

*The Crisis of Schooling? Learning,  
Knowledge and Competencies in Modern  
Societies*

Edited by José Manuel Resende and  
Maria Manuel Vieira

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Sarah Erskine (University of Glasgow)

In this tripartite collection, Resende and Vieira present a refreshing and provocative view of schooling and learning in modern society which 'have been in a transformation process since the 60s' (p.3). While the editors acknowledge their book is not seeking to provide the definitive answers to the debate surrounding 'education and formation systems in modernity', they do endeavour to pose new questions and 'defy the theoretical-methodological imagination of social researchers' (p.5). The use of the word 'crisis' in the title may at first glance appear negative, but ultimately the authors view crisis as an opportunity to seek positive outcomes to schooling at secondary and higher education levels. Generally speaking, this level of positivity is the book's greatest achievement.

The chapters in part one deal with school formation, personal development and the labour market respectively. Martins's chapter provides an interesting interpretive proposal of the Portuguese EU Level III key-competencies referential. How lifelong learning impacts on adult development and how schools gauge adults' competencies is well evaluated and readers are encouraged to positively consider environments that provide lifelong learning in

places other than schools, such as the workplace. Moir's appraisal of Personal Development Planning (PDP) in higher education discusses its value to students and staff alike by assessing the virtue of self-reflection on personal, educational and career development. Moir shrewdly weighs the potential virtues and pitfalls of PDPs, concluding that while PDPs are accepted in principle, in practice they fall foul of the complex relationship between the personal and institutional spheres in which they inevitably operate. Caetano's chapter assesses the general education policies of Portuguese schools in relation to a school's changing mission, focussing on low levels of literacy, low levels of certification and deficit of citizenship. Portugal has the lowest level of educational qualifications in Europe and also the highest level of social selectivity in the completion of degree-level courses, and here the author convincingly argues that changes to pupils' socialisation at school must be implemented alongside curricular changes and new approaches to learning.

Part two presents three chapters on the challenges facing educational professionals, as based on empirical evidence. Dionísio's chapter concentrates on the dilemmas facing professional guidance counsellors in education. Here we appreciate the struggles they face under the crossfire of criticism from colleagues, students and their families, as well as in determining the best course for a pupil's wellbeing as opposed to that of the school. Dionísio puts forward the notion that counsellors interact with several worlds – denunciation, engagement and resignation – and concludes that the views of individual counsellors should be collated in order to reach universal agreement on a school's mission, 'at a time when the school's mission is not unified' (p.75). Resende's chapter represents the perspective of public school teachers and concentrates on one major broken

promise of the Portuguese modern education system, concerning the political socialisation of teenagers in the state-sponsored 'education of citizenship' program, and convincingly surmises that a youth's engagement with his/her personal sphere has the greatest effect on connecting to the public domain. Melo's chapter concentrates on the views of secondary teachers on ranking schools in league tables by collating the opinion of teachers to gauge the negative connotations such rankings have on the profession. Drawing on empirical evidence from Portuguese schools, the author insightfully concludes that because of these league tables, teachers have tended to focus more on academic achievement than to apply effective performances in tandem.

Part three assesses self-determination and the views and experiences of the role of pupils, their families and schooling options. Vieira's chapter attends to socialisation in the context of informal learning and the efforts of one pupil to foster his/her own career path within the institutional setting of the school environment. Vieira concludes that the potential autonomy of pupils and their self-determination is ultimately achieved through the course choices they make. Delaunay's last chapter offers a general overview of self-determination in the learning environment, mainly by seeking to discern the consequences of practical knowledge, autonomy in learning and responsibility at work. Focussing on hospital interns and residents, Delaunay concludes that while the nuances of the consideration of a medical postgraduate career is 'an area of controversies and criticism' (p.135), interns and residents in fact endeavour to take full advantage of their time in hospitals to enforce their academic profile. The element of spontaneity arising from the choices of interns and residents is a striking feature and once again

this chapter successfully emphasizes the reciprocal relationship between an individual and his/her host institution.

Why this study focuses on Portugal is nowhere clear and, while the editors admit that 'a vast study field is still to be explored' (p.5), it is ultimately left to the reader to appreciate that the nuances of the three main themes therein – i.e. school formation, personal development and the labour market; the challenges facing education professionals; self-determination and the role of pupils, their families and schooling options – could potentially be contrasted to modern Western societies elsewhere. To alleviate this, a general summary at the end of the book could have offered clarity on the book's mission as well as provoke like studies in other countries as a means to stimulate future debate. The lack of such a component is definitely the book's weakest element.

However, this edited collection is undoubtedly scholarly and surprisingly easy to digest. The themes are thoughtfully structured and ultimately the chapters do not project the dynamics of schooling and learning in modern society in a negative light but, rather, seek to offer positive outcomes. The solutions to various issues are broached in all instances with care and insight, which, despite the lack of any final summary from the editors, should go on to encourage a fluid stream of debate. This book should predominantly interest academics and students in the fields of social sciences and education, as well as teachers and students from other disciplines who share a vested interest in all aspects of schooling and learning, its outcomes and receptions locally and globally.