

## 2.1. Education governance, autonomy and accountability

### SP - (18869) - NETWORK GOVERNANCE FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT: AN EXAMPLE FROM PORTUGAL

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#### Short Abstract

Since the end of the last century that Portugal is witnessing a restructuring of the State, due to an ineffective state bureaucracy and the emergence of school administration models calling for community involvement. Moreover, there has been a preponderant orientation towards school's autonomy, whose policies are among the most emblematic of the New Public Management "educational toolkit" (Verger & Curran, 2014, p.256), giving rise to programs and practices of a very different nature, with a focus on school-based management, but also on pedagogy, allowing schools to decide about their curriculum and educational projects, according to their social contexts (ibidem).

In this sense, certain policies have been enacted based on reflection, negotiation, and joint work (e.g., school external evaluation), contributing to a gradual reduction of the State's hierarchical control, thus giving rise to network governance. This is the case of the Pedagogical Innovation Pilot Project (PIIP) (2016-2019), a State's initiative founded on school-based management, aiming to promote students' success and combat school dropout. It occurred in six school clusters (4355 students/ 711 teachers), located across the country, which were given greater autonomy in the organizational, pedagogical, and curricular domains (Costa & Almeida, 2019).

PIIP brought together multiple actors, whose number and identities vary, through a plurality of levels (e.g. experts, municipalities, teachers, parents, public educational administration, etc.). PIIP has been about how to break with school's pedagogical rigid organization and change school actors' representations. Moreover, it has inspired a current policy that after the approval of an innovation plan allows schools to manage the national curriculum matrix above 25% (maximum value of the policy in force).

In this paper, we use PIIP as an analyser of the upper mentioned changes in the coordination and control of the education system, network oriented. Based on an evaluative study of PIIP (Costa & Almeida, 2019), mixed methods (Creswell & Clark, 2017) were used: qualitative, with archival research techniques and 85 interviews to key informants (school and deputy principals, coordinators, year and class directors, etc.); and quantitative, through a questionnaire applied to all teachers, students and parents covered by the PIIP (300 teachers answered, 2100 students and 1300 parents).

Findings indicate that network governance was central to enhance school actors' engagement and stakeholders' mobilization in PIIP's conception, enactment, and monitoring, through questioning and joint reflection. Equally significant, it has happened within a results-oriented framework that combines autonomy and accountability, in which the PIIP actors have agreed to be accountable for their results (to reach zero retention and dropout and promote the quality of learning), by carrying out contingent innovative strategies to attend their (contextualized) problems. Notwithstanding, despite the changes that occur towards network steering, signs and manifestations of hierarchical governance remain, introducing greater complexity and hybridity into governance processes, which are a result of a historically deeply rooted bureaucratic form of managing collective action in Portugal.

#### References

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