Challenging the Medium of Learning: the price of being Non-Luso*

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RESUMO

Portugal continua ser um país mais de emigrantes do que de imigrantes. Mas, todos os anos, mais de 2 000 imigrantes legais fixam a sua residência principalmente na zona da Grande Lisboa. As estatísticas mostram que as crianças originárias destas famílias têm menor probabilidade de acabar o ensino básico, o que também significa que a sua aprendizagem de uma língua estrangeira é deficiente. Este artigo tem por objectivo examinar o tipo de educação recebida por uma criança *não-Lusa* com a finalidade de descobrir quais os factores responsáveis pela sua falta de aproveitamento escolar. Se a população imigrante representa 2% da população total, porque não se reflectem esses números no ensino secundário e superior? Para responder a esta pergunta, é necessário conhecer quais os países de origem e qual a língua mãe dos filhos de imigrantes. É também necessário analisar o ambiente educativo e os estereótipos que sobre eles forma a sociedade em geral, não excluindo os professores, bem como as medidas mais eficazes de estimular um melhor aproveitamento num meio escolar baseado noutra língua. Finalmente, o artigo aborda o *Programa Entreculturas,* lançado pelo Ministério da Educação, e constata a sua relativa eficácia em várias escolas-piloto do ensino básico.

According to statistics recently published by the Portuguese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and contrary to other EU member countries, with perhaps the exception of Greece, Portugal continues to be a country of emigration rather than immigration.[1] More than two and a half million Portuguese citizens live abroad and the recent wave of emigration, resembling that of the 1960s and early 70s is once again to France, Germany, Switzerland and now, Spain. In 1997 – the most recent statistics to be had, 175,282 legal immigrants in a total population of 9.8 million people were registered in Portugal; it is not known how many illegal residents there are.[2] Despite the Schengen Agreement, the present trend whereby more than 2000 legal immigrants find their way into this country every year will not drop, particularly as the North-South divide is a reality and workers from less developed nations will continue to try and find a better living elsewhere.

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* The term *Non-Luso* is used in Ministry of Education publications.

But what has this got to do with «Form and Variation in Language», the theme of this edition of the magazine? It has a lot to do with it because statistics have shown that children from immigrant families have less chance of finishing their compulsory schooling successfully whether it means Portuguese children living abroad in counties speaking a different language from their own at school, or children from other countries, cultures and language groups living in Portugal and learning in the official Portuguese medium no matter what their ability is to handle this second or even third language.

This paper attempts to discuss a number of points about the way immigrant children receive their education in Portugal in order to find out who or what is to blame for higher than average failure rates among immigrant school students. It asks why, if the immigrant population is 2% of the total population, do we not have a corresponding number of students in higher education? In order to answer such questions, we need to know who the children of immigrants are and what their first languages (L1) are. We also need to look at the environment surrounding *non-Luso* education and the stereotypes formed by mainstream society including teachers. Moreover, we need to suggest possible ways of helping such children to cope better at school. Finally, we need to look at the EU *Programa Entreculturas* launched by the Ministry of Education and assess its efficiency by examining some case studies.

For the sake of making its statistics more accessible, the Ministry of Education has broken down its classification of *non-Luso* children into three main groups[3] : (1) children born in or outside Portugal of parents from the former Portuguese African colonies (the Cape Verde Islands, Angola, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique and the São Tomé & Principe Islands); (2) from Asian extraction (originally from India, Pakistan, Macau and East Timor); (3) Brazilians and Europeans (largely from countries in the European Community but also from other Continents, ex-emigrants returning to Portugal, and also gypsies). While Portuguese or variants of Portuguese would be the mother tongue of Brazilians, gypsies and some ex-immigrants, it would only be the second (L2), or occasionally, even the third language (L3) of all the other groups and sub-groups. Africans speak Creole and their own African languages, Asians speak Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, Chinese, Tetum, etc.; Ex-immigrants may speak French, German, Spanish and English although they have contacts with the Portuguese language. The official school language in which the child is supposed to do all his/her academic learning, therefore, has to be learned first, whether at kindergarten or as from the first day of primary school.

The location in Portugal of *non-Luso* children is also important if we are to understand the statistics and the dynamic behind school drop-outs and stories of success or failure. While the more affluent Europeans and Brazilians are evenly spread throughout the country, although more around the large cities than in small towns, Portuguese ex-emigrants tend to live in the North of Portugal while over two thirds of the African and Asian communities live either in Greater Lisbon or around the Setúbal area. Appreciable numbers of the 50,000-strong gypsy community are found in the North or in the Alentejo.[4] Statistics show that there are only 4 or 5 cities holding good-sized communities of some or all *non-Luso* children: Lisbon, the capital city of Portugal which boasts of all ethnic groups but mostly African; Oporto (northern capital) and Braga, an industrial city in the north which have mostly European immigrants; Aveiro, a central coastline city-port, having mostly European immigrants and Faro, a southern coastal tourist city in the Algarve, with mostly European and African immigrants. Such well-defined pockets of immigrants are liable to affect overall and partial statistics quite drastically in many aspects and, as a result, numerical data have to be treated with a certain amount of care.

The next relevant question is where is the immigrant school-going population to be found in Portugal? A remarkable growth in the attendance of night-school has been noted in recent years. Young adult learners who have dropped out of school years before and have gone to work, and adolescents who have reached the age of 16 after repeatedly failing to attain their school-leaving certificate, go back to school in the evenings. This involves some 15% of all school-goers in the larger centres where there is a higher density of ethic groups.

While immigrants make up almost 2% of the total population, 8% of all primary school children are *non-Luso,* and 80% of the African and Asian children in this number attend primary schools in the Lisbon-Setúbal area. Estimates for 1996 show that in the 1st cycle (primary school),[5] the overall pass-rate was 88%, while the overall average ethnic pass-rate was 83% for all ethnic groups. The overall African (in this case, Cape Verdian) pass rate was 80% while the gypsy was 56%. In the big cities where there are higher concentrations of ethnic groups (e.g. Lisbon), the fail and drop-out rate reached up to 30% and occasionally 60% and 75% according to the locality of outlying city suburbs. This trend has not changed dramatically in the last 3 years, although it has improved slightly. The most successful primary school learners were and are still the Brazilians and the Chinese(Macaenses); the most serious cases of drop-outs and failures at primary school are among the gypsies; after come the Africans – particularly the Cape Verdian children; the Asians and the EU Europeans are classified in Ministry of Education terms, as «worrying» cases because their success rate is lower than the national average.

The 2nd Cycle which comprises the lower school (5th and 6th grades), the cases of failure and drop-outs among the ethnic groups increases. Again referring to 1996 numbers, although the pattern persists today, an overall 15% of *non-Lusos* dropped out of school. The least successful students continue to be the Gypsies (58% passes) and the Africans (especially from Cape Verde – 76% passes). The most successful students here are the Brazilians, and once they have adjusted to Portuguese system, the EU and Asians students. The ex-emigrants have now become the cause for concern in their failure and drop-out rate. Similar to the data on primary schools, the large urban centres (e.g. Greater Lisbon with larger numbers of ethnic minorities) have the most serious fail/drop-out rates: over 30% more than the *Luso* students.

With regard to the 3rd cycle, the middle school (7th to 9th grades) up to the end of compulsory schooling, despite government measures to ensure full-school-leaving certificates for 16 year-olds, the overall the fail/drop-out rate rose quite sharply (5%)for all students in 1996, whether *Luso* or *non-Luso*. But it ranged between 0% and 35% for the different ethnic groups. For example, Asian students at this level tried hard not to give up or fail school and their progress was – and still is - generally good. However, some African groups attained a 14% drop-out rate, and both Guinenses and Brazilians reach a staggering nation-wide 35%, although in the big cities (e.g. some areas in Greater Lisbon and Setúbal), it reached as much as 80%. The trend among the most serious cases continues to involve African students. There are hardly any gypsies at school at this level which says enough in itself.

The number of African students reaching Upper school or secondary level (10th to 12th grades) is fairly low. For example, only one seventh of the Cape Verdians enrolled in primary school make it to the secondary level although over half of the Angolans and two thirds of the Mozambicans carry on and enroll in the 10th grade. However, fewer than 70% of all the African groups in the upper school managed to finish 12th grade. The fail rate among ex-emigrants, Asians and Chinese (Macau) (in this order) was also higher at this level than in compulsory education. Despite higher numbers of drop-outs in the 3rd cycle for Brazilians, both these students and the ones from the EU were the only two groups to continue their education consistently from primary to secondary level (over 85%). In keeping with national *Luso* trends, however, their rate of success dropped to around 75%. In 1996, ethnic students formed only 6% of the school population, of which 1/3 were Africans and 2/3 were of European origin. The statistics were not able to reveal any cohesive behaviour in the failure/drop out rates but numbers among the *non-Lusos* generally averaged out at 20%, although the nationwide range was situated between 4% (in smaller, hinterland schools) and 28% (in the large coastal urban centres of high-density ethnic minorities).

Having now had a perfunctory glimpse of the broad panorama of Non-Luso successes and failures in education in Portugal within the last 3 years, it is time to examine what lies behind the less successful school careers of children belonging to different ethnic communities. The most obvious reason, the reason that has the unanimous agreement of educators, trainers, policy-makers and the parents and children themselves lies in the discrepancy between the child's language spoken at home and on the streets, and the official language of learning used by schools which, in all likelihood, may be partially or completely unknown to the child when s/he sets foot inside the school building on Day One.

Much has been written about this problem. Back in the 1950s and 60s, scholars like Basil Bernstein put forward highly credible theories about why working class school-goers who were unfamiliar with the Standardised version of the language experienced serious learning difficulties and dropped out of school at an early age[6]. Today, particularly in the EU, we are concerned about promoting tolerance, understanding and mutual respect among young people for the different ethnic minority groups living in their countries. The slogans in a world of globalisation and warfare are: respect for the civil rights of all people, equal opportunities, citizenship, responsibility, cooperation, etc. In education, the buzz-words are *identity, integration, autonomy, socialisation, self-esteem, inter- and multi-cultural education,* just to name a few.[7]

Therefore, before looking at the specific problem of language, perhaps it would be revealing to take a quick look at other factors of a social and cultural nature that help to explain some of the difficulties ethnic minorities have at school. First and foremost, children have to live down the stereotyped image the «host» society has of them – including their teachers as we shall see later on. Most of these stereotypes are built upon ignorance and fear of the unknown and the unfamiliar. They are also built upon resentment – hostility towards the idea of having to open up the community however large or small it may be, and be confronted with change; change acts as a threat to long, comfortably entrenched habits and complacency. Forming stereotypes are a nation's way of closing ranks against the outsider and no matter what grain of truth they may eventually contain, they serve to reassure one that it is the other who is in some way inferior. The stereotype a nation forms of itself also acts as a wall separating off those who fail to comply. In a recent lesson I had with university students in Germany, for instance, members of the class offered words like *disciplined, hard-working, punctual, clean, tidy* and *determined* when asked to characterise their own national traits.[8] These so-called positive traits were considered by the students to lie outside the domain of immigrants working in Saxony which were largely composed of Turks, North Africans, Vietnamese, Portuguese, Lithuanians and Russians, to name a few.

The next question we should ask ourselves is, do we really want to assimilate immigrant populations and force them to lose what makes them unique in order that they become eccentric copies of the «natives» in their adopted lands. Is the 19th-century American ideal of the *melting pot* adequate these days? Should we not rather be content to integrate immigrants into the host society on the basis of equality and mutual respect, encouraging them to take pride in their difference because it is precisely the acceptance and tolerance of this difference that makes a society more civilised? In order for the terms, *equality* and *mutual respect*, to have some meaning, school education needs to equip immigrant children with the means and mechanism allowing them to cope with society on universally accepted terms while at the same time, assuring that the child's own terms and origins are not trampled underfoot. If this question receives the attention it is due, then policy-makers, educators and teachers should know what the next step is - getting to know the social customs, beliefs, forms of social organisation, history and culture of school-age immigrant children so as to find easier ways of «reaching» them when it comes to academic learning.

It has been shown in numerous studies[9] that there is a direct link between the child's success and continued career at school and the family's economic situation and its place in socially deprived groups. Teachers have long been aware that poverty, poor or cramped living conditions, a high illiteracy and/or unemployment rate among family members, unhealthy daily habits, violence and promiscuity within the home, etc. all take their toll on the child's ability to concentrate on his/her formal learning. Many of the African immigrants in Portugal – and particularly in the run-down, seedy areas of Greater Lisbon, live in distressing conditions. While families still manage to stay in tact and provide homes where off-spring are cherished although not indulged, objective conditions make it so that it is a struggle to bring up their children. But what many teachers often fail to realise is that the prevailing social system at home, whether it is functional or not, can be used to help such children overcome in some measure their problems of integrating in a formal academic environment. For instance knowing about the family's mode of organisation as a community, the duties of each member, the use of space, the patterns of interaction, discursive habits, etc. provide insights of how to approach certain topics in the syllabus which may seem like an appeal to common sense to children born and brought up in the usual kind of European surroundings but which fail to be meaningful to children brought up in other kinds environments. As Celia Roberts *et al.* says: "…when participants in an interaction have different cultural backgrounds and are, as a result, working on different assumptions, the greater the difference between assumptions, the greater amount of language needed to establish common ground and achieve satisfactory negotiation of meaning"[10]. For example, the task of map reading (compass points, city plans, geographical chart-plotting) and giving or following street or other types of directions is a hard-won skill among certain African learners[11], as is the numerical interpretation of measures. Similar to children brought up in rural environments where many references depend on natural surroundings, and the code is restricted in Bernstein's definition of the term[12], the hurdle they have to jump to refer to such entities as measures in abstract mathematical values is sometimes insurmountable.

Learning about the immigrant children's cultural references, what their symbols and rituals are as well as their values, is one way of allowing children to reveal more about themselves and allow teachers to strip the syllabus of possibly irrelevant topics at best and insulting ones at worst. An immigrant group's national cohesion lies in its symbols, its country's natural attributes, customs, eating habits, music, fashion, games. Likewise the rituals – how people are celebrated in the rites of passage (birth, adolescence, marriage and death) - despite the fact that such rituals tend to become more easily eroded by the dominant culture and its official rituals - give teachers an idea of how to handle certain delicate questions (e.g. like sexuality and bereavement. Religious customs cannot be overlooked as they may well decide upon a whole code of ethics and living patterns. Fundamentalist values are gaining ground as threats to civilizational values are felt more acutely and there is a real danger of loss of identity. Even as simple a subject as celebrating holy days may alleviate some of the neglect and resulting tension felt by some immigrant children at school. For example, in Portuguese schools, there is still a tendency in December to focus on the Christian celebration of Christmas, despite the fact that the Council of Europe decided to remove it from the curriculum some years back.[13] Nevertheless, it is surprising to find that very few teachers in Portugal have ever thought about it as an issue that excludes rather than includes in their multicultural classes where there is a mixture of religions.

The social values of another society may be very different from the host society's and it is as well for educators to see what kind of treatment the elderly and the very young receive; how punishments fit the crime, what kind of status is enjoyed by women, the handicapped and certain groups on the fringe. Teachers have to deal with their students' parents and as it has been shown in more than one study, the social role and status of parents is important if schools want to work more closely with parents and the community.[14] For example, at primary school level, only 18% of gypsy parents in Portugal ever go to the school to find out how their children are doing. Some 60% refuse to participate in school meetings or initiatives, 15% are indifferent and 7% are suspicious of the school. When accused of being disinterested in their children's progress, they say that they are intimidated by the highly educated teacher and as they themselves are illiterate they feel ignorant about school procedures. The opposite, however, seems to take place with African parents: 60% (mostly the mothers, in this case) participate, while only 20% are indifferent. But 15% adamantly refuse to have any dealings with the school and 3% become aggressive with the teachers[15]. It should be noted that many primary schools take on and intercultural types of activity involving the parents, particularly teaching illiterate parents how to read and write[16].

Another cultural area that is often forgotten but which has made a considerable impact on the search to find ways of relating to school-children is learning about who their heroes are in history, religion, literature, folk culture and entertainment. As we shall see further on in this study when describing a multicultural/multidisciplinary project, the «hero» may be an excellent means of reaching through to *non-Luso* children, who have different heroes despite the globalisation of certain, albeit fleeting, pop-culture figures whose (mainly USA) images are constructed in high-intensity, short-lived fashions and mass media campaigns.

One of the cultural binding agents, so to speak, and which has been largely neglected, although it cuts across regional, social, cultural and personal backgrounds in a nation, is humour. Children have a natural tendency to produce rhymes, rhythms, alliterations, word play, riddles and language games and it could well be that this ludic aspect of language development is important for literacy. Language play helps children become more aware of their language, how to manipulate it, how to venture into unfamiliar linguistic worlds through trial and error, how to discover new uses of words and sounds. In other words, a child's humour expressed through using her/his language shows just how inventive and creative s/he can be. It is the road to discovery about her/his own language that can generate knowledge in other areas. Furthermore laughter often acts to maintain group cohesion and identity and sometimes acts as an outlet for hostility and aggression. How many teachers have been bewildered by this excluding and selective laughter in their classes, even among native-speaker students? The generation gap explains many things but add to this the particular brand of humour of ethnic groups and classroom understanding and tolerance may well collapse under rigid conditions. If, as David Crystal points out, children need to conform to the standard medium of learning, they need to draw upon their creative resources and this includes their creative power to «play» with language[17]. Drawing upon the students' own stores of rhymes, riddles and puzzles in their mother tongues that are transformed into or contrasted with the medium of learning, as well as tapping some of the word play emerging in, for example, rap music, may help the teacher to get over ideas that are otherwise difficult to grasp due to inaccessible academic terminology.

Finally, teachers need to consider the nature of power relations which invade the child's world. The exercise of power in gate-keeping situations where what Fairclough calls *commodification*[18] is at stake, may make it so that any child (not only the immigrant child) finds her/himself in a disadvantaged position when dealing with other children who are older, of another sex or ethnic group or gang, etc. or with parents, teachers and the figures of authority in the community (e.g. the law, or any other official dealing with the general public, etc.)[19]. Power relations need not manifest themselves in physical force or acts of repression, superiority, overt humiliation or open discrimination. They may be and usually are effected through discursive modes. The teacher's discourse has been the object of serious study for many years[20] but it is only recently that the child's L2 discourse and paralinguistic behaviour in the classroom has been noted usually by educators in recently independent African and Asian countries where the medium of learning is in the language of the former colonial power, and less commonly, among immigrant children[21].

For example, before they become «streetwise» as regards survival tactics at school and in the classroom with the teacher, it is often found that smaller African children refuse to look their teacher in the eye or volunteer information without being coaxed. It frequently means, not a sign of disinterest or ignorance, but respect for an older person in authority[22]. The fact that many immigrant children find it hard to sit down for long but roam around the classroom and make physical contact with other children may also be diagnosed as a cultural trait and indicative of the type of social organisation they have grown up with. With older children, breaking into their own language – similar to what other teenagers do when using fashionable jargon, codes or sign- and body-language – acts as a challenge to teacher authority, peer-group approval and a distancing from the troublesome official language of learning. Instead of being intimidated by this, teachers would do well to draw on these languages, dialects and codes for reference and a better perception of student mentalities and habits, as well as incorporate them into certain areas of study that helps to motivate interest and a deeper understanding of the subject in question. Precisely because speech is exophoric, context-bound and relies heavily on gesture and non-verbal behaviour, kinemic expression assumes great importance. The African handshake, for instance, has a history and the fact that urban youth of immigrant extraction have modified it to suit their own needs could provide topics leading to other issues in the syllabus[23]. One example of how to work a topic like this into the school programme, is students compiling their own verbal and kinemic glossaries based on as many varieties of the L1 as are found in the classroom and their linguistic equivalents in the official L2 (and even in the FL they are studying). The children could add to the terms by giving socio-cultural and historical explanations and elaborating upon cross-cultural references using their own and outside sources.

Looking at the question from the teacher's point of view, they are not exempt from having their own attitudes and prejudices towards race, colour and creed. It is interesting to see some of these attitudes are manifested in what teachers say and how they attempt to cover up more basic emotions.

As mentioned earlier on in this paper, a survey on teacher attitudes towards intercultural education was carried out by the Portuguese Ministry of Education in 1995 and involved 60 primary schools (40 of which were located in Greater Lisbon, and 15 in the Algarve). It covered 138 teachers (all women, mostly over 31 years of age and teaching for more than 15 years). 42% of these schools had some African teachers, ¼ of the schools had more than 40% African children and ¼ of the schools had more than 20% gypsy children.

Two thirds of the teachers in the survey said that the ethnic minorities had problems in learning and the reason was that the children did not speak or understand Portuguese (the language of the classroom) very well. It was also reckoned that some ethnic children also had difficulty thinking along the same cognitive frameworks as the *Luso* children. 25% of the teachers thought that having ethnic minorities at school generated conflict and aggression among the children; they believed that misbehaviour rose proportionally to the number of ethnic students in the school. However, this rather negative outlook was largely counterbalanced by 62% of the teachers who thought the school environment was positive and relatively calm; they placed stress on words like «making an effort to understand», «helping», «encouraging». It was gratifying to note that 63% teachers believed that having ethnic minorities at school encouraged the teachers to work more and better with each other in order to solve problems. On a more cynical note, however, it could also mean that this banding together nurtures a «them» and «us» attitude where problems are solved in order to safeguard the smooth-running of the school and classroom efficiency, but little else.

With regard to the attitudes of the teachers themselves and their own behaviour in a multicultural setting, 35% of the teachers thought they had become more tolerant, co-operative, respectful and open towards other races, while 12% said they made a greater effort with minorities and tried hard to help them to succeed. However, only 9% said they felt feel more responsible and sensitive towards ethnic minorities and 7% confessed that they felt distinctly uncomfortable, fed-up and tired when it came to coping with a multiracial school environment, or they could not care less or felt perplexed about having ethnic minorities at school. The fact that an overwhelming number of teachers refrained from expressing views whatever they might have been, is also fairly informative.

Teachers attitudes about themselves differed somewhat from what they thought could be encouraged more actively at school. Here, there was a certain amount of contradiction and mixed feelings. It was as if the teachers did not like being forced to recognise that integrating ethnic minorities in their schools was now a permanent issue, although they were obliged to deal with it on a one-to-one basis as the need arose. A little over half the teachers bothered to voice an opinion at all. The others had no opinion and seemed at a loss. Only 25% teachers said they were in favour of promoting the social and cultural integration of ethnic minorities, 13% were in favour of cultural interchange while 11% were in favour of promoting success at school among all students. Very few teachers (8%) were in favour of giving added value to the ethnic children’s culture and merely a handful (3%) wanted to develop a multicultural pedagogy at school.

Likewise, only some teachers in the survey envisaged a number of strategies in order to promote better harmony and learning prospects among the *non-Luso* children at primary school. The rest remained silent. 23% wanted more value given to different cultures; 11% underlined that a closer relationships between the school and the children's families had to be assured; 9% put their finger on the linguistic sore-point and said it was essential to help children to understand the language of learning/teaching (Portuguese) better; 7% insisted on a democratic, co-operative classroom and individualized teaching.

In order to encourage learning among *Luso* and *non-Luso* school students, the teachers in the survey often undertook to do project work, drama and simulation tasks, asked pupils to choose their own tasks (which were frequently co-operative) and divided up the class into mixed ability groups when doing tasks. However, despite these measures, **all** the teachers confessed that more often than not their classes were heavily teacher-controlled. As the authors of the survey pointed out, the primary school teachers in the survey seemed to mix a lot of traditional approaches with some of the newer approaches mentioned in the 1994 Educational Reform. This verdict was supported by the fact that 44% of the teachers believed that the most successful activities they had undertaken with their pupils involved the whole school as against 9% who thought their most successful activities were done in the classroom) while 28% said they involved the family and 19% the community. Primary school, therefore, is viewed by most educators as a valuable means of socialising the child while giving him/her a grounding in the traditional «3 Rs». This approach takes on even greater importance when we think about making room for the multi- and intercultural aspects brought to light by the *Non-Luso* component of the school population.

The fact that two thirds of the teachers in the survey put one of the main reasons for immigrant learners' lack of achievement in their school studies down to difficulties in coping with standard Portuguese, the language of formal education, showed that this is a widely held premise. But I think many teachers fail to go deeply enough into the question and connect up the standarised language with the socio-cultural peculariarities and factors underlying the languages, dialects and codes of each group, whether they are *non-Luso* or or low *Luso*-achievers. While it is commendable that primary school teachers prefer concentrating on getting their pupil to ***do*** things centring upon activities acceptable by the dominant culture and involving cooperative learning, intensive training of skills improving the acquisition and handling of the dominant language from an L2 speaker stance has been somewhat neglected.

For example, and again referring to the 1995 Teacher Survey, exhibitions, shows, food contests, dancing, games, sports and festivals are more widely favoured (7-13%) and considered by the teachers to be the most successful activities put on by their pupils. Consequently, children's practical skills received a lot of attention (handicrafts, making videos, taking photographs, making picture books, producing exhibition material, etc.) and made up between 11-20% of their production. Fewer teachers contrived to involve their pupils and develop their linguistic skills by story-telling, play-acting and singing in Portuguese (5-8%) and only a small minority (2%) ever thought of asking the children to do tasks in their mother tongues. However, the materials produced by children in these two latter cases when working towards increased confidence in handling Portuguese, occupied only between 1% and 5% of their total material output. It mostly took the form of story and pamphlet-writing, and writing for the school newspaper.

As a result, when children leave primary school and go into the lower grades of high school, their problems of coping with ever more complicated forms of Portuguese, in which they are urged to develop their cognitive abilities along more rational and abstract lines, cause them increasingly more difficulties. One of the measures gradually being put into practice in high schools seeking to improve *non-Luso* children's (as well as low *Luso* achievers') understanding of increasingly abstract concepts in a language that is not their own, calls for joint cooperation among teachers of different subjects at school, a reliance on the student's own (L1) cultural and linguistic knowledge, task-based project work where teaching and learning units occupy whole blocks of time in the schedule, and readily-available resources located outside the classroom (e.g. internet, community services, etc.). There have been various reports published describing the relative success of such measures[24] but one particular account attracted my attention precisely because the project's main concern was improving the quality of the students' perception of Portuguese from their own (*non-Luso)* cultures. The end result, according to the teachers, was that they were able to make better progress in such subjects as Portuguese language and literature, geography, history and mathematics.

The project[25] was aimed at 12 students in the 6th grade. They were from the working class (40% parents unemployed or on short-term contracts) in an ethnically varied school with a high failure rate (over 15%) and enormous drop-out rate (up to 53% did not enroll in the 7th grade). To start off, the Portuguese teacher selected some simply-written traditional Mozambican and Nigerian folk tales which she was sure would be well-received by the adolescents in question. They were read and studied for language use, ideas and imagery that is typical in oral (recorded) African folk literature; pupils wrote opinions about the stories and made up and wrote their own stories.

The Geography class then took over: groups of pupils were given the roles of «Embassies» for certain African and Asian countries and they had to do some fact finding about them to inform the rest of the class in a «Forum». Topics included: geographical location, people, economic activity, culture, etc. After that, the History class took up the topic: pupils had to find out some relevant historical facts about «their» country and the way Portugal was connected with its history (from the 16th century to the present). In the follow-up Portuguese lesson, numbers and sizes mentioned in the stories and about the «Embassy» countries, were talked about, ready for working on in the Maths class which set problems for the children to solve.

The Portuguese class, still acting as a pivot, then asked the children to read two more texts which were carefully prepared to motivate the children and answer doubts about difficult language and vocabulary. They were chosen not only for their theme and socio-cultural relevance and interest, but also for their register and style. One involved a newpaper cutting about racist behaviour among white school children in Lisbon and the other was a translation of a historical narrative by Voltaire about a white man taken into slavery by a black tribe when shipwrecked off the coast of Africa. The language and ideas in Portuguese were subsequently analysed.

The topics raised in the latter text was then taken up by the history class which focussed the pupils' attention on Portugal's role in the slave trade, the New World discoveries, etc. – all subjects coming in the 6th grade history syllabus. The Geography class looked at the African countries providing slaves to the American colonies, the trade routes, crops produced in the New World, etc. and a series of lessons occupied the learners in this way.

In going back to the Portuguese class, which launched the last of its initiatives in this project, the aim was to run the entire circle and come back to traditional folk tales. This time, a well-known Western European folk tale was used: *Little Red Riding Hood*. Learners were now asked to write some stage instructions for a play about the story. The children worked on ideas for a stage set and wrote dialogues for their own paper cut-out figurines. The Maths teacher was called in at this point and got the class to work on the stage-set asking them to calculate the measurements of the cottage, the cloak, the basket, etc. in *Little Red Riding Hood*. After this, each child made its own cut-outs to measure.

According to the authors of the project, the outcome of this inter-disciplinary, multicultural unit was highly successful as well as motivating and enjoyable. The students successfully learned the relevant parts of the history, geography and mathematics syllabuses precisely because their Portuguese lessons had prepared them for the type of language they would be needing. Moreover, it linked up the socio-cultural preoccupations of their own worlds and age-groups with the general aims of the 6th grade syllabus in these subjects as well as in Portuguese.

In conclusion, many of the evils affecting the school system[26] as it is and all of the difficulties learners experience when passing through this system become much more complicated for learners from other cultures, speaking other languages and thinking along other cognitive schema. The European Council has already given guidelines to help such learners and the Ministry of Education's *Entreculturas* Progamme has been in action ever since 1994, although only recently has it begun to become more widely known among educators. The first results of projects set up under its auspices (all too few, however) are only just beginning to bear fruit but they are sporadically done and rely heavily on the good will and hard work of a few teachers. If teachers, other educators, parents and the community at large were made more aware of the fact that with a little more attention given to multi- and intercultural education, the risk of discriminating against *non-Luso* children and excluding them from the roll of more successful learners, would not be quite as serious as government statistics reveal. It is not only the language medium of learning that needs to become readily available to speakers of other languages; the complex social, cultural and intellectual fabric underlying each of the languages found at school needs to be carefully looked at by educators so as to make the job of learning assessable to non-native speakers as well as to all low-achievers, academically speaking.

NOTES

[1] As reported in the weekly newspaper, *Expresso*, 2 April 1999.

[2] At the request of the Ministério do Interior (the Home Office), the enterprise *Geoideia* drew up a report on the matter in April 1999.

[3] See the *Base de Dados VIII* regarding 1996-97 in the EU-sponsored *Entreculturas* Programme.

[4] See Manuel Gonçalves, coordinator of the study (reference list). In 1995, there was an estimated 40,000-50,000 strong gypsy community in Portugal where 90% of the adult population was illiterate and only 50% of all school-aged gyspy children were enrolled in school. (pp. 22-27).

[5] See *Base de Dados VII* for 1995-96. My numbers have been based on statistics for 12 major cities in Portugal: Aveiro, Braga, Coimbra, Faro, Guarda, Leiria, Lisbon, Oporto, Santarém, Setúbal, Viseu and Vila Real.

[6] Even after the misinterpretation Bernstein's work has suffered, he was a path-finder whose theories have done a lot to help diagnose learning difficulties due to the use of a different code at school in which learning is supposed to be done.

[7] See the Portuguese school perspectives underlying the Educational Reform of 1993-4, the *Entreculturas* Programme begun in 1995 and influential theoreticians like Antonio Perotti calling for better EU intercultural policies.

[8] The lesson on multicultural education for 3rd year science and humanities students at the University of Leipzig in June 1999, was introduced by showing a video excerpt of a satirical performance based on sterotypes in Pina Bausch's televised «Repäres sur la modern dance». The discussion took off as from this point.

[9] For an informative study on the relationship between success at school and economically distressed groups in the Lisbon area see Bruto da Costa & Pimenta's recent study drawn up for Lisbon Municipal Council.

[10] C. Roberts, Evelyn Davies & Tom Jupp (1992), *Language and Discrimination*, Essex, Longman, p. 206.

[11] My own experience when teaching young Angolan women how to give and follow street directions on a map in English as the foreign language (EFL) (1986). The problem was that they did not know how to do so either in their own language (L1 - Kimbundu) or in the official language of Angola (L2 - Portuguese). The trouble was solved by taking the learners into the street and asking them to note down the characteristics of certain «target areas», where the sun was, what vegetation or buildings were nearby, etc., in relation to where the school was, and then, back in the classroom, arranging the desks to match the targets. Directions were then learned by acting out and saying while doing – weaving their ways through the desks with the rest of the class calling out the characteristics as well as the directions. There is also relative difficulty displayed by young African students when learning about measures (time, volume, size and quantity) and numbers. Again, the method adopted was handling concrete objects and not going through L1 or L2 but referring to words and concepts directly in the FL. In effect, this shows that in certain fields of knowledge, learners such as these acquire a more elaborated code in the FL than they do in the L1 or L2.

[12] See Basil Bernstein (1971), T*heoretical Studies Towards a Sociology of Language*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, Vol.1, p.76; also Bernstein (1972), "Social Class, Language and Socialization" in P-P. Giglioli, *Language and Social Context*, Harmondsworth, Longman, p.163; also S. Ervin-Tripp's quotation of William Labov's staement in her article in J. Gumperz and D. Hymes, (Eds.)(1972) *Directions in Sociolinguistics: the ethnography of Communication*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, p. 240.

[13] While we can question the validity of its withdrawal – because not only does it fail to recognise a celebration that is widely respected, but at classroom level, it acts as a jumping board to get children from other religious callings to

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share their knowledge about their own particular celebrations with the rest of the class, we can understand the Council of Europe's concern not to exclude. Although the subject of Christmas will not be found in school texts books dealing with English as a foreign language and published by multinational houses such as Longman, locally written text books cannot resist the temptation to include it on the grounds that Portugal «is a Catholic country».

[14]. See Decreto-Lei 115A/98, Chapter V, Articles 40 and 41 regulating on the role parents and students play in school decision-making. Also see the Lei de Bases do Sistema Educativa, Decreto-Lei 372/90 of 27/11/90 for this subject. Parent-teacher associations are important partners in the autonomous school's co- and self-management. In Greater Lisbon, over 40% of primary school teachers take part in meetings with parents. See J.M.T. Sampaio's useful article, "Parceira na Organização Escolar: implicação e envolência dos pais/encarregados de educação in *O Professor,* 1998, No. 62, III Série, pp. 23-25.

[15] Data comes from the 1995 Survey on *Intercultural Education* undertaken by or the *Enreculturas Programme* under the coordination of Ana Maria Cotrim for the Ministry of Education..

[16] An example lies in 43% of the 60 schools mentioned in the 1995 Survey on teachers providing multicultural activities for parents (81% of these based on teaching reading and writing). Also see the table giving types of parent-teacher cooperation in J.M.T. Sampaio, *op. cit*.

[17] David Crystal (1998), *Language Play*, London, Penguin, pp. 193-217.

[18] W. Fairclough (1992), *Discourse and Social Change,* Cambridge, Polity Press, explains: "Commodification is the process whereby social domains and institutions, whose concern is not producing commodities in the narrower economic sense of goods for sale, come nevertheless to become organised and conceptualised in terms of commodity production, distribution and consumption. It is no longer surprising, for example, for sectors of the arts and education, such as theatre and (…) language teaching to be referred to as 'industries' (…) an aspect of the 'enterprise culture'." Pp. 207 ff..

[19] For more about partners in power relations, see N. Fairclough (1989) *Language and Power,* London, Longman; F. Erickson & J. Schultz (1982), *The Counselor as Gatekeeper*, New York, Academic Pres; Nigel Grant (1997), "Some Problems of Identity and Education: a comparative examination of Multicultural Education" in *Comparative Education,* Vol. 33, No.1, pp. 9-28; S. MacKay & N. Hornberger, (1996) *Sociolinguistics and Language Teaching*, Cambridge, CUP, particularly Section III (Language and Intercation) and IV (Language and Culture); B.M. Mayor $ A.K.Pugh (1987), *Language, Communication and Education,* Kent, Open University – especially Section 3 discussing Language, Power and Control; Emília Pedro (Ed.)(1997), *Discourse Analysis – Proceedings on the 1st International Conference on Discourse Analysis,* Lisbon, Edições Colibri, particularly Part 4 entitled 'Power and Inequalities'; Celia Roberts *et al., op.cit*.

[20] For critical analysis of teacher-talk, see for example, Emília Ribeiro Pedro, (1992) *O Discurso na Aula: uma análise sociolinguistica da prática escolar em Portugal*, Lisbon, Caminho; J.W. Tollefson (Ed.)(1995), *Power and Inequality in Language Education,* Cambridge, CUP, particularly in Tollefson's 'Introduction' and the article by Elsa Auerbach, "The policies of the ESL classroom: issue of power in pedagogical choices", pp. 9-33.

[21] For children learning in L2 in independent African countries, see the pioneering studies by N.S. Prabhu (1987), *Second language Pedagogy*, Oxford, OUP describing his work on the Bangalore Project; B.B. Krachu (1995) 'Transcultural creativity in World Englishes and Literary Canons" in G. Cook & B. Seidlhofer, *Principles and Practice in Applied Linguistics*, Oxford, OUP; also Krachu & C.L. Nelson, (1996) "World Englishes" in MacKay & Hornberger, *op. cit*.pp. 71-102 . The magazine, English Today, published by the Cambridge University Press has a continuous stream of articles by scholars and teachers working with World English as the official language in various Commonwealth countries. It acts as a forum for discussing ideas about education in the vernacular and not in English as a way to fight against failure at school.

[22] See also: J. Keith Chick (1996), "International Communication" in MacKay & Hornberger, op, cit., pp. 329-348, about Zulu workers deferential attitudes in South Africa ;R. Freeman & B. McElhinny(1996), "Language and gender" in MacKay & Hornberger, op, cit., pp. 218-280, about black children – especially the girls - in the Southern

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States of the USA having the same respectful behaviour; Elizabeth de Villiers , (1990), *Walking the Tightrope: recollections of a schoolteacher in Soweto*, Parklands, South Africa, Jonathan Ball Publishing – among other problems, this author describes the problem of giving classes in a language other than the children's own and of the children's hostile reception of a literary cultural of the dominant race-power; Doris Lessing (1992), *African Laughter – four visits to Zimbabwe*, London, Harper Collins Publishers, which gives a picture of rural children in a village school learning in a medium that is not their own against almost insurmountable problems.

[23] In Gumperz & Hymes, *op. cit.,* see the description of the almost ritual-like ceremony of lighting up a cigarette. Kinemes may also include pitch, tone and loudness of voice. When commenting on a transcript of a conversation between two immigrants from Bangladesh, Celia Roberts *et al*., says: "the high pitch of these utterances is a typical phenomenon for speakers in North Indian languages and signals the great importance the speaker attaches to what he is saying" (p.217).

[24] See the Universidade Aberta's report: *Educação Intercultural de Adultos*, and a project entitled "A experiência portuguesa do Projecto 'Educação Multi/Intercultural'", Rocha Trindade et al. analyse the data collected during a 3-year project on a Oeiras school giving immigrants night classes. Also see the *Entrecultura's* programme, *Educação Intercultural: relato de experiência*s, for six project reports.
For methods of managing multicultural project learning at school, see L. Barboso de Castro & M.M.C. Ricardo (1994), *Gerir o Trabalho do Projecto*, Lisboa, Texto Editora. For more specific tasks teaching English a foreign language in an intercultural setting, see Wout de Jong (1996), *Open Fronteirs: teaching English in an intercultural context*, Oxford, Heinneman; also for projects seeking to improve the official medium of learning, see François Victor Tochon (1995), *A Língua Como Projecto Didáctico*, Oporto, Porto Editora, translated by M.R. Araújo Vidal.

[25] The report quoted here is by Antonio Costa et al., "Em busca de uma pedagogia intercultural", pp.95-141, in the *Entrecultura's* programme, *Educação Intercultural: relato de experiência*s..

[26] At the moment, apart from the usual list of poor funding going into education, inadequate school conditions, job instability among teachers, etc., one of the most serious problems affecting compulsory education in Portugal is the breadth and complexity of the school curricula. Discussion is going on throughout the country in formal and informal forums about making the school programmes flexible in order to meet the needs and capabilities of the learners. If curricula were made more flexible and adaptable to local conditions, ethnic groups would benefit greatly. See the Ministry of Education's forum on the internet, the forum launched by *Fenprof* and the Sindicato de Professores de Grande Lisboa both in print and digitally, and educational publications such as *O Professor.*

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