachers…» (H_AGE4)

> «There is a weakness, nationally, regarding classroom supervision. And we are trying to do something about it in our improvement plan…» (H_AGE7)

> «The main weakness is classroom supervision. We have not done much about this yet… but next year I'll be starting the process again» (H_AGE6)

However, all of these schools – AGE 4, AGE 6 and AGE 7 – are still trying and experimenting classroom supervision. This, again, reinforces the question of why supervision is such a delicate matter and why are schools resisting or delaying it.

Headteachers also referred some changes in teaching practices and classroom approaches *per se*, but these seem to be much less deep and less emphasised.

> «… the articulation between departments and cycles… teachers collaboration practices it all resulted from the SEE…» (H_AGE3)

> «There are four actions… what we are working is, mainly, active teaching and learning methodologies…» (H_AGE5)

> «We had our curriculum, our curricular adaptations, however there was no official document framing our curriculum. Now we do have it» (H_AGE6).

A look upon the Headteachers discourse led to conclude that the main improvements made are in terms of the organisation of teachers work, in more of a formalisation of the practices. This raises the question of whether the SEE is, in fact, helping to improvement teaching and learning processes and, consequently, curricular processes. It also raises if the impact of SEE is merely at a formal level.

The relationship according to the Heads of Department

Before the same question, the Heads of Department emphasised the same aspects already referred by Headmasters and present in the documents. Mostly, they identify the improvement in articulation processes and classroom supervision practices. In addition, they also identify the improvement in the collaborative work between teachers, the sharing of experiences, materials, etc..

> «The articulation between cycles is also better» (HeadDep2_AGE7)

> «The work in terms of the articulation between cycles increased, meaning that there is a better communication network than before» (HeadDep3_AGE2)

> «the articulation between cycles started to be more systematic and more formal» (HeadDep2_AGE4).

> «… [according to the SEE] we should go and supervise lessons which gave place to a project…» (HeadDep3_AGE5)

> «… another indicator was the issue of classroom supervision … We tried to establish this process in a very informal way…» (HeadDep5_AGE10).

> «… [teachers] share more than before, because we did not used to do it… there is a better connection between everyone. Collaborative work increased» (HeadDep3_AGE6)

> «The school is making efforts to increase collaborative work practices…» (HeadDep3_AGE3)

It is interesting to notice that the Heads of Department give more emphasis to the articulation between cycles, disciplines and departments than to the supervision, when identifying what has changed as a result of SEE. Again, supervision seems not to be a major change in schools' dynamics, despite its centrality in SEE reports. And, again, regarding the classroom activities, the discourse reveals somewhat superficial changes made:

> «…one weakness was the lack of experimental activities and this gave place to projects (HeadDep1_AGE2)

> «The creation of study groups which was great for students» (HeadDep2_AGE4).

This data reinforces the doubt concerning the actual contribute of SEE to improve teaching and learning within classrooms.

Final remarks

The data revealed 5 main aspects which improved as a result of school external evaluation and the information provided.

The main improvement happened in the processes of curriculum articulation. Each school revealed that efforts were made in developing more articulated curricular processes, both within the different levels of school education as well as within different disciplines. These are particularly emphasised by the Heads of Department. Another aspect identified by them was the collaborative work between teachers, sharing experiences, materials and working together as a team.

The classroom supervision processes are a major aspect contemplated in SEE reports and improvement plans, but not so much in the discourse of Headteachers and Heads of Department. According to the interviewees this is an aspect that is currently changing and seems to be the one schools delayed the most but were, in the end, forced to address. Nonetheless, it is a recurring issue schools seem to be failing at, which in turn raises questions such as: why? Are schools resisting it? Are schools struggling to overcome it? If so, isn't SEE supposed to be supporting the change?

And finally, there is the matter of the actual pedagogical practices and initiatives such as the development of projects and other classroom actions. These seem to be almost absent of the discourses, of both documents and interviewees, which is a concern given the SEE intention of promoting the quality of education, which entails deeply and greatly the curricular practices.

It is also interesting to notice that there was no significant differences in the discourse of the schools which are evolved from the 1st to the 2nd SEE cycle. All schools seem to have experienced the same changes and seem to be facing similar problems. What does this mean, then? Are all schools at the same level in terms of the curricular practices?

Other questions seem to arise from this study and need to be further addressed: 1) Is it possible for SEE to improve actual curricular practices in classroom environment?; 2) Are the actions within the improvement plans being effectively implemented?

References

Biesta, Gert. Priestley, Mark & Robinson, Sarah (2015). The Role of Beliefs in Teacher Agency. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, *21*(6), 624–640. Retrieved from http://hdl.handle.net/1893/21169

Bogdan, Robert & Biklen, Sari (1994). *Investigação qualitativa em educação: uma introdução à teoria e aos métodos*. Porto: Porto Editora

Campbell, Carol and Levin, Ben (2009). Using data to support educational improvement. *Educational Assessment Evaluation and Accountability*, *21*(1), 47-65. doi: 10.1007/s11092-008-9063-x

Coe, Robert (2009). School Improvement: Reality And Illusion. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, *57*(4), 363-379. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-8527.2009.00444.x

Commission of the European Communities (2001) The Concrete Future Objectives of Education Systems – Report from the Commission, http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2001:0059:FIN:EN:PDF

Commission of the European Communities (2007). Schools for the 21st Century – Commission Staff Working Paper

Devos, Geert & Verhoeven, Jef (2003). School Self-Evaluation-Conditions and Caveats: The Case of Secondary Schools. *Educational, Management, Administration & Leadership, 31*(4), 403-420. doi: 10.1177/0263211X030314005

Doyle, Walter (1992) Curriculum and pedagogy. In: Jackson, P. (ed.) *Handbook of research on curriculum: a project of the American Educational Research* (pp. 486-516). New York: Macmillan.

European Commission (2012) Rethinking Education: Investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes – Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions,
http://ec.europa.eu/education/news/rethinking/com669_en.pdf

European Commission (2012b). Annual Growth Survey 2013. Retrieved from:
http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/ags2013_en.pdf

European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice (2012). Developing Key Competences at School in Europe: Challenges and Opportunities for Policy. Eurydice Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice (2015). Assuring Quality in Education: Policies and Approaches to School Evaluation in Europe. Eurydice Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

European Council (2013). Council Conclusions on investing in education and training: A response to 'Rethinking Education: Investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes' and the '2013 Annual Growth Survey'. Retrieved from http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/135467.pdf

European Parliament and Council (2001). Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 February 2001 on European cooperation in quality evaluation in school education, Official Journal of the European Communities L60. Retrieved from:
http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2001:060:0051:0053:EN:PDF

European Parliament and Council (2006). Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning, Official Journal of the European Communities L394. Retrieved from:
http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2006:394:0010:0018:en:PDF

European Union Council (2009). Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ('ET 2020')

European Union Council (2011). Council conclusions on the role of education and training in the implementation of the 'Europe 2020' strategy, pp. 1-3

European Union Council (2013). Council Conclusions on investing in education and training — a response to 'Rethinking Education: Investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes' and the '2013 Annual Growth Survey', http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/135467.pdf

Faubert, Violaine (2009). School Evaluation: Current Practices in OECD Countries and a Literature Review, OECD Education Working Papers, 42, OECD Publishing. Retrieved from: http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/218816547156

Fernandes, Preciosa *et al* (2013). Curricular contextualization: tracking the meanings of a concept. *The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher*; *22*(4), 417-425. doi: 10.1007/s40299-012-0041-1

Fernandes, Preciosa (2011). *O currículo do ensino básico em Portugal: políticas, perspectivas e desafios*. Porto: Porto Editora

Greenbaum, Thomas (1998). *The handbook for focus group research.* Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications

Hofman, Roeland. Dijkstra, Nynke & Hofman, Aadriaan (2009). School self-evaluation and student achievement. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement, 20*(1), 47–68. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09243450802664115

Krippendorff, Klaus (2003). *Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology.* Beverly Hills: Sage

Kärkkäinen, Kiira (2012). Bringing About Curriculum Innovations: Implicit Approaches in the OECD Area, OECD Education Working Papers; 82, OECD Publishing. Retrieved from: http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/5k95qw8xzl8s-en

Leite, Carlinda (2002). *O currículo e o Multiculturalismo no Sistema Educativo Português.* Lisbon: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian

Miller, John P & Seller, Wayne (1985). *Curriculum: perspectives and practices.* Michigan: Addison-Wesley Longman Limited

OECD (2010) Ministerial report on the OECD Innovation Strategy Innovation to strengthen growth and address global and social challenges – Key Findings, http://www.oecd.org/sti/45326349.pdf (6/11/2013)

OECD (2012) Key Data on Education in Europe 2012. Brussels

OECD (2013). Synergies for Better Learning: an international perspective on evaluation and assessment. Brussels

Pacheco, José Augusto (1996). *Currículo: teoria e praxis.* Porto: Porto Editora

Plowright, David (2007). Self-evaluation and Ofsted Inspection: Developing an Integrative Model of School Improvement. *Educational, Management. Administration and Leadership, 35*(3), 373-393. doi: 10.1177/1741143207078180

Reezigt, Gerry and Creemers, Bert (2005). A comprehensive framework for effective school improvement. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*; *16*(4), 407-424. doi: 10.1080/09243450500235200

Schildkamp, Kim *et al* (2012). The use of school self-evaluation results in the Netherlands and Flanders. *British Educational Research Journal, 38*(1), 125-152. doi: 10.1080/01411926.2010.528556

Sun, Hechuan, Creemers, Bert and Jong, Rob (2007). Contextual factors and effective school improvement. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*; *18*(1), 93-122. doi: 10.1080/09243450601058287

The Economic and Social Committee (2000). Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on the 'Proposal for a Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on European cooperation in quality evaluation in school education'. Official Journal of the European Communities C 168/30.

Toner, P. (2011). Workforce Skills and Innovation: An Overview of Major Themes in the Literature, OECD Education Working Papers; 55, OECD Publishing. Retrieved from: http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/5kgk6hpnhxzq-en