

Effects of national policies on teachers' sense of professionalism: findings from an empirical study in Portugal and in England

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This paper reports on research aimed at investigating the ways in which teachers in Portugal and in England are experiencing recent changes in the policy environment which have affected their sense of professionalism and their professional identity. Data were collected through questionnaires and focus group interviews. Findings suggest the existence of some strengths in teachers' views on their professionalism, namely the importance of vocationalism, continuing learning and collaborative cultures, the relevance of project-oriented work at school and an integrated perspective of the curriculum. However, a number of limitations also emerged, such as feelings of ambivalence and conflict, associated with increased bureaucracy, qualities of school leadership, cultures of loneliness and the lack of understanding and ownership of the process of change.

Cet article rend compte des données sur une étude réalisée au Portugal et en Angleterre sur la manière dont les enseignants des deux pays vivent les plus récents changements dans leur travail en résultat des politiques nationales. Plus concrètement, l'étude a analysé la manière dont les enseignants des deux pays caractérisent leur professionnalisme et leur identité professionnelle. Les données ont été recueillies à travers des questionnaires et des entretiens en groupe. Les résultats suggèrent quelques points forts, notamment l'importance du sentiment de vocation, de l'apprentissage continu, des cultures de collaboration et du travail de projet ainsi qu'une perspective intégrée du curriculum. Par contre, les points plus faibles ont été les sentiments d'ambivalence et de conflit, ainsi que la bureaucratie, la culture de solitude et l'absence de compréhension du processus de changement.

El artículo se basa en un estudio realizado por las Universidades del Minho (Portugal) y Nottingham (Inglaterra) sobre la forma como los profesores de los dos países han reaccionado a los recientes cambios en la política curricular, bien como sobre sus implicaciones en su profesionalismo y su identidad. Los datos fueron recogidos a través de cuestionario y entrevista de grupo. La lectura que surge de los datos indica un conjunto de puntos fuertes en la definición del profesionalismo de los profesores, especialmente la importancia atribuida al aprendizaje continuo y a las culturas de colaboración, así como la importancia del trabajo de proyecto y un entendimiento más amplio de los papeles de la escuela y de los profesores. Sin embargo, también

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surgieron algunas limitaciones, sobretudo en lo que respecta a sentimientos de alguna manera ambivalentes y conflictivos, determinados por el aumento de la burocracia, de la cultura individualista y la falta de comprensión y asimilación de los procesos de cambio.

Dieser Artikel berichtet über eine Studie, welche untersucht hat, inwiefern Lehrer aus Portugal und England die jüngsten Veränderungen im politischen Umfeld erleben, und inwiefern sich diese Veränderungen auf die berufliche Einstellung und Identität der Lehrer auswirken. Die Daten wurden durch Fragebögen und Fokusgruppeninterviews erhoben. Die Untersuchungsergebnisse zeigen, dass die Lehrer ihre Weiterbildung und Arbeitskulturr, projektorientierte Schularbeit, eine integrierte Perspektive des Curriculums und ein breites Verständnis für die Schule und für die Lehreraarbeit als wichtig erachten. Es wurden jedoch auch einige Schwachpunkte identifiziert, wie beispielsweise mit erhöhtem Bürokratismus verbundene Ambivalenz- und Konfliktgefühle, Einsamkeitskultur, sowie Verständnislosigkeit gegenüber dem Veränderungsvorgang.

Introduction

Teaching is a changing profession and, therefore, the work of teachers has been profoundly affected over the years. Intensification and bureaucratisation, increased forms of managerialism, and greater accountability and public scrutiny are but a few examples of the most recent changes (Day, 1999; Helsby, 2000; Estrela, 2001), which it is said, have led to a decrease in teacher motivation, job satisfaction and sense of professionalism for some teachers. As a consequence of being a 'socially constructed concept' (Helsby, 1995), and, therefore, changing and contested in its nature, teacher professionalism is marked by ambiguity and complexity. Understanding its meaning implies, consequently, the consideration of the historical, cultural and political context in which it is embedded. Not only is it a concept under permanent construction (Gimeno, 1995) and subject to different, and sometimes competing, interpretations and analyses, but it also entails different 'voices' or 'perspectives' which are rooted in different political, professional and institutional endeavours (Helsby, 2000; Hargreaves, 2000).

Over the last two decades, schools, and therefore teachers, have been confronted with new challenges, such as increasing roles and responsibilities (resulting from the multicultural settings in which they have to work and a broadening of their role, which goes beyond the traditional boundaries of subject matter); changes occurring in social agencies (for instance, families who have witnessed deep transformations in recent years with implications for the role of schools and teachers); greater influence of the mass media on the education of children and young people; the co-existence of different educational models in a multicultural society; the fragmentation of teachers' work; growing opportunities for learning outside school owing to the development of information and communication technologies; and increasing contractual accountability, bureaucracy and public scrutiny (Day, 1999, 2001; Esteve, 2000; Estrela, 2001; Hargreaves, 2001). Although they vary on their mutually, these performativity agendas are to be seen in many countries: for example, through 'no child left behind' in the USA, and the national testing and

school inspection in the UK. Even schools in these countries which by tradition have been less subject to state intervention and control (e.g. Norway, Denmark) are now experiencing greater accountability pressures. These examples of the changing nature of teaching illustrate the ways in which teachers' work, and moral purpose, forms of autonomy and discretionary decision-making which have been the traditional keystones of teachers' professionalism, are now being challenged and reframed into forms of audited compliance with results-driven agendas. Thus, there is now a struggle for the soul of professionalism, in pre-service and in-service phases which reflects the 'increasing complexities and contradictions of teachers' work' (Day, 1999). This paper reports on findings from research aimed at investigating the ways in which teachers in Portugal and in England are experiencing recent changes in policy environment which have affected their sense of professionalism. These countries have been selected in part because of the interests of the authors in the changing conditions of work of teachers but also because the contexts in these countries represent discretionary different policy phases. In England, government intervention in schools has been wide-ranging since 1988, whereas in Portugal, it is only in recent years that teachers have experienced the winds of change. It was, therefore, important for us to examine the effects of these changes on teachers themselves and, in particular, whether and to what extent these were affecting their sense of professionalism. Few other studies have attempted to identify differences and similarities between reforms across countries with different cultural, policy and educational histories.

Context of the study

The Portuguese reform context: flexibility, 'imposed' autonomy and increasing accountability

Within the context of a traditionally highly centralised educational system, teachers in Portugal, mainly at basic (compulsory) education, are witnessing a move towards imposed 'autonomy' and greater 'flexibility'. Schools are no longer seen as 'curriculum delivery agencies' but as 'educational centres' (Estrela, 2001). This vision calls for new ways of approaching school curriculum according to a more flexible design. Based upon the national curriculum, schools and teachers are being granted, albeit without consultation, greater autonomy to construct their own curriculum projects, based upon local needs, according to government guidelines and regulations.

The re-thinking of the curriculum for elementary education begun in 1996–1997 in so far as schools and teachers were given the opportunity to reflect upon the school curriculum in an attempt to identify its weaknesses, limitations and ways of improving it. Significantly, it also aimed at reorganising the curriculum in order to build up a new national curriculum based on the idea of key competencies to be achieved at the end of compulsory education. The results of this experience led, in 2001, to publication of the national curriculum for basic compulsory education entitled Essential Competencies. Thus, the notion of increased autonomy was

accompanied by the demand for greater definition and measurement of the end-results for pupils. Paradoxically, what appeared to be greater autonomy in fact was greater centralist control of the curriculum.

Although syllabi and curricula for basic education are defined nationally, adjustments to curricular organisation depend on school resources and needs, under school autonomy. Therefore, schools have to design an 'educational project' which defines the school's educational policy for a three-year period. The interpretation and application of the national curriculum is implemented through curricular projects at school and classroom level. These projects aim to respond adequately to different needs and characteristics of schools and their pupils.

Within the context of elementary school (9 years of compulsory education), curricular management is bound by the following guiding principles:

- consistency and continuation between the 3 cycles of basic education and co-ordination of these with secondary education;
- inclusion of learning assessment in the curriculum;
- existence of disciplinary and non-disciplinary curricular areas within a view of significant learning and the global education of pupils through the integration of knowledge;
- inclusion of education for citizenship in all curricular areas;
- more experimental learning in the different areas and subjects, and compulsory in science teaching;
- more diverse methods for teaching and learning activities using the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) promoting skills development within a view of life-long learning.

Thus, it is possible to identify contradictory trends in recent curriculum policies in Portugal. On the one hand, schools and teachers are granted greater autonomy to reinterpret and manage the school curriculum (an 'imposed' autonomy); on the other hand, a 'normative view' is still prevalent, which can be seen in the amount of central regulations according to which schools (and teachers) are expected to operate, leading, in a sense, to a process of 'recentralisation' (Pacheco, 1998). Recent empirical work (Flores, 2003, 2005; Morgado, 2003) demonstrated the ambiguity characterising Portuguese teachers' views of curricular autonomy: it is a locally constructed process (not an imposed one), but, at the same time, rituals and routines characterise their practices which are led by 'control mechanisms' such as the national assessment system and the curricular competencies (defined by the Ministry of Education).

In many ways, the recent educational reforms in Portugal parallel those which began in England in the late 1980s with the publication of the Education Reform Act. In both cases, national curricula were developed, and schools were given greater responsibility to become self-managing through, for instance, greater budgetary control. However, the parallel ends there, for in England such reforms were accompanied by the growth of unprecedented levels of public accountability which have not yet occurred in Portugal.

The English reform context: imposition and transition, 1988–2005

Since 1988, English schools have been the subject of considerable reform by central government (DfES). Indeed, reform has now become the norm in every teacher's life, rather than the exception. The results of local school management, independent external inspectors, national testing of pupils at ages 7, 11, 14, 16, 17 and 18, publication of league tables, annual performance management interviews and target setting for teachers, school improvement plans and national strategies for ICT, literacy and numeracy have been a lowering morale for many teachers, difficulties in recruitment and retention, and threats to teacher identities. There is more diversity and intensification in teachers' work also, since these reforms have to be managed. Furthermore, movements in the broader society—for example, more single parent families, fewer 'values' reference points for children and young people and less family time—have meant that teachers in general have had to manage more social and emotional issues in their classrooms. Teachers are more tired. Those who are able to maintain their resilience do so because they have clear core values or moral purposes, work in well-led, supportive school cultures and structures, and have stable personal support networks. When these break down, vulnerability increases and commitment and self-efficacy—the belief that they can make a difference—drain away. Until recently then, the situation after more than fifteen years of reform was thus:

1. standards of attainment in Literacy and Numeracy rose—though the targets set by government were consistently not met;
2. there were growing signs of a more tired, ageing profession;
3. recruitment of teachers and headteachers had become more difficult;
4. retention of young teachers had not improved—1 in 3 are lost after 5 years;
5. schools in areas of economic and social deprivation had not improved to the same extent as others;
6. pupil behaviour in the classroom had deteriorated;
7. headteachers had a more visible role to play in the success of the school;
8. teachers had to take on more management roles outside the classroom;
9. local authorities (LAs) roles had become more tied to the implementation and monitoring of the government agendas.

These negative changes in the nature of the work and professionalism of teachers remain. However, recognising the difficulties which its reforms had created, more recently the government has devised strategies to attempt to ameliorate the damage to morale and self-efficacy:

10. there is to be a reduction in National Tests which are assessed externally;
11. teachers' salaries have risen significantly and there are more financial rewards for certain teachers, i.e. the salary structure is more finely differentiated;
12. The DfES have introduced a new form of support for classroom teachers-learning assistants;
13. The DfES has produced a National Strategy for Teachers' Continuing Professional Development (C. P. D.);

14. The DfES has introduced a policy to reduce bureaucracy and develop a 'workforce remodelling' agenda by guaranteeing that a minimum of 10% of all teachers' time each week will be spent outside the classroom;
15. Schools themselves will have to pay for (12) (13) and (14).

The spate of centrally driven reform, however, continues. Schools, teachers and students are obliged to respond. Thus, although it is possible to recognise the potential virtues of the more recent changes in strategic direction by central government, there is still a climate of target setting, accountability and public scrutiny in schools.

Given the above situation, it was timely to design and carry out this study. Much may be learned from the experiences of teachers in both countries, from the 'weary traveller' perspectives of teachers in England and travellers from Portugal, who have more recently begun their reform journeys but are not yet certain of where the journey might take them.

Methods

The broad aim of the study reported in this paper was to discuss teachers' sense of professionalism and the ways in which this has been affected in recent times in Portugal and in England. Three main research questions informed the study:

- i) What were the main changes and factors which have affected teachers' work?
- ii) What were the effects of national policies on teachers' sense of professionalism in both countries?
- iii) Are there any lessons to be learnt from the answers to i) and ii) which might inform knowledge of the effects of change in teachers in other countries?

A questionnaire was designed including both closed and open-ended questions (see Appendix). Three levels of information were included: teacher level (concerning issues such as motivation, self-efficacy, commitment, job satisfaction, sense of professionalism, teacher change, etc.); classroom level (e.g. effects of recent policy directives on teachers' perceptions of their work at classroom level, student motivation, factors which impact upon teachers' work under the national policy directives, etc.); and school level (perceptions of school culture and leadership, school policy, factors which impact on teachers' work at school under recent policy directives, etc.). Background characteristics, such as years of experience, academic qualifications, years of experience at current school, and gender were also included. Overall, 240 teachers (both primary and secondary) participated in this study. Focus group interviews with teachers in four schools (two primary and two secondary) in each country were also conducted.

The majority of the respondents are female (69%), 37% of the respondents are between 40 and 49 years old, 34% are between 30 and 39 and 13% are between 50 and 59. Only 15% are between 20 and 29 years old. Therefore, the large majority of the teachers have more than 16 years of experience (48%), 32% have between 8 and 15 years of service. Only 6% have less than 3 years of experience. However, it is

noteworthy that 33% were teaching for the first time in their current school, which relates to teacher recruitment in Portugal (occurring at national level) and the high rate of teacher mobility. Only 21% of the respondents have more than 10 years of experience in their current school, 15% have between 7 and 10. The majority of the teachers have a permanent position at the school (59%). The respondents taught in elementary school—comprising pupils aged 10 to 15—(44%), whereas 33% taught in primary school and 20% in secondary school. Only 3% worked in pre-school.

The process of qualitative data analysis (open-ended questions) was undertaken according to a comparative or horizontal analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Quantitative data were analysed statistically with the use of SPSS 11.5. In this paper the major findings of the study will be presented according to emerging themes integrating both quantitative and qualitative data.

Findings

National policies: motivation and job satisfaction

Both English and Portuguese teachers were asked about their current levels of motivation, commitment, job satisfaction and self-efficacy and whether these had been affected by government policies.

Portuguese teachers reported that over the last three years decreases in job satisfaction, commitment and self-efficacy were less than increases, although decreases in motivation levels were more than double the increase (see Table 1). English teachers who reported much greater decreases in job satisfaction, commitment and self-efficacy had decreased. The sense of motivation over the last three years was, however, similar for teachers in both countries. This discrepancy between sense of commitment, job satisfaction and self-efficacy and motivation levels suggests that the motivation to teach is, for some, able to be sustained despite adverse effects of external change on self-efficacy, job satisfaction and commitment; and this may relate to the strong sense of vocationalism expressed by the respondents who had been, and remained attracted to teaching because of:

My love for teaching and the opportunity to ‘turn them on’. [ET]

I wanted to ‘make a difference’...to excite them about their learning. [ET]

Table 1. Teachers’ motivation, job satisfaction, commitment and self-efficacy

Over the last three years...	Decreased		Stayed the same		Increased	
	<i>English teachers</i>	<i>Portuguese teachers</i>	<i>English teachers</i>	<i>Portuguese teachers</i>	<i>English teachers</i>	<i>Portuguese teachers</i>
... my motivation has...	33%	37%	52%	49%	15%	14%
... my job satisfaction has...	35%	20%	50%	57%	15%	23%
... my commitment has...	35%	3%	50%	55%	15%	42%
... my self-efficacy has...	25%	8%	55%	62%	20%	30%

I always wanted to be a teacher since childhood. [ET]

Seeing their faces light up when they achieve something they couldn't do before. [ET]

Being inspirational to young people. [ET]

Passing on knowledge, seeing children making progress. [ET]

Portuguese teachers also highlighted intrinsic reasons for entering the teaching profession, such as the willingness to teach, the opportunity to educate pupils, the relationship with children and young people, sharing experiences with people, the opportunity to learn and develop, feeling useful in society, the challenges associated with teaching, and a calling.

What attracted me to teaching was enjoying sharing experiences, the opportunity to learn and develop which is a key issue in the teaching profession and the opportunity to educate children and young people. [PT]

I decided to enter teaching because I enjoyed my subject matter and I think it was a dream coming true... [PT]

Teaching was a calling for me... [PT]

I entered teaching because of the opportunity to improve individual abilities in learning and reflection, to share experiences and to reflect upon the values of school and society... [PT]

What attracted me to teaching was the motivation for the art of teaching and the opportunity to relate to young people... [PT]

I think that I entered teaching because of my willingness to teach and the fact of being useful and committed socially... [PT]

I joined the profession because of the work with children and the opportunity to always learn something new... [PT]

This is even more significant when set against responses to questions concerning the teachers' working conditions. All English teachers had experienced an increase in working time and reported that they regularly worked beyond their statutory hours (100%); 90% experienced increases in bureaucracy; 100% experienced increased external control and public criticism; 70% said that imposed curricular innovations had contributed to a lack of motivation; and 100% stated that the increase in public accountability and criticism had led to lower morale.

The vast majority of the Portuguese teachers also stated that, over the last few years, there has been an increase in working time (95%), in bureaucracy in teaching (95%) and in public accountability and public criticism of teachers (96%) (see Table 2). They also reported that there is greater control on teachers' work (69%) and that they regularly work beyond the minimum time demanded (96%). Working conditions for both sets of teachers were, then, becoming more demanding as a result of increased incidence of centralist reform agendas.

In some cases, extrinsic motivations were also cited namely employment opportunities (the lack of other professional prospects), teacher social status, the opportunity to have a career, and professional stability.

Table 2. Teachers' views on their working conditions

	Agree		Disagree	
	<i>English teachers</i>	<i>Portuguese teachers</i>	<i>English teachers</i>	<i>Portuguese teachers</i>
There has been an increase in bureaucracy in teaching.	90%	95%	10%	5%
There is greater control on teachers' work.	100%	69%	0%	31%
There has been an increase in working time.	100%	95%	0%	5%
There is an increase in public accountability and public criticism of teachers.	100%	96%	0%	4%

Teaching wasn't my first choice...I would like to do something else. [PT]

Teaching was my choice as a profession due to the timetable and the opportunity to do other things at home... [PT]

When I joined the teaching profession it was just the opportunity to do something... I mean, it was the first job which crossed my way... [PT]

I entered teaching because of career opportunities and social status. [PT]

Changes in professionalism

All English and Portuguese teachers regarded themselves as 'professionals' in the traditional sense which we defined earlier in this paper. Within this general agreement, however, when asked to 'rank order' seven characteristics of their professionalism, English and Portuguese teachers prioritised them differently (see Table 3). In general, continuing learning, commitment, moral and social purpose and care received the highest rankings among English teachers, whereas Portuguese teachers valued more care, commitment, continuing learning and collaborative cultures. It is reasonable to suggest that 'care', for English teachers, has begun to slip down their priorities as pressures to provide measurable test results have increased.

Table 3. Characteristics in teacher professionalism (rank order)

English teachers	Portuguese teachers
Continuing learning	Care
Commitment	Commitment
Moral and social purposes	Continuous learning
Care	Collaborative cultures
Discretionary judgement	Discretionary judgement
Collaborative cultures	Moral and social purposes
Task complexity	Task complexity

Table 4. Effect of recent policies on your work as a teacher

	Positive	Negative	No effect	Mixed effect
English teachers	40%	20%	25%	15%
Portuguese teachers	38%	10%	52%	0%

This seems to be confirmed, as 85% of the English teachers stated that the development and implementation of national policies had affected or changed the way that professionalism was now being defined. When asked what elements were under attack or being promoted, most stated that their discretionary judgement (60%), moral and social purpose (45%), commitment (35%) and care (40%) were under attack; whereas collaborative cultures (45%), continuing learning (90%) and task complexity (35%) were being promoted. These findings confirm recent research on teacher professionalism in which, it is suggested that there is an increased emphasis upon measuring pupil attainment in relatively narrow areas of the curriculum (i.e. Literacy, Numeracy, Science) through target setting, national testing, the aggregating and publication of these in 'league tables'; and that the increase in monitoring, inspection, targets and the associated increases in workload and stress are eroding the broader moral and ethical purposes of teachers.

Table 5. The effects of national policy and school leadership on teachers' professionalism

	English teachers		Portuguese teachers	
	Strongly agree/ Agree	Disagree/ Strongly disagree	Strongly agree/ Agree	Disagree/ Strongly disagree
With the national policy initiatives teachers are granted more autonomy to make decisions at classroom level	30%	70%	39%	61%
The design and implementation of curriculum initiatives at school level contribute to teachers moving beyond teacher individualism	80%	20%	59%	41%
There are no more collaborative opportunities between schools and other institutions	68%	32%	73%	27%
With the new curriculum arrangements, teachers participate more in informal assessment of pupil achievement	50%	50%	59%	41%
There are more opportunities to develop cross-curricular work with my students	60%	40%	79%	21%
The new non-discipline based curriculum areas enhance knowledge integration from different subject areas	50%	50%	80%	20%

Portuguese teachers also claimed that recent national policies have affected the way in which they think their professionalism was now being defined (64%), but they found difficulty in identifying the characteristics under attack and those being promoted. This relates to their knowledge about national policies which they described as 'unclear' or at best 'ambiguous'. They also spoke of the lack of clarity of communication which makes their decision making processes difficult and that these also lead to uncertainty of initiative. They stated that making decisions implies taking risks, but that they would be blamed if things went wrong. In other words, they felt uncomfortable and unsafe in making decisions due to ambiguity in policy texts:

We find it difficult... legal texts are unclear, we can read and interpret them differently, and this is going to create problems in different schools (...) They should be clearer... [PT]

Overall, Portuguese teachers tended to agree that the characteristics under attack were: discretionary judgement (83%), moral and social purposes (71%), commitment (63%) and care (53%). Those being promoted were: task complexity (77%), collaborative cultures (73%) and continuous learning (67%). They also thought that they lacked information and training opportunities in order to help them deal with recent changes, which, again, contributed to their feeling uncomfortable. This made it even more difficult for them to define the boundaries of teacher professionalism. Thus, insecurity and ambiguity emerged as key issues in their discourse, and these militated against their sense of professionalism, with implications for their sense of professional identity.

There is an emphasis on work which isn't useful. [PT]

There are always curricular changes going on and that is a threat to educational stability and to a secure and stable job... [PT]

Teachers are not used to making decisions. They are not trained to make decisions and they get confused, they do not know what to do... what kinds of decisions they can or cannot make... [PT]

Teachers don't get enough information about what to do. There is no legal support for their work. [PT]

The effects of policy on teachers' work

When asked directly whether national policies affected their classroom work and, if so, what the effects were, 40% of English teachers reported a positive effect; 20% negative, 25% no effect and 15% stated that the effects were both positive and negative.

Examples of typical responses were:

On the whole, having a focus is helpful, but when it becomes too prescriptive then it becomes more of a problem. [ET]

Makes me reflect on my current practice, but have to provide evidence of what I have changed! [ET]

Can interfere with creative flow of children and teaching as I need to ensure that certain targets are met. [ET]

Gives us clear aims and guidelines to work towards and follow. [ET]

Recent policies and strategies are very positive. [ET]

It is the last comment which is the most interesting in relation to the more positive changes in the reform agenda and its management and promotion which teachers have been experiencing over the last two years. Many teachers' complaints may be traced back to earlier, radical reforms which were implemented quickly and largely without regard to an understanding of conditions in schools and classrooms and teachers' own professional cultures and broader 'ethical/social' agendas. More recent reforms in England have seen the maintenance of a central agenda which contributes to set a strategic direction but which also supports teachers in their implementation of this, recognising the importance of their use of discretionary judgement and the need for ownership of change and improvement. Thus, for example, over the last two years, the British government has in England:

- begun to promote school self-evaluation, with external inspection as an auditing process;
- promoted the well-being of teachers through attention to reduction of bureaucratic tasks, provision of classroom assistants and a workforce 'remodelling agenda' which now guarantees that every teacher will have a minimum of 10% of their time outside their classroom;
- promoted a creativity agenda and personalised learning in schools;
- promoted a range of schemes for collaborative cross school learning through 'Networked Learning Communities' and a national Primary Strategy for Learning Networks;
- increased the ability of teachers to assess some pupils' (Year 2) achievement, thus reducing external scrutiny.

Thus, alongside their negative responses, these English teachers spoke also of the advantages of:

- working in a fully collaborative team [ET]
- networked learning communities [ET]
- meeting other teachers—reflection upon practice [ET]
- chance to work in different ways...new initiatives that are relevant and school-based [ET]
- greater freedom with the curriculum [ET]

Nevertheless, the negative impact of 'too many initiatives' remained strong:

- I want to work with children instead of rushing around with bits of paper [ET]
- Overload of initiatives, which don't have time to be bedded in [ET]
- Paperwork which doesn't lead to improvement [ET]
- Parental questioning, devaluing of our work...media portrayal of teachers as incapable [ET]

- Working with negative colleagues...poor relationships [ET]
- Lack of time to fine-tune planning documents, mark, gather resources [ET]
- Having to prove everything I've done by documenting evidence for other people [ET]
- Losing creativity...rigid planning [ET]
- Low energy levels, lack of time and not being prepared as well as I would like to be [ET]

When asked about the effects of recent policies on their work, the majority of the Portuguese teachers reported endless changes going on in education, structural problems in education in general, lack of teacher commitment, and excessive bureaucracy:

New curriculum changes haven't been very positive, they are not discussed, not evaluated... [PT]

... because when their [curriculum directives] effects start to appear, they change again or teachers move to another school... [PT]

Teachers do not engage by curriculum policies, they have to be committed and they have to enjoy what they do... [PT]

There are many teachers who are not aware of curriculum directives and individualism still dominates. [PT]

Documents are elaborated and put in files because of the inspection, but they are not put into practice [PT]

I think there are too many meetings, but we don't discuss, we don't make decisions... [PT]

Teachers have loads of meetings and they get bored if they are asked to do collaborative work... People cannot stand more meetings... [PT]

Teachers spend a long time dealing with bureaucracy and analysing legal texts... [PT]

When asked about the areas in which they had experienced the greatest increase in satisfaction in the last three years, Portuguese teachers referred mainly to situations related to their work in the classroom: teaching the subject, ability to enhance pupils' learning, relationship with pupils, the teaching/learning process itself, the ability to meet pupils' needs, the contact with the pupils. Less frequently reported, were issues such as collaboration with colleagues, new syllabi, new compulsory non-disciplinary curriculum areas (e.g. civic education, project work and supervised study), sex education, teaching students with special learning needs, being a tutor and dealing with students' problems, better working conditions, ability to professional growth and self-confidence.

One of the areas in which I experience greatest satisfaction is being able to meet every pupil's needs in order to enhance communication and interaction in the classroom, such as civic education and supervised study. [PT]

It is good to me to feel that pupils are under control and that this has an impact upon pupils' behaviour and achievement. [PT]

It is great to get pupils' motivated and feel that they are learning something... [PT]

I feel good when I feel confident in myself and my work and that makes the difference in my pupils' learning. [PT]

It is good to know that I teach in the same school and see my students' growth... [PT]

Areas in which they had experienced the most dissatisfaction, were: bureaucracy in teaching, the amount of changes and reforms in education, large classes, pupil behaviour and lack of motivation, new compulsory non-disciplinary curriculum areas, namely project work (cross-disciplinary work), lack of time, lack of collaborative work, parents and teachers' lack of motivation, low salary, criticisms in relation to teachers, pupil assessment, school administration, poor working conditions, lack of efficiency in education in general (which leads teachers' lack of involvement), and lack of provision of relevant education courses and opportunities. The most frequent negative responses among English teachers concerned deterioration in parental support, opportunities to attend to individual needs of pupils (of care), and the consequences of government initiatives; and the most positive responses (fewer), related to opportunities for C.P.D. (Continuing Professional Development), creativity and planning.

The effects of national policy and school leadership on teachers' professionalism

Frequently, questions were asked in relation to changes in autonomy (ability to take decisions at the classroom level), arguably central to traditional notions of teacher professionalism, and school cultures and practices.

The effects of national policies were described by English teachers as: 'not giving time to effectively bed in one process before other, new initiatives need to be implemented'; 'bureaucratic and unnecessary—reflects a lack of trust'; 'raised standards for pupils, overloaded staff'; 'gives structure and progression'; 'drives the curriculum forward constantly'; 'learning is more focussed'; and:

A 'buzz' is returning to the teaching profession as the over-prescription of previous strategies is reduced and teachers can use their own skills, expertise and interests to enthuse and motivate pupils. [ET]

It is clear, however, that for most of the teachers over-prescription and lack of trust in teacher autonomy remain problematic. The picture that is beginning to emerge, however, is that there are two lenses which the teachers are using: the national policy lens and the school culture lens. In the case of the former, there remains disquiet, despite the positive moves towards collaboration and relaxation of prescriptive curricula and national testing and school inspection regimes. In the case of the latter, it is clear that the headteacher has a key mediating role which determines how the national initiatives are played out in the school context. For example, 65% of English teachers said that they were motivated to take new roles in implementing curriculum initiatives at school level; and 65% said that they participated in school decision making processes; whereas 65% said that they did not have time to discuss their curriculum practices with colleagues in school; and 60% stated that they made their own decisions about how to teach and assess their pupils. Whilst the kinds and

quality of leadership were not the focus of this research, it is clear that school leaders do have strong positive or negative direct and indirect influences upon the commitment, motivation, job satisfaction, self-efficacy and classroom practices of their staff and that these influences are of particular significance in terms of teachers' motivation, self-efficacy, job satisfaction, commitment and sense of professionalism in times of change and instability.

In contrast, overall, Portuguese teachers' disquiet focussed upon school leadership issues. Perceptions about school culture and leadership were negative and pointed to an unclear perspective about some aspects of their work: 66% of the teachers did not feel motivated to undertake new roles in implementing curriculum initiatives at school level; 71% stated that working relationships were characterised by individualism (we rarely discuss professional matters); 74% felt that they were not encouraged to undertake leadership roles; 63% stated that their opinion and experience were taken into account in the decision-making process at school level:

[Current curriculum directives] were not designed; they contribute to pupils' and teachers' lack of motivation. [PT]

[Teachers] are not supported by the management team at school. [PT]

We don't know what is going on, we don't know what we are expected to do, there are no guidelines... [PT]

It is very hard to get in touch with school administration; I think we don't feel supported by them. [PT]

In the classroom it is possible to enhance motivation and success. But outside classroom people lack motivation because people at the school administration don't do their job... [PT]

This may relate to the election-based appointment system for headteachers in schools in Portugal and the lack of training and development programmes which are in direct contrast to the plethora of opportunities for headteachers' preparation in England.

Portuguese teachers also stated that the design and implementation of curriculum projects at school level contribute to move beyond individualism. This view seems to meet the philosophy and goals of recent government initiatives which are underway, which relates to teachers' views of their professionalism, when they talked about the lack of clarity, coherence and articulation of national policies. In other words, it seems that it is possible to identify two levels of discourse emerging from teachers' accounts: i) the rhetoric level—which corresponds to policies' expectations and priorities, associated with a 'positive image' of the professional, and ii) the action/practice level—which is far from the rhetoric. Put it differently, there seems to be a 'conflict zone' between what teachers claim to understand and what they put into practice.

Discussion

By and large, Portuguese and English teachers were critical of the national policies, and, within this, highly critical of the ways in which recent policies have been implemented in schools. They claimed that they lacked the (timely) information,

training and resources to fulfil the roles and tasks expected from them. Their perceptions include, however, a sense of ambivalence, which needs to be understood in the light of the contexts in which they work and of their own views of what it means to be a professional and the systems of school leadership. A number of issues emerged from both quantitative and qualitative data: the increase in bureaucracy linked to increase in workload; change of expectations of professionals (i.e. discretionary judgement, moral/social purposes/care under attack through national policies); the contrasting influence of school leadership on the motivation, commitment and quality of work of the teacher. Findings also suggest the existence of some strengths in teachers' views of their professionalism, namely the importance of continuing learning and collaborative cultures, the relevance of project-oriented work at school and an integrated perspective of the curriculum and a broad understanding of schools' and teachers' work. However, a number of limitations also emerged, such as feelings of ambivalence and conflict, associated with increased bureaucracy, cultures of loneliness and the lack of understanding and ownership of the process of change.

The issues which arise from this study touch the heart of the government agendas for raising the quality of education in schools and the consequences of this for school level leadership and management and for teachers. It seems clear that they:

- challenge vocational identity (associated with traditional professionalism)
- result in increases in bureaucracy linked to increase in workload
- change expectations of professionals by others and themselves, i.e. discretionary judgement, moral/social purposes/care under attack despite positives in C. P. D., through national policies
- create less time for meeting: individual needs, planning, giving feedback to pupils, working with colleagues
- increase the importance of the quality of school leadership to the motivation, self-efficacy, commitment and job satisfaction of the teacher

For Portuguese teachers, it remains to be seen whether this is a temporary, transitional phase which will result in a renewed sense of autonomy and whether, as in England, the quality of school leadership will become recognized as a key determining factor on the quality of teachers' work. For English teachers, the concern is still whether new identities which are emerging as a result of many years of reform will ensure that commitment to the job of educating the whole child socially, personally and academically will be replaced by a narrower, more technical sense of identity which provides a narrower focus on a limited range of pupil attainment indicators. By and large, professionalism in both countries seems to be marked by ambivalence and conflict associated with the lack of (clear) direction and continuing challenge and contestation of existing identities.

Note

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