

Paper 2/1 - Crossing Glances and Practices on Early School Leaving in Portuguese Upper Secondary Schools

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This paper focuses on Early School Leaving (ESL) in Portugal. ESL was identified by the European Union as a major social problem, but its characteristics differ across Europe. Portugal still pre-sents higher percentages of ESL, although they have decreased in the last decade. This paper explores school-based practices addressing ESL in search for local measures to tackle ESL. It is based on the analysis of school policy documents to clarify the perceptions of school actors and highlights the institutional discourse about its prevention. Data was gathered in 4 upper secondary schools in Porto through interviews to principals, students and parents; and focus group discussion with peers and staff, as educational stakeholders. This allowed the interpellation of multiple subjectivities that can be associated with the allocation of each subject to particular power positions within the system. The triangulation of these subjectivities allows a more holistic view on each measure. Our research has identified a set of measures addressing a diversity of factors affecting ESL: the provision of economic support to students of low economic status by a “Social Cohesion Group”; The focused attention to students’ specific needs in terms of social competences and content knowledge by a “Class Advisor”; The adjustment of the curriculum to the class needs by means of “Pedagogic Differentiation” and “Supplementary training” for national exams by the use of extended “Credit Hours”. However, in Portugal ESL is not fully recognized as a problem in need of tackling. Different actors have dissimilar awareness of the measures. Principals were the most enthusiastic; teachers were aware of the measures but not always of its purpose; parents and youngsters were the less aware; and the latter, in general, were not consulted about the measure.