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Portuguese elementary teachers' perceptions of Portugueseness, Europeaness and the role of Social Studies

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Introduction

Concepts of national and European identities are a matter of wide discussion, and educational institutions from kindergarten to universities have a role in this discussion. The role of elementary schools has, perhaps, a special relevance in identity formation.

This paper reports a study on elementary teachers' perceptions of Portuguese-ness and Europeaness. It also tries to reach an understanding of how elementary teachers look at and use social studies, and especially history, in their classrooms as a source of activities to foster national and European identities and concrete understanding of cultural differences. The study participants were 12 elementary teachers who teach in the region of Braga. Six of them attended a post-graduate course 'Elementary Education: Social Studies and Natural Sciences' from 1999-2001 and the other six began the same course in November 2001.

The research questions were:

1. what does it mean to be a Portuguese / a European citizen?
2. could Social Studies contribute to promote 'good' Portuguese and 'good' European citizens?
3. how do the teachers interviewed use Social Studies in general (and History in particular) to help their students to be 'good' Portuguese and European citizens?

The research methodology was qualitative. The data was collected through semi-structured interviews conducted with pairs: three pairs of the teachers who have completed the post-graduation course, and three pairs who have just started the course. Data was organised in several levels, beginning with broad categories associated with the research questions, and also including categories that arose from the set of answers connected with the literature related with this subject. This is briefly presented below and forms the basis for our analyses.

Theoretical Framework

Mattoso (1998) stresses that the Portuguese national identity has its foundations in geographical, political, sociological and behavioural elements. The perception of national identity is a phenomenon of collective consciousness "based on one hand in a perception of common differences verified in relation to the other countries inhabitants at a level of social structures, the cultural expressions (namely language, habits, and values) and, on the other hand, in a perception of a common past" (p. 102).

"Historical territory, legal-political community, legal-political equity of members, and ideology and civic culture commune: these are the components of standard, Western model of nation" (Smith, 1991, p. 11). Alternatively, the non-Western model, an 'ethnic' conception, stresses birth and native culture. In this context Smith defines a nation as "a named human population sharing an historic territory, common myths and historical

memories, a mass public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members." (1991, p. 14).

The concept of European identity is difficult to define. We considered the definition of European citizenship included in the Amsterdam Treaty, according to which citizenship of the Union is dependent on holding the nationality of one of the member states. In addition to the rights and duties laid down in the Treaty establishing the European Community, Union citizenship confers four special rights. The introduction of the notion of Union citizenship does not, of course, replace national citizenship: it is additional. This is intended to give the ordinary citizen a deeper and more tangible sense of belonging to the Union.

However, Ross (2000) considers that the conception of European citizenship that enthuses many contemporary educators is

perhaps a rather different conception from those outlined by the various Councils of Ministers and treaties. Any notion of citizenship or identity based on the new Europe must be distinct from the old citizenship of the nation states: less ethnocentric, more diverse, more inclusive, less wedded to nationalistic conceptions (p. 184).

Ross also points out another significant issue: it is considered axiomatic that citizenship education is education for democracy. The issue is about the kind of democracy and the role politicians want educators to play in developing "good citizens", meaning "to participate in political processes, to understand the need for compromise, to accept the decision-making process" (p. 186). The role of educators is also stressed as "a key factor in the development of a European 'identity' and as an essential way to mobilise legitimacy for the Union" (p. 186). Ultimately, the good citizen will legitimate the existing democracy, the existing way of governance. But another kind of democracy is also growing up, a kind of democracy more concerned with issues than with political structures.

We agree with Ross's ideas but we should stress the difference between a country that is an established and stable democracy, such as the United Kingdom, and a country such as Portugal, which in Moreira's (1998) view had critical support from the European Union as a young democracy. The diversity within the European Union is evident in many aspects. Stoer and Cortesão (1999) advocate that education for Europeaness should be developed through the multi/intercultural education if it is to "put together the integration dimension, to recognize the power of the structure, and to stress explicitly the interaction" (p. 116).

Teachers have a crucial role, and the way issues and themes are approached makes a difference, as their own conceptions extend beyond their teaching. Davies, Gregory and Riley (1999, pp. 48-57) describe a project on teachers' perceptions of good citizenship and educational provision: from their analysis of questionnaires and interviews they formulated three broad categories, each of which including subcategories:

- 1) Social Concern Characteristics;
- 2) Conservative Characteristics;
- 3) Knowledge Characteristics.

According to this study, teachers believe that schools should implement projects that encourage involvement in the local community. Our own research results support this finding.

We were also interested in the role of social studies, especially history. Rowland (1987) in the essay 'Antropologia, História e Diferença' associates three concepts, which we think would truly contribute to multicultural education. He emphasises that we must not consider what is simply different as inferior. Children like to analyse differences in past times, and to compare them to the present: they do not see these differences as something inferior but only as different (Gomes, 2001). Making such comparisons is, according to Arthur, Davies, Wrenn, Haydn and Kerr (2001), one of the key principles and procedures to approaching questions of diversity through the study of history. They also point out the need for children to learn to handle information intelligently, make connections, and not to have too much stress placed on the national past. They conclude that there "is a danger that approaches to citizenship and diversity are not thoughtful, materials may be simplistic, 'politically correct' and stultifying" (p. 110). They also stress the importance of studying history to develop skills of inquiry and communication as well as participation and responsible action. Participation is connected to communitarianism, another issue related to citizenship and multiculturalism. Nonetheless, the idea of multiple communities, in which identities would be grounded, should not end up "with a 'dominant memory', which is open to exploration by national governments as a focus for encouraging a mechanistic loyalty and patriotism from the next generation" (p. 59). The study of local history and the local social environment contributes to develop a sense of local, national and European identities.

Portugueseness

Our sample of elementary teachers showed strong feelings about being Portuguese, with one single exception, Judith, who was born in Mozambique. She stated that although she has Portuguese nationality, she does not truly have a Portuguese identity. This is in accordance to the view - expressed by several of the teachers - that the main feature of being Portuguese is to be born in Portugal. Claudine said that "the first thing that contributes to being Portuguese is to be born in Portugal, a lovely country ... naturalised Portuguese will never have the Portuguese identity". Most of the teachers referred also to territory: it sometimes seemed that they had a deterministic view of territory versus identity. Renate expressed this view - "our identity is what is distinctive about our country, what is characteristic of our people, the people who live in that physical space, who have characteristics than other people who live in other geographical spaces do not have." Claudine also pointed out that if "someone comes to Portugal, they will probably have the same duties we have; if they come to Portugal they will be a member of our Portugal, but for me, I might be wrong, but the true Portuguese is a Portuguese". The other teacher in this pair, Claire, seemed to feel that Claudine was being radical and defended an alternative view, "if someone is an active member of our society, they are a full member of our society, they have the same rights". It is interesting that Claudine mentioned duties, while Claire referred to rights. Only one other teacher referred to rights, but those rights were not in relation to the state but to society.

Territory was not the feature of Portuguese-ness cited most often - the most common feature was the common past (traditions, values, and language) and the historical

memories. Some teachers expressed ideas and traditional constructs similar to those of which Sara spoke:

For me to be Portuguese is to have a deep identity, to feel proud of and joyful about being Portuguese - how can I explain - because it was born in me, or at least it was transmitted to me when I was a young child. It inspired in me a very strong love for our country, for being very small, for being near the sea and with many, many stories related to it that my father told me. Our achievements, the way we relate to people, the way the past was presented to me, stimulated in me the pleasure and joy of being Portuguese, and when I visit foreign countries I feel that.

However Renate, reflecting on the changes in Portuguese behaviour and development, mentioned that once, having travelled through France and Spain, she did not feel happy to be Portuguese on her return because even the landscape seemed to her in some ways an unorganised mess, the streets were not clean and the buildings were small compared to those she had seen in the other countries. A few teachers referred to the development of the last years, and thought of Portugal as in ways similar to Third World countries, as is the behaviour of the Portuguese, who are becoming more open to other cultures, have more information, travel more, and no longer aspire only to save money. The youngest teacher interviewed was the only one who mentioned stereotypical Portuguese characteristics such as a liking for port wine, sardines and *fado*. Several of the teachers defined Portuguese-ness through 'typical' Portuguese behaviour. Olive quoted positive traits such as sincerity and warmth, but also negative ones like impulsiveness, impoliteness, and over-valuing material things.

Europeaness

All twelve teachers felt European, but at different levels. Catherine said that for her European citizenship "as an internal feeling does not exist, but politically, socially it has a meaning, now I am more receptive; nevertheless, abroad I feel like a foreigner". Claudine thought territory was the defining feature - "it is a matter of location in the European Continent". She was one of the two teachers who began by saying that they did not feel more European after Portugal joined the EU. The other, Elaine, justified her position because she had previously had relationships with other European countries through travelling and business. It is also possible that this was because she was born in Africa: Judith, also born in Africa, also did not feel a Portuguese identity, but both felt they were truly European.

Laura said "to be European means to be integrated in a community which has cultural and economic aims, we are integrated in a broader culture and a larger space".

Neither the teachers' ideas of Europeaness or of Portuguese-ness relied on political-legal dimensions, although those dimensions were implicit when they expressed their concerns about domineering countries. Nor did they consider that their country's membership of the EU was necessary to make them European citizens. Iris showed an interesting approach from a Portuguese point of view, defining the European Union as a democratic community and concluding that this would be reflected in our schools.

Only part of one of the four special rights stated in the Amsterdam Treaty was referred to - the freedom to move anywhere in the Union. The concept defended by Ross (2000)

about European citizenship seems to be the one which appealed most to these teachers; it was many times related to a respect for differences and multicultural education. For example, Olive pointed out that to be European means “to open horizons, look at things from others’ perspectives, go away from this ‘little corner’, and go further, start to see that what we have would be enriched with other ideas, other contributions” and Elaine said “and we should not forget the diversity of cultures, languages”.

In fact the twelve felt European and are proud to be European, but they emphasised a common belief that Portuguese identity should be maintained.

How should schools and teachers educate 'good' Portuguese and European Citizens?

A common idea, stressed by most teachers, is that educating a 'good' Portuguese citizen is no different from educating a 'good' European citizen. As Amanda reflected: “If we educate our children to respect colleagues in our classes, we are educating them to respect others elsewhere ... if we prepare good Portuguese citizens we prepare good European citizens”. The idea of overlapping 'good' citizenships is present, starting from local citizenship, and even family citizenship, through Portuguese and European citizenship to global citizenship. The teachers referred to the development of traditional characteristics of good Portuguese and European citizens similar to those found in Davies, Gregory and Riley (1999) - following rules; having responsibilities, rights and obligations; and patriotism were stressed as components of national identity. However, in relationship to citizenship the teachers rated as most important the development of social concern and active participation. Laura considered it crucial “we develop those capacities of our students; critical thinking, the ability to actively participate, then they will know how to act in each context ... if our students acquire a maximum of competencies we are preparing them to be good European citizens”. Such competencies were mentioned by several teachers: the capacity to investigate independently, and the capacity to use the new information technologies. Other forms of knowledge were also considered important, in particular those related to Portuguese history and general knowledge about EU countries. This is understandable, because most elementary schools developed projects to introduce the Euro and also approached some aspects of the other European countries. However, as researchers, we have some concerns about the materials used because we think they may stress stereotypes.

The use of Social Studies and History

Several teachers mentioned the importance of Social Studies, and especially of History, in developing citizenship. Most mentioned several methodologies: inquiry, careful exploration of visual documents, visits, museums, the study of the community and local heritage, and also some current institutions and the way they work to develop solidarity. The study of history, mainly using active methodologies, is considered a powerful way to foster citizenship in general and specifically an awareness and respect for several kinds of difference, mainly cultural difference. Sara spoke very enthusiastically about a project she had developed and pointed out that very young children “discovered in the pictures from old times much more differences than I would suppose. They compare the differences in clothing, food and transportation in past time and related them to other kind of differences including behavioural differences”.

Completing the history courses seemed to have contributed significantly to opening the teachers' minds to new ways of approaching history. Nevertheless, some of them continue to use Portuguese history mainly to develop nationalism, or at least national identity.

Conclusion

1. The idea of national identity of these teachers seems to fit Smith's (1991) 'ethnic model' better than the Western-model of national identity - they emphasise the importance of place of birth and sharing a common past. Considering the elements stressed by Mattoso (1998) the political elements are almost absent.
2. The idea of Europeaness for most teachers developed after the Portugal joined the EU, and mainly most recently as changing the national currency gave us a special European role. Teachers seem to have a closer understanding of Europeaness as described by Ross (2000) than to what is stated in the EU Treaties.
3. They were comfortable with the development of overlapping citizenships which would be reached mainly through the development of competencies.
4. Social Studies/History offered good opportunities to foster respect for differences, but teachers need to be trained to do this.
5. This exploratory study showed that Portuguese teachers are no different in their perspectives to teachers referred to in other studies.

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