

## ***Images of Pedagogical Innovation: Escola da Ponte (Portugal)***

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**Abstract:** This paper highlights a pedagogical experience that began in Portugal in 1976, namely that of the Escola da Ponte, the success of which was based on a shift from the graded school model. Unlike the majority of educational reforms that were tested throughout the twentieth century, changes were made in Escola da Ponte precisely due to the fact that the genetic matrix of the school model, the classroom, had been called into question. Therefore, it is not surprising that since the late 1980s, Escola da Ponte has received multiple visitors, associated with the knowledge of new ideas and pedagogical methods. Departing from the research of Larry Cuban (2008), however, the initial aim of this paper is to reflect on the inflexibility of the school model. Secondly, with a view to understanding how Escola da Ponte was «regarded» by its visitors (based on their own photographic records), the use of visual documents in historical research is addressed. The pedagogical project of Escola da Ponte is then discussed. Finally, a number of photographs depicting pedagogical action in the School in the 1980s and 1990s are considered. Based on the assumption that images are representations of objects, in other words, re-representations (Colleldemont, 2010), this paper seeks to reveal what the photographs sought to transmit, and how they should be interpreted in terms of pedagogical innovation.

**Keywords:** Escola da Ponte; pedagogical innovation; educational project; open-plan school; visual sources; Portugal; twentieth century.

Received: 21/03/2019

Accepted: 24/08/2019

### **1. Introduction**

The present text highlights a pedagogical experience that began in the second half of the 1970s<sup>1</sup>, namely that of *Escola da Ponte*, the success of which was based

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<sup>1</sup> Escola da Ponte was located in Aves, in the county of Santo Tirso (Porto-Portugal), in an open-plan building until September 2012. It was later transferred to another parish in the same county. Up until the academic year 2001/2002, it served solely as a primary school (1st cycle of basic education).

on a shift from the graded school model<sup>2</sup>. Unlike the majority of educational reforms that were tested throughout the twentieth century, not only in Portugal, changes were made in *Escola da Ponte* precisely due to the fact that the genetic matrix of the school model, the classroom, with its underlying idea of pedagogical standardization, had been called into question. The main concern of the project's mentor (José Pacheco) was the management of the heterogeneity of the school population – in other words, the construction of a non-unifying school (Pacheco & Pacheco, 2015). However, there were other educational action assumptions that contributed to innovation<sup>3</sup> and the school success of pupils, such as a strong connection with the local environment, reflected in the definition of the curriculum (and consequently in learning), the involvement of parents and guardians in school life, democratic life and the establishment of the learners' autonomy.

The success of the *Escola da Ponte* project is also evaluated, given its projection in the field of education- its acknowledgement in Portugal occurred in the late 1980s; in Brazil, only after 2001, the year of the publication of *A escola com que sempre sonhei sem imaginar que pudesse existir* [The school I always dreamt of but never imagined could exist], by Rubem Alves, in which he recounts his experience in *Escola da Ponte* (Alves, 2001). We are confronted with a pedagogical experience that was developed outside the scope of the school system; it falls within the line of research of Marie-Laure Viaud (2005), in the so-called «different schools», «schools of reference» and «alternative schools», among other designations. In the context of the INOVAR Project – *Roteiros da inovação pedagógica: escolas e experiências de referência em Portugal no século xx* [Pedagogical innovation itineraries schools and experiences of reference in Portugal in the twentieth century] – Joaquim Pintassilgo and Alda Namora reflect upon the meaning contained in the aforementioned designations. They highlight the alternative nature of the experiences/schools, the «radicalism of their options», the «vanguardism they seek to assume», the «exemplariness to which they aspire», and the «experimentalism they risk» (Pintassilgo & Namora, 2018, p. 11)<sup>4</sup>.

As previously mentioned, since the late 1980s, *Escola da Ponte* has established itself as an experience of reference in the field of education. Therefore, it is not surprising that it has received multiple visits associated with the knowledge of new

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<sup>2</sup> From a broader perspective, namely the main features of *school culture*: graduation and classification of pupils; division of knowledge in autonomous disciplines according to a specific hierarchy; strict criteria for the evaluation and progression of pupils; strict distribution and use of school time and space, thus configuring the idea of classroom (or «class») as the space-time of teaching and learning, «led» by a single teacher who controls the information and communication (Nóvoa, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Although the concept is far-reaching and subjective, educational innovation here is understood as defined by Kirkland and Such (2009, p. 10): «[Educational] innovation is the application of a new resource or approach that changes social practice, creating some value». Furthermore, educational innovation is usually regarded as a dynamic process resulting from an intentional action (Blamire & Prosser, eds., 2017).

<sup>4</sup> Within the scope of Portuguese historiography, the INOVAR project seeks to analyse a series of more significant experiences/schools that called into question the graded school model, in the light of history.

ideas and pedagogical methods (a situation that has continued up to the present time).

That said, and initially departing from the research of Larry Cuban (2008), the aim of the present text is to reflect on the inflexibility of the school model, which will provide a context for the shift that characterises the pedagogical experience in question. With a view to understanding how *Escola da Ponte* was «regarded» by its visitors (namely with recourse to their own photographic records), the issue of using visual documents in historical research is addressed. This is followed by an attempt to characterise the pedagogical project of *Escola da Ponte*, particularly its most distinctive feature, the shift from the graded school model. Finally, a number of photographs depicting pedagogical action in the School in the 1980s and 1990s are considered.

In short, it is the aim of this text to capture the sense of identity of the pedagogical experience, the scope that gave rise to the *educational community*<sup>5</sup>, without forgetting how it was observed/evaluated by a number of external actors.

## 2. Inflexibility of the school model

According to Larry Cuban (2008, p. 85), the fact that educational reforms are successive, «reforming again, again, and again», to use his words, points to their having failed to eliminate the problems they sought to resolve. He adds: «although there is motion, there is no change» (Cuban, 2008, p. 93). Whatever the argument, educational reforms «were concrete and potentially transforming manifestations of a certain present-past», and simultaneously contained a kind of idealization and expectation in relation to the future (Magalhães, 2010, p. 77). It is known, however, that these processes of change (or rather, attempts to change), caused antagonistic reactions. In fact, in the line of research of João Barroso, the reforms are interestingly analysed «in light of the different political perspectives and actors, pedagogical trends and strategies of change» (Barroso, 2000, p. 75).

Within the economy of the present text, what is important to acknowledge is the fact that the educational reforms that were tested throughout the twentieth century gave rise to a number of changes, however what remained is what constitutes a surprising factor; the class (which made collective education possible – *teaching many as if they were just one*) – based purely on the genetic matrix of the school model. In other words, «in this matrix and its structures, the reforms encountered remarkable friction, which reduced their impact, diverted their path and even blocked their effects» (Barroso, 2000, p. 65). Moreover, right from the beginning, the criticism of the graded school model was based on the fact that it did not take the individual differences of the pupils into due consideration (Silva, 2017). For example, one of the assumptions on which the idea of *active school* – which emerged in the 1920s, a fertile period for pedagogical debate, was based was as follows «l'enfant n'est pas fait pour l'école; c'est au contraire l'école qui doit être faite pour l'enfant et tenir compte de ses besoins et de ses possibilites» (cited by Hameline, Jornod & Belkaid,

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<sup>5</sup> Referring to the possibility each school had to draw up its own educational project that would «define the particularity of each community» (Estêvão, 1995, p. 92).

1995, p. 60). However, it is above all the vision of class as a homogeneous whole that is affirmed throughout a considerable part of the twentieth century, the progress of which occurs in a uniform manner, but not on the basis of the individual progress of each of its elements. This undifferentiated and invariable perspective of the school population, associated with a unidimensional and mass conception of the child, contradicts the idea that in a class, the pupils may have much in common without any of them being the same as anyone else. Basically, the model was designed for an «average pupil», to whom an «average curriculum» would be applied, interestingly at a time when scientific pedagogy was drawing attention to individual differences. Indeed, as noted by João Barroso, it is paradigmatic that all pedagogical utopias at some stage adopt the vision of a «classless school» (Barroso, 2000, p. 77). On the other hand, according to Larry Cuban, acknowledging that the school, in the second half of the twentieth century, ended up adapting to the pupils, it is remarkable that:

The core processes, what we might think of as the DNA of the graded school – labeling, segregating, and eliminating, those who do not fit – have largely endured in the persisting practices of testing, ability grouping, differentiated curricula, and periodic promotions (Cuban, 2008, p. 76).

In the Portuguese case, but not only, the failure of a series of reforms implemented in the second half of the twentieth century was related to their *externality*, since they omitted the central nucleus, namely the classroom (the DNA of the school referred to by Larry Cuban). The construction of open-plan schools in the years 1970-1980 is an example. The intention of these schools was to do away with the spatial notion of classroom; on the other hand, the *phase system* was introduced in primary education as a means to suppress the annual selection of pupils. However, these measures did not produce the desired effect, whether due to their strong opposition on the part of the teaching workforce, or as a result of their implementation outside the framework of a systemic policy supporting the dissemination of innovative principles. In fact, it is clear that the reforms were unsuccessful because of other factors, namely the adoption of the same formal model whose main characteristics consist of: i) A deterministic conception of change (through central government regulation); ii) The exogenous nature of the reform elaboration process; iii) The application of the reform by means of a normative integration process (Barroso, 2000). Moreover, as referred to by the same author, this occurred «with the main «global reforms», which marked the recent history of education in Portugal (Galvão Teles, 1963; Veiga Simão, 1973; Roberto Carneiro, 1987)» (Barroso, 2000, p. 83).

The most striking idea to emerge is that the school is continuously subject to reform measures, and one may go as far as to refer to a *tyranny of change*, suggesting that its functioning is never satisfactory and can always be improved (Iglesias, 2005). This author resorts to an ironic tone to highlight the following:

Todos los gobiernos quieren reformar total o parcialmente la educación, y, si nos atenemos a la cantidad de iniciativas, podríamos pensar que asistimos a una constante renovación y mejora de la enseñanza, aunque lo único que queda claro es que los jóvenes prolongan en el tiempo su estancia en la

institución escolar, retardando cada vez más su incorporación al mundo del trabajo (Iglesias, 2005, p. 9).

Finally, it is certainly worth noting that reformist intentions are always based on the assumption that the school has an underlying sense of future, and is full of expectations and idealizations. Furthermore, educational systems are constructed more for imagined rather than real societies, and, in the light of history, we know that they change at a very slow pace (Lehmann & Chase, 2015).

### 3. The image as historical evidence: some considerations

Visual sources have been used for several decades in the field of childhood and educational history. However, only recently has research sought models to interpret images (Sureda & Pozo, 2018). Thus, the question is not whether visual documents are of recognised importance in the research of history (consensual, to a certain extent), but rather whether the images convey significant and exclusive information in terms of school culture. Essentially, what is at stake is a theoretical (and, obviously a methodological) position, which should be translated into change: from the use of an image for mere illustration purposes (the primacy of the written source still stands) to the use of visual documents as a primary source with specific analytical parameters. This issue will be discussed further ahead in the context of the historiography of education over the last two decades. It may be useful here to cite three authors, Erwin Panofsky, Philippe Ariès and Francis Haskell, whose contributions have proven invaluable to the acknowledgement of the importance of figurative sources in historical research (in other words, for interpretation and understanding of the past). As regards the work of the first author, the studies on iconology published in the late 1930s<sup>6</sup> are particularly noteworthy. According to Panofsky (1989), the interpretation of images (in a far more comprehensive manner, of any work of art) involves the functioning of three levels to understand their meaning, namely: *primary or natural meaning*; *secondary or conventional meaning*; *intrinsic or content meaning*. The first results from practical experience (familiarity with objects and events); the second from the knowledge of literary sources (familiarity with specific themes and concepts); the last, from *synthetic intuition* (familiarity with the essential tendencies of the human mind) (Panofsky, 1989). This approach expresses well the difficulties that underlie the interpretation of visual documents. On the other hand, as recently highlighted by Sureda Garcia and Pozo Andrés (2018), Philippe Ariès worthily marked the beginning of a new era of research on childhood by basing the historical narrative on the systematic use of iconographic materials. Finally, Francis Haskell (1993, p. 3) stressed the fact that there have been historical periods in which «seeing has appeared to provide a more useful way of understanding the past than reading». In this regard, the most expressive example is that of the European numismatists and antiquarians of the mid sixteenth century, for whom the study of

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<sup>6</sup> *Studies in Iconology*, Oxford University Press, 1939. A chapter in Portuguese was published from this work of Panofsky in the book entitled *O Significado nas Artes Visuais* [Meaning in Visual Arts], Editorial Presença, 1989.

coins brought the idea that the figurative sources «could bring them into close and exhilarating contact with aspects of the past that were not apparently accessible in any other way» (Haskell, 1993, p. 25). However, the great concern or premise of the cited work (in line with the rationale of Panofsky) is the following: «seeing can itself be learned only by complex stages» (Haskell, 1993, p. 25).

In fact, over the last two decades – it should be noted that the International Standing Conference for the History of Education (ISCHE) held in 1998 focused precisely on the theme of the «visual» – the attention given to iconographic sources has not translated into a consensus on the use of the image in the history of education. One may simply recall the «debate» established in 2005 between a group of Belgian historians of education (Catteeuw, Dams, Depaepe & Simon) and Margolis, regarding an article published by the latter in 1999, in which he valued the use of photographs as a primary source (See Braster, 2011). At the time, the aforementioned Belgian historians were of the opinion that visual sources could be used solely as a complement to written sources (See Idem). Two of them relativized this position a few years later, arguing that it is not the source that «emerges» at the beginning of historical research, but rather the point of departure- determinant for the selection and use of sources (Depaepe & Simon 2010).

Notwithstanding the above, the intention here is to highlight the fact that in the last decade in particular, the visual memory of the school has become the object of special reflection and theorization. A central idea, that draws lessons from works published as of the late 1990s by researchers such as Peter Burke and Richard Leppert, is that the images are representations of objects (re-representations). In other words, they convey a «way of seeing» that stems from the historical, social and cultural moment (Colleldemont, 2010, p. 135).

Methodologically, the difficulties underlying the interpretation of images call for well-structured analysis models. Indeed, as recently referred to by Sonllewa, Sanz & Torrego (2018, p. 31), «la valía de las investigaciones con fuentes documentales iconográficas reside en la importancia de que el investigador exponga de forma detallada cómo ha llevado a cabo el trabajo con este tipo de material gráfico». One of the important issues is the question of the motives behind the production of images (Colleldemont, 2010). The photograph is a record of a particular moment, among many other moments of the past that are lost. Therefore, it is of interest to know what motivated the capture of a specific image, who did it and why (González & Comas, 2016). It is not by chance that Ian Grosvenor (2010) refers to the need to relate the recorded moment to moments of the past that were not recorded; the issue, it should be noted, is about contextualizing the «visual». In this line of reasoning, graphic representations of the school (considering the different typologies) are an important source to gain understanding of the educational phenomenon, but they do not enable a vision of the entire contemporary and historical reality (Grosvenor, 2007). In this regard, it is important to recall the elucidation of an eminent political scientist on the need (and advantages) of triangulating various sources of evidence (Putnam, 2000). Notwithstanding the above, visual sources have the potential to open new narratives. The relevance of photography may be seen, for example, in contemporary research on young people's perception of their school experience (See Burke, Grosvenor & Norlin, 2014).

#### 4. The pedagogical experience in *Escola da Ponte*: a shift from the graded school model

The most distinctive feature of the experience at *Escola da Ponte* since the mid-1970s, mentored by Professor José Pacheco, is its shift from the graded school model (Canário, 2004). In other words, this means that the pedagogical project challenged (and successfully) the structure of the graded school - the homogeneous classes. It involved implementing a process of deliberate change, geared towards finding solutions to deal with the heterogeneity of the school population. On the other hand, it is worth noting that innovation was based on an instituting logic, that is, on professional knowledge (that of the teachers) constructed in context, «combining collective action and reflection» (Canário, 2004, p. 33); and not, therefore, on an institutional logic - that of innovation under tutelage (Canário, 2005).

The main motive of the pedagogical project constructed in *Escola da Ponte* was, in fact, to promote teaching adapted to the differences and characteristics of the pupils. In addition, it implied a strong involvement of the local community (namely parents and guardians), the affirmation of a human rights policy (guaranteeing equal opportunities and participatory and democratic citizenship) and, not least, an «active and responsible sense of institutional autonomy» (Barroso, 2004, p. 11).

However, according to José Pacheco and Maria de Fátima Pacheco, the accomplishment of the afore-mentioned principles involved «attributing particular value to how learning was carried out and to the contexts in which learning took place» (Pacheco & Pacheco, 2015, p.11). In the pursuit of a non-unifying school (without classes), it involved the creation of a pedagogical dynamic in an open-plan school:

The *Escola da Ponte* is an open area school for teachers, built by their own will, where no walls were erected where architects had previously tore down the walls. Architecture also plays an important role in achieving the project objectives. The layout of the indoors space finds out its major expression in an open space concept whose identification is with a *workshop*, according to Freinet, or *laboratory school*, naming Dewey. It is a school building that allows the development of a pedagogy oriented to a social practice of integration in school and in life, combining knowledge with know-how. At school there are no classrooms and no classes. A single space could receive a work group at the beginning of a working day, could serve the dramatic expression during the morning, and also could receive, at the end of the day, the children who will participate in the debate. In the same day, the polyvalent space could be a canteen, an assembly or even hosting dramatic and physical-motor expression moments... (Pacheco, 2004, p. 95)<sup>7</sup>.

As for the pedagogical organization of *Escola da Ponte*, José Pacheco e Maria de Fátima Pacheco provide an explanation:

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<sup>7</sup> Although the pedagogical project started in the mid-1970s, it should be noted that open areas only emerged from 1984 on the initiative of the pedagogical team.

The pupils are organized into groups that are formed on the basis of the educational needs, whenever there are new projects. They move around the spaces of the school according to the areas of knowledge they are exploring at particular times, working with different teachers, developing work which is conducive to reflection, critical thinking and a research component.

It is in this context that evaluation is seen as a learning opportunity moment and it occurs when the pupil wishes, or rather, when he/she feels ready to explain the knowledge he/she has acquired (Pacheco & Pacheco, 2015, p. 12).

Thus, particular emphasis is given to the horizontality of relationships, the autonomy of the learners, the teamwork of the teachers and their educational action, based more on offering support than masterly communication (hence the reference to «educational supervisors»). The possibility for pupils to work individually or in a group (peer-learning plays an important role), expressing a set of activities developed in various flexible learning environments is also fostered. Moreover, and drawing on the words of António Nóvoa, «knowledge acquisition is accomplished from the perspective of appropriation and research, and is not limited to a sequence of classes and disciplines» (Nóvoa, 2017, p. 14) – basically, learning through discovery.

On the other hand, evaluation is a key element, in that it affirms itself as the regulator of pupils' learning; among other meanings, this suggests that each pupil is acknowledged as having a personal appropriation trajectory of knowledge and experience.

Curriculum management is another important issue in the *Escola da Ponte* experience. In fact, since the mid-1970s, the School has developed its pedagogical project within the scope of the local context. This means that, as far as curriculum management is concerned, the characteristics and knowledge of the school community are valued – the curriculum (flexible and resulting from teachers' autonomy) is configured to take pupils' life experiences into consideration, thus preventing underachievement (Leite & Fernandes, 2009).

Accomplishment of autonomy is referred to on the assumption, on the part of the pedagogical team, of flexible curriculum management – a decisive step towards the construction of a school for all (Leite & Fernandes, 2009). However, the issue of autonomy should also be considered from a different perspective, namely from that of institutional autonomy, grounded on contextualized professional practice, on the existence of cooperative self-learning devices (study circles), on the feeling of belonging to a pedagogical team, with an underlying theory and consolidated in the peer, constituted by collective action and reflection. In short, and in the words of Rui Canário (2004, p. 39), this autonomy is based on «the professionalism of a teaching team». It is also possible to build on the previous references to the autonomy of the learners. The organization in nuclei (initiation; consolidation; further development) conveys the importance of the pupils' work and the idea that their autonomy, in terms of their ability to plan activities, collect and interpret information and adopt evaluation procedures, is progressive. In this case, autonomy is supported by a series of pedagogical devices such as evaluation records, a fortnightly plan, an aims grid, project records, the «tutorial», a list of problems of the school and the town, in addition to a responsibilities map. Finally, a word on the implication of the pupils in



the collective life of the School and their accountability. Here, the sense is not only that of the pupils' democratic participation in the various dimensions of the school organization, but above all the democratizing effects contained in this participation. Hence, the pupil assembly is paradigmatic. According to Paulo Morais, «the meetings [...] are a concrete example of living in a community» (Morais, 2017, p. 189).

To close this section, the following should be noted. The success of *Escola da Ponte* was the result of teamwork that was capable of further developing the *professionalism of teachers*, of establishing bridges with the local community (based on the understanding that the School could only change if it changed its relationship with the community), of experiencing real (and not imposed) autonomy, and within the scope of deliberate change, of constructing an innovative and consistent pedagogical project, geared towards prevailing over the graded school model.

## 5. Meanings of visitors' photographs (*Escola da Ponte*)

Since the late 1980s, *Escola da Ponte* has established itself as an experience of reference in the field of education. Therefore, it is not surprising that since the late 1980s, it has received multiple visits associated with the knowledge of new ideas and pedagogical methods.

This section seeks to understand how *Escola da Ponte* was «regarded» by its visitors, with recourse to photographic records captured by the visitors themselves. The sample selection criterion was as follows: to select photographs taken by visitors of *Escola da Ponte*, in the 1980s and 1990s (these years correspond to a consolidation of the educational project), involving pupils and / or teachers in the context of work inside / outside the school building. It was only possible to choose five photos (kindly provided by Professor José Pacheco). Naturally, the limitations imposed by the size of the sample are evident. Additionally, there is no knowledge on the authorship of the visual documents.

Methodologically, the qualitative analysis proposal of Braster (2011) was adopted, which is developed in three phases: i) Describe what is seen; ii) Explain what is seen (and not seen); iii) Formulate hypotheses about what is seen (and not seen). However, before describing the set of photographs, it is important to bear in mind the context of each one (it is not only a case of describing).

In all the photographs, active pupils may be observed (individually, in pairs or in groups), who are quite involved (pupils are never looking at the camera), but in highly diverse situations, namely: tutorials; building «models»; drawing and taking notes on elements resulting from the direct observation of nature (therefore, outside the school building); working in a large group, autonomously and moving freely. Only in two photos is the figure of the teacher present, more precisely in a tutorial situation (more formalized, so to speak, in that which was taken in the 1990s), and in close proximity to the students. Most of the photos display spaces inside the school building. In two of them (both in 1980), the teacher and pupil are wearing smocks. The following may be noted with regard to the school furniture and teaching material: the blackboard is only partially represented in one of the images; there are many didactic resources available to the pupils; the furniture does not include individual

desks. Finally, in all the situations represented, a shift from the graded school model is clearly evident.

Considering what is not observed in the photographs (or is less expressive), one may be led to think, for example, that the educational action of the teachers is limited to directly supporting the pupils and to forget the educational situations in which teachers perform equally important tasks (namely, in curriculum management and in the regulation of student learning). In fact, as already stressed, familiarity with the specific context is necessary, namely the pedagogical project of *Escola da Ponte*.

Let us now look at the photographs and identify the features that, from my point of view, the photographers sought to highlight (and considered more innovative) in the pedagogical project of *Escola da Ponte*. The idea of educational progress is evident in different ways. Firstly, the proximity between pupils and teachers, in other words, the horizontality of relationships is particularly evident in Photos 1 and 2. As already characterized, the teacher is, above all, an «educational supervisor».

**Photo 1.** Teacher clarifying/supervising two pupils (1980s).



Source: Private collection of José Pacheco.

**Photo 2.** Teacher and pupils in tutorial (1990s).



**Source:** Private collection of José Pacheco.

Secondly, the idea is conveyed that the appropriation of knowledge is carried out along the lines of research, learning by discovering and developing one's own projects - the autonomy of the learner, whether working individually or in pairs, even in a large group (cooperating), but always with great freedom of movement and at his/her own pace. The importance given to the ways one learns and to the contexts in which one learns is evident (See photos 3, 4 and 5).

**Photo 3.** Pupil working on a personal project (1980s).



**Source:** Private collection of José Pacheco.

**Photo 4.** Outside, two pupils drawing and taking notes (1980s).



**Source:** Private collection of José Pacheco.

**Photo 5.** Pupils developing creative expression activities (1980s).



**Source:** Private collection of José Pacheco.

Finally, even though it was not possible to identify their authorship, the five photographs give substance to the following idea: pedagogical action takes place in different spaces – therefore, we are distant from the image of a classroom-centred pedagogy, one that was consecrated in the late nineteenth century.

## 6. Final considerations

The first consideration, which emerged at various points of the narrative, is that the successful experience of *Escola da Ponte* is founded on the consistency and innovative nature of the pedagogical project. In other words, the pedagogical project is what defines the «real autonomy» of the School. What should also be borne in mind is the fact that the underlying idea of this project, designed and put in practice in the mid-1970s, is that an open-plan school should allow for educational action – which, in fact, was the case as of 1984. Thus, the aforementioned pedagogical intention pre-exists the open-plan building. This last assumption leads us to the following consideration: the idea that the open-plan physical space, per se, does not pre-define or induce an «open pedagogy», and cannot be regarded as something static. In fact, the school space is a social construction that is dependent on interactions among educational subjects, objects and the building itself (Ribeiro & Silva, 2018). In sum, the pedagogical project defines the scope of action in which individuals (namely the teachers) will act, while also determining how the work spaces are organized. This does not mean the «value» of the layout of the open-plan space is ignored (just as those promoting the experience in question do not ignore it) for fulfilment of the pedagogical project.

On the other hand, it is important to emphasize that the *Escola da Ponte* experience represents a real break down with the school model. This means that this experience, in the last 40 years, was organized according to the students individually considered. Therefore, an opposition which marked the educational field since the last third of the nineteenth century, that was between a «theoretical» model and the difficulty of putting it into practice, was overcome in the above mentioned experience.

What also seems important to underline is that this experience was developed outside the scope of the school system; therefore, the observation of Rui Canário (2004) makes sense when it comes to innovation despite reforms. Moreover, at certain times, the government did not support the ongoing renewal process (in fact, it tried at all costs to curb it). In this sense, talking about *Escola da Ponte* is also talking about resilience.

Referential in the educational field since the late 1980s, the experience of the *Escola da Ponte* has never been (despite some attempts that have been made for this purpose) effectively replicated in other contexts. Thus, is not enough to respond to new ideas and pedagogical methods to produce innovation. Indeed, if there is a lesson that can be drawn from the mentioned experience is that, innovation is a dynamic process resulting from an intentional action conceived in the day to day teachers' professional knowledge in context.

Finally, with regard to the understanding of pedagogical innovation, the idea that the sources (especially visual documents) give back to us is essentially based on the following assumptions: horizontal relations (teacher and students); teacher

as «educational supervisor»; pedagogical action taking place in different spaces (including outside the school building), allowing, for example, individual or group work and with students to have free and open mobility; learning through discovery.

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