Conceptualisations of student diversity in an area-based intervention in Portugal (TEIP)

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Education is a basic right for all, however, schools are generally not geared to respond to the growing student diversity in a way that guarantees equity. Changes in the demographics, and in cultural, legal, economic, and societal factors (Dyson & Millward, 2000; Florian & McLaughlin, 2008; Moltó, Florian, Rouse, & Stough, 2010; Roldão, 1999; Skrtic, 2005) resulted in considerable changes in the social universe in which schools are based. School diversity has become one of the most important challenges for schools in the 21st century (Ainscow, 2016; Madsen & Mabokela, 2002; Theoharis & Scanlan, 2015). This challenge seems to be more present in socio-economically disadvantaged areas. As an attempt to promote educational success in these contexts, area-based initiatives (ABI, Kerr & Dyson, 2017) are often launched in Europe. Territórios Educativos de Intervenção Prioritária (TEIP) is an ABI in Portugal, that includes 137 school clusters and aims at reducing school dropout, truancy, indiscipline and to promote educational success. Although some features of TEIP have been explored (Rolo, Prata, & Dias, 2014; Sampaio & Leite, 2015; Silva, da Silva, & Araújo, 2017) its overall success remains questioned (Abrantes, Roldão, Amaral, & Mauritti, 2013) and little is known about how student diversity is conceptualised within TEIP. Diversity is conceptualised in different ways in the literature, for example the OECD (2005) proposes three categories of diversity: disabilities, difficulties and disadvantages (socio-economic, cultural, and/or linguistic factors included). Indeed, various aspects of diversity may cause disadvantage such as language, cultural and socio-economic background, religion, sexual orientation, and disability (Ainscow, 2007; Minow, Schweder, & Markus, 2008; Moltó et al., 2010). Diversity is not neutral, 'it implies problems of discrimination and inequalities that must be dealt with by authorities and individuals' (Arnesen et al., 2008, p. 11). Some aspects of diversity have been reported to contribute to lowered teacher expectations, discrimination, and views of difference as 'deviation from normal' (Alves, Andreasson, Karlsson,& Miles, 2016; Florian & McLaughlin, 2008, p. 5). Teachers' perspectives on difference impact their practice with children (Hayes & Deyhle, 2000; Mitchell, Morton, & Hornby, 2010; Robinson & Diaz, 2005).

Therefore, student diversity in a school context is entwined with equity issues. Sliwka (2010) proposes that schools develop through a paradigm shift from homogeneity to heterogeneity and to diversity. Schools of heterogeneity see difference as a challenge and make adjustments to respond to students' 'different needs'. Finally, schools of diversity see difference as an asset and opportunity and use students' differences as a resource for learning and development. Research suggests that

affirming students from diverse backgrounds in the teaching-learning process, developing partnerships between schools and families, and making individuals feel safe and welcome to express their values, backgrounds and identities contribute to better achievement (Markus, 2008; Nieto & Bode, 2011). This paper uses a broad definition of diversity that includes culture, language, ethnicity, disabilities, social and economic status, religion, and sexual orientation. We aim to develop a deep understanding of how diversity is conceptualized in TEIP policy documents and to explore in what ways different conceptualisations serve the purpose of achieving more equitable schools. The work is guided by the following research questions: What aspects of diversity are mentioned in TEIP national and school policies? How is diversity conceptualized in TEIP policies? What conceptualisations of student educational success are present in TEIP policies?

In order to study the conceptualizations of diversity in TEIP on a national as well as local level, a meso- and micro-level policy analysis method was selected. These two levels of investigation were important in order to outline how TEIP legislation might frame individual school interventions, and how schools respond locally. The documentary data corpus included national and school policy TEIP-related documents (e.g. Despacho Normativo 20/2012; 188 school documents from 95 TEIP schools). These documents were obtained through a manual online search of school websites of the 137 TEIP school clusters. The search purposefully targeted documents framed by TEIP, as well as local school initiatives for improvement, therefore three types of documents were searched: TEIP School Improvement Plans, School Educational Project, Professional Development Plan. School clusters that did not display TEIP School Improvement Plans were excluded from the search. A typology was developed for delineating the documentation types of school clusters 1) schools with only TEIP Improvement Plan 2) schools with Improvement Plan and Educational Project 3) schools with Improvement Plan and Professional Development Plan 4) schools having all three documents. The analysis was guided by the principles of contextual policy analysis (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994). The research procedure followed the stages of familiarization, identifying theoretical framework, indexing, charting, mapping and interpretation (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994, p. 178). A protocol was

designed based on the study's research questions to ensure a standardized framework for extracting information from the selected documents. The protocol consisted of a detailed coding scheme covering aspects such as document type, school/ school cluster, and contents related to diversity (diversity markers, for e.g. ethnicity, gender, disability, socio-economic background, countries of origin), interventions proposed (e.g. tutoring, ability-based grouping, Portuguese language classes and so on), and conceptualisations of educational

success. The coding scheme was developed and tested by both researchers on a randomly selected sample of documents, after which the framework was finalized. Next, the whole data was independently analysed and results were compared by the two researchers in order to ensure credibility. Final refinements in indexing and charting were made when comparing each other's coding. All steps were systematically documented using Excel. As a complement to the qualitative analysis, a semi-quantitative content analysis was also carried out, detecting frequencies of certain concepts, associated terminologies and intervention types.

The initial legal framework (DN 20/2012) presented four target areas: quality of learning and school results; reduction of school dropout, absenteeism and indiscipline; transition to active life; schools as educational and cultural agents in their communities. These targets have evolved into (1) Enhancing teaching and learning; (2) Preventing school dropout, absenteeism and discipline; (3) Management and organisation; (4) Family and community. Preliminary findings indicate that national legislation acknowledged students' socio-economic

background and disadvantaged contexts from a deficit point of view, associating low socio-economic status with low achievement and school failure. So, this view homogenises diversity into a "problem" where socio-economic status seemed to be the most significant marker of school success. Generally, a similar deficit approach with a narrow vision of diversity was found in local school documents. To some extent, schools seemed to incorporate more aspects of diversity such as the language diversity, or countries of origin; however, the notions of success remained largely reduced to what was measured by tests results. The similarities between the narrow conceptualisations of diversity and success in national and local approaches also indicated schools´ dependency on policy frameworks. These results point to the need to reconceptualise diversity in a more comprehensive sense in policy documents, and acknowledging the nuanced situations of particular diverse school communities and how their experiences might be in relation with school success. In reaching this view, school´s agency is also crucial to break away from deficit approaches and bring about conceptual change, in which school staff development plays an important role.

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