



## Book Review

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Inês Félix  
*School journeys: Ideas and Practices  
of New Education in Portugal  
(1890–1960)*

Umeå University (PhD diss.)  
2020, 293 pp.

The aim of Inês Félix's dissertation, in brief, is to expand knowledge about the introduction, implementation and naturalisation of school journeys in the Portuguese system of secondary education in the period of 1890 to 1960. Attached to that aim is also an ambition to bring knowledge about the New Education movement, which the phenomenon of school journeys was attached to.

As the title and aim suggest, the book is about school journeys. On these occasions, the students together with their teachers travelled outside the walls of the schools with the purpose of learning and fostering. This was part of the New Education movement in Portugal and in several other countries in the same period of time. Thus, it is by far not only a Portuguese phenomenon. A basic idea of school journeys was to open up for a more active type of learning where students were more motivated and searched for facts and conclusions on their own. This was in contrast to a traditional type of teaching where students listened to teachers and followed instructions. The new ideas were, however, not just a matter of learning a particular school subject in a more efficient way. The idea was also to promote the fostering of a certain kind of citizen; a citizen that could think independently and critically, but also work together

with other people. Here it is important to keep in mind that the book deals with secondary education and a time period when that type of education was possible for only an elite section of society.

But the book is also about another school journey: the journey of a set of educational ideas through time and most importantly through an educational system. After the introductory chapter, including sections about aims, question, theory, and method, there is a chapter about the emergence of new educational ideas and practices in Portugal in the nineteenth century. It is followed by a chapter concerning the legal framework of school journeys, and then a chapter that gives a thorough explanation of the concept of school journeys as it was understood then. The journey through the educational system continues with a chapter on the organisation of school journeys (plans, decision making, purposes, and funding) and then on to a rich chapter about places and practices of school journeys. Here we learn about which sites the students travelled to. Four types of sites are identified and described: historical sites; industries and companies; natural sites; and education and social institutions. After that, there is a chapter on the preparation and assessment of the students. Here, the teaching and learning component of the journeys becomes more concrete. In the final chapter, the findings of the previous chapters are summarized and synthesized.

Thanks to well-disposed chapters, a fluid and clear language and a number of examples, we can follow how the original ideas about school journeys

were moulded and transformed as they passed through different parts of the educational systems and where confronted with various types of realities. In order to handle issues of moulding and transformation of educational ideas, Félix applies a number of theoretical constructs. It is the concept of *grammar of schooling* which originates from Larry Cuban's work and which was developed by David Tyack and William Tobin; it is the concept of *pedagogical paradox* developed by Marc Depaepe; and finally it is the concepts *alchemy of school subjects* and *reason of schooling* developed by Thomas Popkewitz. These concepts are mainly used in the beginning of the book and in the final chapter.

The book clearly shows that it was possible to establish something new in an educational system – school journeys – and how that was done. In the beginning, school journeys were quite rare, but they became increasingly common as the funding became stable and regulations were established. However, becoming established included a transformation process where some of the ideas connected to New Education was played down in the practice of planning and doing the journeys. Instead, elements of more traditional teaching practices in the different school subjects were picked up. Félix elaborates on this using the theoretical constructs mentioned above.

My overall standpoint concerning the scientific quality is that the design of the study and choice of sources, methods, and theories fit aims and questions well. Answers and conclusions are supported with a pertinent analysis of a lot of sources and different types of sources. The sources comprise legal documents, education press articles, educational monographs, educational handbooks, and school princi-

pals' reports. Félix carefully points out the limits of her analysis of the sources, which is done both in the method section and in subsequent chapters. However, some passages concerning this issue are unclear or too general. In some cases, the author could have been more precise concerning how many sources or documents that are supporting the claims. Sometimes, I miss formulations that clarify whether quotes or examples are representative for a larger number of documents. But this is a minor problem.

As to the theoretical contribution, I have some concerns. The theoretical concepts mentioned above are appropriate in relation to the aims and they are used in a good way. However, the theories of Cuban, Tyack, Tobin, Depaepe, and Popkewitz are not really challenged. These theories are not just a set of concepts, but grander narratives about how different parts of an educational system functions, how they are related to each other, and how educational change can be achieved, or not. To challenge such narratives is of course not an easy thing to do, but given that Félix's study covers several aspects of a reform process in combination with a good selection of sources, it should be possible, at least a bit. So, I am looking forward to three or four articles where each of the theories of these gentlemen gets a more critical review, on the basis of empirical findings.

While I do have concerns regarding the theoretical framework, this book constitutes a good contribution when it comes to methodology. In brief, previous research tends to have the following shortcomings: too much focus on ideals in for instance curricula, textbooks, and official reports; and too little focus on what happened in the schools and even less so outside the schools. All the material concerning the practicalities

of planning and doing school journeys is used by Félix to take the analysis beyond educational ideals and policy documents. Félix has made a great effort in collecting a rich material in this respect. Thus, Félix is not only producing new knowledge about school journeys in Portugal, in comparison to previous research she is also doing a more complete analysis of the phenomenon of school journeys; how it occurred, got established, and persisted.

A positive side effect of the rich material is that the readers can join the school journeys in the sense that Félix provides several examples of what students were doing, where they went, how they got there, what assignment the students had, etc.. And even though it is not the purpose, all the examples from everyday school life give interesting insights into life and society of Portugal in the period, which certainly contributes to making this dissertation a good read.

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