

# **Education and Intercultural development**

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## **School disengagement and intercultural educational challenges to municipalities**

Helena C. Araújo, Laura Fonseca; Sofia Marques da Silva; Eunice Macedo; Alexandra Alves de Oliveira; Marisa Silva (CIIE/FPCEUP)

Schooling for all means that pupils with diverse social and cultural origins will be attending schools. In that way schools and other institutions connected with them experience numerous challenges, which include the search for strategies to promote school achievement in children who appear to reveal more distance from school culture, especially when it is substantially different from the pupils' backgrounds (Bourdieu 1993). Related to citizenship, social rights and intercultural inclusion (Bernstein 1996), school dropout and underachievement, affecting specific social groups, need to be confronted, namely in educational policies and practices. In Portugal, in the context of the transfer of competencies from the central government to municipalities, and considering the socio-cultural diversity of pupils who attend school, it becomes relevant to debate the challenges posed to municipalities concerning education and interculturality (Bourdieu 1993; Touraine 1997; Stoer & Cortesão, 2000, 2001a, 2001b) to contribute to the larger forms of inclusion and democracy (Clavel 2004; Young 2000). Hence, the paper aims to focus the discourses of political actors and educational technical staff in municipalities and their work on school achievement and disengagement, concerning their awareness on the intercultural role they can play on their action with the work of schools.

This study fits into the project «Building Local Networking in Education? Decision-makers' discourses and strategies in school achievement and dropout», funded by FCT. It is structured in three main stages. The stage more relevant here is the second in the study of the municipalities to analyse the ways in which they confront dropout and promote school achievement.

Interviews were conducted with local educational politicians and technical staff. The project involved 3 research sub-teams that inquired a total of 25 municipalities, in 13 Portuguese districts. This paper focuses on the interviews led by the research sub-team from CIIE-FPCEUP, which include 10 municipalities of 5 districts in the North and Centre of the country. Data collected was processed through content analysis of 20 interviews, using the software NVivo. It is this analysis, focusing on their perspectives that more directly are connected with interculturality that will be presented in this paper.

Interviewees stress the inexistence of dropout in almost all counties studied. When it exists they stress that it is related to minority groups like Roma or migrant descendants. Concerning underachievement, other processes are stressed. School and community cultures are different and sometimes appear as irreconcilable. It is underlined that families with low educational credentials have difficulty in supporting their children in school matters. Sometimes it links to low expectations about the school's promotion of better jobs or a better life. Low socioeconomic conditions of some communities are mentioned. The action on these problems is a task that the interviewees assign as responsible for the educational department of municipalities. They mention transportation, school social action (meals, books), and activities directed at families, as means to promote school achievement, according to their competences on education. Proximity to the communities is considered as a key factor for the success of the educational communication and action with these institutions. Nevertheless, it appears that there is no questioning of the school dominant culture and its effects on pupils' educational pathways. A main question remains: how far would a reflection on intercultural issues contribute to better develop a more inclusive education through the contribution of local authorities?