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**International inspiration and national aspirations: inclusive education  
in Portugal**

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# **International inspiration and national aspirations: inclusive education in Portugal**

This article critically analyses the recent developments and changes towards Inclusive Education in Portugal, through a policy analysis that includes the last three legislative frameworks. These policies will be analysed within their cultural and historical context, to explore the similarities and differences in the conceptualisations of diversity and inclusion; and the influence of international policies in the national policies that regulate the Portuguese schools' role in ensuring education for all. The 2018 policies aim to ensure that all students, regardless of their personal and social situation, have access and participate in an inclusive school, which aligns with the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (1994).

Keywords: inclusive education; Portugal; educational policy

## **Background and aims**

This article uses a critical policy analysis (Taylor 1997) that takes into account the principles of a comparative cultural-historical approach (Artiles and Dyson 2005) to answer the following research questions:

- (1) What are the similarities/ differences between the existing special/ inclusive education legal framework and the previous ones?
- (2) What conceptualisations of diversity and vision of inclusion do the Portuguese educational policies present?
- (3) What role do international policies, and specifically the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (1994) play in the national arena?

The research questions were used as a first framework for thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006) of Portuguese written policies, published between 1991 and 2018 by the Ministry of Education; these last three legislative frameworks guided

almost thirty years of developing inclusive education in Portugal. Given the current international interest in the Portuguese case (e.g. Hunt 2018; All Means All 2018) and the lack of international academic literature focusing on the Portuguese situation, this article aims to provide a rigorous analysis of the national policy developments that will allow for discussions about the case of Portugal and a better understanding about its cultural-historical context to develop internationally.

The use of ‘special education’ and ‘inclusive education’ in the article reflects the terminologies used in the policies analysed. For example, in the current policy framework, the terminology has shifted from ‘special education’ and ‘special educational needs’ (SEN) to ‘inclusive education’ and ‘each and every student’; however, the policy still refers to ‘special education teachers’ and that will be echoed in the article. Inclusive education is understood as a process that aims to realise the right of all learners to access, participate and achieve in education (UNESCO 2017).

## **Introduction**

The article is based on the premise that each policy exists within an ecological system, that reflects different international, national, regional, and local dynamics (Weaver-Hightower 2008). Countries are influenced by ‘globalized education policy discourses’ (Lingard 2010, 132) but the international influences are mediated by the people involved in the development of the policy (Weaver-Hightower 2008) and by the people involved in the ‘national systems of schooling’ (Lingard 2010, 132). The complex ecological system of which policies are a part of, include parallel versions of a policy in its ‘written, stated and enacted’ forms (Fulcher 1989). These parallel versions are created by policymakers, and subsequently rewritten, restated and turned into practice at the school level. An ecological perspective allows us to consider the different levels involved in policymaking, and in this article is complemented by a comparative

cultural-historical approach (Artiles and Dyson 2005). A comparative cultural-historical approach reinforces the need to consider the policies as part of a cultural and historical context, while considering participants (Who are the stakeholders of special education and inclusion?) and outcomes (in this case, visions of inclusion).

Inclusive education is, at the moment, one of the key international priorities as demonstrated by the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (United Nations 2015). The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (UNESCO 1994) has been a ‘source of inspiration’ across the world (e.g. Artiles and Kozleski 2016; Forlin 2006; An, Hu, and Horn 2018; Walton 2018; Runswick-Cole 2011). However, even the Salamanca Statement is an example of the complex dynamics in policy-making and its subjective interpretation has been problematised by Kiuppis (2014). Conversely, Hunt considers that ‘the possibilities of practice it affords are broader in that they are not severely restricted by linguistic or textual genres.’ (P. F. Hunt 2011, 14) and states that

*‘rather than arguing for the reframing of the Salamanca Statement definition of inclusive education, (...) the discussion should focus instead on building upon its discourse(s), by being explicit about that particular choice as opposed to another, and always moving clearly towards a choice made out of the glaringly evident need for a paradigm shift’ (P. F. Hunt 2011, 14)*

So, 25 years after its publication, the Salamanca Statement is an international milestone in the national attempts to create a paradigm shift towards more inclusive education systems, or as worded in the latest Portuguese policy a ‘civilizational landmark’ (DL54/2018 - Ministério da Educação 2018).

### **Contextualisation of ‘special education’ and inclusion in Portugal**

The national policies that regulate the Portuguese schools' role in ensuring the education of all students have followed the international developments around inclusive education. Portugal has been ‘experimenting’ with inclusion since the 1970s when a

group of blind students were integrated into mainstream school (Rodrigues and Nogueira 2011). In 1979, the national policy stated that ‘special education’ should, as far as possible, happen in mainstream schools and that schools should progressively readjust their structures (Law 66/79). ‘Special education’ should cater to students who needed specific responses because of their characteristics (physical, sensory, intellectual disabilities). At the time, it was accepted that some students would not be able to attend mainstream schools, because of ‘their characteristics’. This group of students would be catered for by ‘multipurpose workshops’, rehabilitation and ‘special education’ centres. Numerous ‘education cooperatives’ (CERCI - Cooperative for the Education and Rehabilitation of Citizens with Impairments) were created to respond to the needs of this group and were, in practice, ‘special schools’. In 1986, the Basic Education Law (48/1986) defined ‘special education’ as being part of mainstream education and depending on the ‘level of specific education needs’ students would either attend a mainstream or a special school.

Conversely, in 2018, Portugal had a total population of 10.3 million inhabitants, and a school population of over 1.3 million students, and 99% of students with disabilities attended mainstream schools, 86% of which in state schools, according to the most recent report from the National Observatory of Disability and Human Rights (Pinto and Pinto 2018) based on governmental statistics (Direção Geral de Estatísticas da Educação e Ciência - DGEEC).

The three national policy documents analysed are the 1991 Decree Law 319/1991, the 2008 Decree-Law 3/2008 and the 2018 Decree-Law 54/2018, all published by the Portuguese Ministry of Education. Even though other essential policies supported these three Laws, such as the ‘Student Profile at the End of Compulsory Schooling’ (Ministério da Educação/ DGE 2017), they will not be analysed to the same

extent as they fall outside the boundaries of this article. The following section presents the key characteristics of the three national policy documents and their relation to international ecosystem.

## **Inclusion? Thirty years of Education Policy in Portugal**

### ***Decree-Law 319/1991***

Published in 1991, the Decree-Law 319/1991 (DL 319/91), referred directly to ‘international recommendations regarding the access of students with disabilities to the mainstream educational system’, it established the right of children with ‘special educational needs’ (SEN) to be educated in mainstream schools and classes (Costa and Rodrigues 1999). The DL319/91 proposed the substitution of ‘the category-based classification, based on medical decisions’ by the concept of ‘special educational needs’ based on pedagogical criteria, a concept that had been put forward by the Warnock Report (Department for Education and Science 1978) thirteen years earlier. It proposed that ‘mainstream schools have a growing responsibility for the problems of students with disabilities or learning difficulties’, and that schools should be open to students with SEN, in a perspective of ‘schools for all’. The notion of ‘a school for all’, frequently used in Sweden (Brodin and Lindstrand 2007), made its way into that Portuguese policy. DL319 advocated the ‘education of students with SEN in the least restrictive environment’ and provided a list of responses which should only be adopted ‘when necessary to achieve the educational aims’ defined for each student. In 1991, ‘special education’ was understood as the ‘pedagogical responses that allow strengthening the individual autonomy of students with SEN, due to physical and mental disabilities’.

### *Decree-Law 3/2008*

Published in 2008, the Decree-Law 3/2008 referred to both inclusive and to special education, creating a strong divide between students who needed ‘specialised support provided’ due to ‘significant limitations at the level of activities and participation due to permanent functioning and structural alterations’, i.e. those ‘with SEN’ and ‘others’. This law was strongly influenced by the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF), and its Children and Youth Version (ICF-CY) (WHO 2001, 2007), both in the definition of the target population served, and in the description of student’s characteristics. The DL3/2008 aimed to ‘promote equal opportunities, valuing education and promoting the improvement of the quality of teaching and learning’. It considered that a ‘democratic and inclusive school, targeting the educational success of all children and young people’ was essential to achieve quality education, and that ‘a flexible educational system, that allows to respond to the diversity of characteristics and needs of all students’ to ensure quality education and educational success for all. The law referred directly to the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO 1994), claiming that the ‘notion of inclusive school, that is able to welcome and retain groups of students traditionally excluded’, and that given its aim of achieving ‘educational equity’ requires the ‘guarantee of equality in the access and in the results’. So, no school can reject the enrolment of a child or young person on the basis of their disability or SEN. Mainstream schools were expected to accept and respond to all students by using different strategies to respond to all the students’ educational needs in a framework of educational equity. ‘Individualisation and personalisation’ were strategies proposed to promote universal competencies and access to full citizenship for all.

However, ‘individualisation and personalisation’ were presented as opposed to the specialised support required by a minority of students to ‘promote the

biopsychosocial functioning'. Specialised support included adapted strategies, resources, contents, processes, procedures, and instruments and assistive technology. In this legal framework, special education's aims are the educational and social inclusion, educational access and success, autonomy, emotional stability, and promoting equal opportunities. 'Special education' worked towards principles of social justice and solidarity, non-discrimination, equal opportunities to educational access and success, and fighting social exclusion. However, the process of enacting the DL 3/2008 was highly contested by teachers and teacher organisations (e.g. Fórum de Estudos de Educação Inclusiva 2008) and some academics (De Miranda-Correia 2010) because there was a feeling that it consisted of a step back into the 'medical' categorisation and with SEN being equated to disability.

### ***Decree-Law 54/2018***

The Decree-Law 54/2018 published in 2018 was presented as aiming to develop the 'second generation inclusive school'. It was preceded by a review of the previous policy framework done by a working group constituted under the notion of the Salamanca Statement being a 'civilizational landmark' at the basis of a redesign of educational policy to promote better learning conditions for students with SEN in 'the regular school' (Despacho 7617/2016). The working group, composed by State Secretaries and representatives from various organisations (Education, Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities, Health, Social Security, Employment, Schools Council, National Institute for Rehabilitation, etc) engaged with numerous stakeholders (academia, teachers and teacher unions, parent's organisations, disabled persons' organisations, general public) to collect issues and solutions regarding inclusion. The project of law was then presented, and subjected to public consultation, both in writing and through several open talks organised across the country.

The Decree-Law 54/2018, ‘establishes the juridical regime on inclusive education’, based on an ‘inclusive school where each and every student, regardless of their personal and social situation, finds responses to their potential, expectations, and needs, and develops a level of education that creates full participation, a sense of belonging, equity, contributing to social inclusion and cohesion. This law makes clear references to key international documents such as UNESCO’s ‘Policy guidelines on inclusion in education’(2009), used to the define inclusive education, i.e. “a process that aims to respond to the students’ diversity of needs, increasing the participation in learning and school life”. Additionally, the law aligns itself with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations 2006) and the Lisbon Declaration on Educational Equity (Inclusive and Supportive Educational Congress 2015), aiming to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda (United Nations 2015). The Decree-Law puts the curriculum and student learning at the centre, and asks schools to recognise the ‘added-value of student diversity’ and find ‘ways to deal with difference’ adapting learning and teaching processes to the student individual characteristics and conditions, valuing their potentialities and interest, mobilising the existing resources so that all students can learn and participate in school life. The DL 54/2018 rejects the idea that ‘categorising is necessary to intervene’ and recommends that all students should achieve the ‘Student Profile at the End of Compulsory Schooling’ (Ministério da Educação/ DGE 2017), even if this profile is ‘reached’ through differentiated paths to educational success. This ‘Student Profile at the end of the Compulsory Schooling’ was another policy document that came out in 2018 and that contributes to the national priority of inclusive education, as it acknowledges student diversity and the complexity of schools in the mission of creating Education for All. The ‘Student Profile’ is based on principles and values that align with inclusive

education: learning, inclusion, stability, adaptability, coherence, flexibility, sustainability, humanism, knowledge, freedom, responsibility, integrity, citizenship, participation, excellence, rigour, curiosity, reflexion, innovation. The stated aim of this policy is for education and schools to develop individuals who are autonomous, responsible and active citizens.

DL 54/2018 proposes the use of assessment for learning, which considers academic, behavioural, social, emotional and environmental factors, and in which the main aim is to get all students to reach the "Student profile at the end of schooling". This law proposes an increased school and teacher autonomy, in which all schools have multidisciplinary teams involving teachers, 'technicians' (e.g. Speech and language therapist), parents and students. These multidisciplinary teams play a crucial role in identifying and monitoring appropriate learning and inclusion support measures in order to 'taking each student to the limit of their potential'. DL 54/2018 requires schools, teachers and multidisciplinary teams to identify barriers to learning and to propose diversified strategies to overcome those barriers, using a multilevel approach to provide access to the curriculum, based on the Universal Design for Learning (Rose and Meyer 2006; CAST 2018).

The DL 54/2018 proposes a tiered approach of responses to support learning and inclusion, organised into three levels: universal, selective and additional, and each level has corresponding target groups, and responses (see Table 1). This system seems to bear some similarities to the system of response to intervention (RTI) (McLaughlin et al. 2006; Fuchs and Fuchs 2006).

<INSERT TABLE 1 HERE>

The ‘universal level’ should be available to all students and includes curricular accommodations, differentiation, and extension, it involves changes to teaching and learning methods, assessment, and resources, considering learning styles and aiming to promote educational success. This level can involve interventions to develop pro-social behaviour, and small group interventions targeting academic aspects or behaviour.

The ‘selective level’ includes non-significant adaptations to the curriculum with changes made to the aims and contents (e.g. through altering sequencing or creating intermediate targets), the use of a differentiated curriculum, psycho-pedagogical support, the use of prior learning or extra support interventions, and tutoring. ‘Tutoring’, to foster the relationship between students and school staff that go beyond the traditional teaching and learning dynamics has been a strong trend in recent years (Despacho Normativo n.º 10-B/2018). Tutoring targets students perceived to be disengaged, and struggling, and involves assigning teachers to students to support planning and monitoring their progress. The measures proposed at the ‘selective’ level should aim to get all students to reach the ‘Student Profile’.

Finally, the ‘additional level’ implies significant curricular adaptations (e.g. different curricular contents) and should be available for students with considerable and persistent difficulties in communication, interaction, learning and can include responses such as the design of Individual Educational Programmes and Individual Transition Plans, modular attendance ‘by subject’, specialised resources, “structured teaching”, personal and social autonomy development. The decree-law states that the target of ‘additional level’ responses should be to foster autonomy, personal development, and interpersonal relationships, but it also makes clear that even at the ‘additional level’, preference is given to ‘in class’ responses.

Essential resources associated with DL 54/2018, are:

- Learning Support Centres within schools (CAA), dynamic, diversified, human and physical resource hubs that mobilise the knowledge and competencies of the whole educational community to promote quality of participation in the mainstream, support mainstream teachers, and support development of resources (teaching/ assessment);
- Inclusion resource centres (CRI) to support students with specific needs are settings outside mainstream schools, most are “user” organisations/ Non-Governmental Organisations, and some of them were once special schools. These resource centres have partnerships and collaborate with mainstream schools.
- Specialised units exist within certain schools to respond to students in the Autistic Spectrum and Deafblind students. In 2018, 2117 students in the autistic spectrum, and 2156 students with profound and multiple learning difficulties and deaf-blindness were supported in units within mainstream schools (Pinto and Pinto 2018)
- Reference schools for students with vision and hearing impairments that is mainstream schools with additional and specific resources to cater to the specific needs of these two groups of students

### **Similarities and differences between the 2008 and the 2018 educational policies**

The two educational policies presented within ten years of one another present several similarities, namely the use of Individual Educational Programmes, Individual Transition Plans, and Technical-pedagogical reports created by Multidisciplinary teams. In both frameworks, there is a call for environmental barriers to be identified and partnerships should be developed with external resources such as Inclusion Resource Centres (‘CRI’) which are commonly accredited “user” associations, and in some cases ex-special schools. Both laws propose reference schools for Early Intervention and for students with vision and hearing impairments: these are mainstream schools within which there are additional and different resources to cater for the specific needs of these two groups of students. In the 2008 law, there were also reference schools for students on the Autistic Spectrum and students with profound multiple learning disabilities, whereas the 2018 law proposes Learning Support Centres within schools (CAA).

<INSERT TABLE 2 HERE>

While there are several similarities between the existing law and the previous framework, there are also considerable differences. If we start by considering the ‘participants’ component, presented by Artiles and Dyson (2005) the target groups, that each law refers to, are considerably different. While the 2008 law, using the ICF/ ICF-CY (WHO 2001, 2007) terminology, defined as target group students with ‘significant limitations at the level of activities and participation due to permanent functioning and structural alterations; extended difficulties in communication, learning, mobility, autonomy, interpersonal relationships, and social participation’. The 2018 law refers to ‘each and every student’ being provided learning and inclusion support need. The use of the ICF in schools has been reported (Sanches-Ferreira, Silveira-Maia, and Alves 2014) to promote “a holistic view of students’ functioning” with school documentation displaying a strong focus on documenting limitations in Activities and Participation, not always as strongly associated to documenting environmental barriers experienced by students. Unrelated to the use of the ICF in the DL 3/2008, which could be used as a descriptor of functioning for every student, was the decision to require medical statements to support the decision of considering that a student had SEN. This, along with the definition of SEN to be ‘permanent’ created a dichotomous divide between students who experienced difficulties for ‘legitimate’ permanent health-related reasons, and those who were also disadvantaged and struggling and the reason was not health-related but could be due, for example, to socio-economic reasons. The DL3/2008 was working in the realm of disability and impairments, creating a clear divide between students who were experiencing difficulties because of health-related aspects and ‘the others’. The reasoning behind DL54/2018 in terms of the target group is considerably different as it requires teachers and schools to consider all students and to respond to their needs and characteristics regardless of their aetiology. Associated with this change,

is also the change in expectations towards the role of special education teachers. Previously the trend seemed to be for special education teachers to work with small groups of children identified as having SEN outside the classroom, often with minimal time with students and little or no collaboration with the mainstream teachers (Alves 2015). Conversely, the current expectation is for special education teachers to work as resources for the school, collaborating and supporting mainstream teachers in their role of responding to all students. Another considerable change was the abandonment of the use of 'specific individualised curriculum' (Currículo Específico Individual: CEI), as all students are now expected to achieve the 'Student Profile'. The 'CEI' was problematic in terms of equity, as it implied that some students would reach the end of compulsory schooling without being entitled to a diploma.

Going back to the comparative cultural-historical framework (Artiles and Dyson 2005), it is still early to assess the outcomes of this paradigm change, but the policy seems to push for a cultural change, in which all teachers are asked to plan and teach using the principles of Universal Design for Learning (CAST 2018). Possibly, given the change of definition of the target population into a much wider group, the DL 54/2018 presents a new 'label', that is students with specific health needs, for whom an Individual Health Plan should be developed.

## **Discussion**

The analysis shows that the international scenery plays a considerable role in Portuguese policies. Documents such as the Warnock Report (1978), the Salamanca Statement (1994) and the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (WHO 2007) have a strong influence in the conceptualisations of diversity and inclusion. The concept of "special educational needs" proposed in the Warnock report is

clearly present in the 1991 law; the 2008 law shows an undeniable contribution of the ICF; whereas the most recent policies (2018) align with the Salamanca Statement as they present a move away from the “language of special needs” into a language of student diversity in which “each and every student” is expected to learn and be included in the educational community. In the following sections, the results of the critical policy analysis will be discussed, guided by the three initial research questions: What are the similarities/ differences between the present legal framework and previous ones? What conceptualisations of diversity and vision of inclusion do the current Portuguese educational policies present? What role do international policies play in the national arena?

***What are the similarities and differences in the way diversity is conceptualised and inclusion is viewed in the present legal framework and previous ones?***

When focusing on international ‘inspiration’ for the national move towards inclusive education, it is clear that the influence of international dynamics is a persistent aspect. In 1991 references were made to the rights of children with special educational needs (SEN) to be educated in ‘ordinary’ schools. The notion of SEN was clearly based on the concepts proposed by the Warnock report, moving away from medical categories to an umbrella category based on pedagogical criteria. Seventeen years later, in the DL 3/2008, schools continued to be expected to be inclusive and respond to ‘traditionally excluded students’ in a way to ensure equity but the definition of SEN was reconsidered, to include only ‘normative’ disabilities (Dyson and Gallannaugh 2008) associated with ‘low frequency, high-intensity problems’ (Simeonsson 1994). The use of the ICF/ ICF-CY, inspired by an international trend and practices in other countries (e.g. Hollenweger and Lienhard 2007; Tokunaga and Tanaka 2009), was highly contentious, with supporters (Sanches-Ferreira et al. 2015; Sanches-Ferreira, Lopes-dos-Santos, et al.

2013; Sanches-Ferreira, Simeonsson, et al. 2013) and opponents (De Miranda-Correia 2010; Fórum de Estudos de Educação Inclusiva 2008). While the ICF, as a classification of functioning, did not offer either a conceptualisation of diversity, a definition of what is considered to be a SEN, or eligibility criteria to extra support, its use in the national law was perceived by many as a step back towards the development of an inclusive school. Ten years later, in the DL 54/2018, inclusion was put at the centre of educational policy, and the influence of international policy is evident through direct mention to the UNESCO definition of inclusive education (UNESCO 2009), the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations 2006), the Lisbon Statement (Inclusive and Supportive Educational Congress 2015), and the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations 2015). The conceptualisation of diversity is much broader than it had been in previous national educational policies, starting from the principle that schools must provide quality education, be inclusive and work towards the removal of barriers and stereotypes, through a non-categorical approach. The conceptualisation of diversity starts from the notion of a heterogeneous student population, including characteristics such as disability (physical, mental, visual, hearing), Special Health Needs (NSE), language (e.g. during exams use of a dictionary, PT 2nd language exam), and ‘predictors of school failure’.

***What vision of inclusion and conceptualisations of diversity do the current Portuguese educational policies present?***

The most recent Portuguese national educational policies, both the DL 54/2018 and the ‘Student Profile at the End of the Compulsory schooling’, seem to support a clear vision of inclusion. The conceptualisation of inclusion implied is that all students should have access, participate and be supported to succeed within mainstream settings. The aspiration to develop a more inclusive system and practices is evident, for example

in the recent projects created by the Ministry of Education (Autonomy and Curricular Flexibility Project - PAFC and Pilot Project Pedagogic Innovation - PPIP). These encourage schools and teachers to work collaboratively and in an interdisciplinary way, rethinking practices based on principles of curricular flexibility and school autonomy, to develop appropriate responses for all students. Moreover, in 2019, the media (e.g. Viana 2019) have reported that from May 2019, schools will be monitored in terms of their levels of inclusivity during school inspections. This seems like a logical step from the publication presented by the national Student Inspection Office reporting on the analysis of existing statistical data, and on the observations made by school inspectors during their school visits with regards to the challenges and ways to develop ‘an inclusive school’ (Inspeção-Geral da Educação e Ciência 2016).

As previously stated, the conceptualisation of diversity is based on the notion of a heterogeneous student population, that includes students with disabilities, students to whom Portuguese is an additional language and students who present some characteristics which have been associated with ‘school failure’. This broader conceptualisation of diversity is linked with the requirement for schools to identify and remove barriers and stereotypes and provide quality education ‘for each and every student’. However, the Decree-Law 54/2018 poses three main concerns with regards to the conceptualisations of diversity in schools. Firstly, the ambiguity present in wanting to “push away the need to categorise to intervene” while at the same time creating a ‘new category’: Special health needs (NSE), which encompasses students with physical and mental health problems that impact on attendance and learning progress. This denotes the complexity of finding a balance between developing a ‘school for all’ without forgetting the specific needs of some.

Secondly, the notion of 'Universal teachability' while also referring to the role of schools in 'guid[ing] each student to the limit of their potential'. This perspective that each student has 'a limit' has been challenged by Hart and colleagues (Hart et al. 2004), who have shown the negative impact of fixed ability thinking.

The third is the conflict between the way diversity and difference are presented, which suggests that student differences still being perceived as challenges to the teachers, in their role within homogenised educational systems of bringing all student to the same level. This is illustrated by statements used in the DL 54/2018 such as 'schools should recognise the value of student diversity', and also 'find a way to deal with difference'.

### ***What role do international policies play in the national arena?***

As it has been claimed throughout this article and considering almost thirty years of educational policy regarding inclusive education in Portugal, it is clear that international policies play a role in the way Portuguese national educational policies are developed. This influence is shown more consistently at the level of concepts, terminology and definitions used, and to a lesser extent, structures, systems and practices. This is consistent with the idea that international policies and discourses interact with the characteristics of national systems of schooling (Lingard 2010).

The Portuguese drive to create inclusive schools seems to be reinforced by international policies, like the Salamanca Statement. However, the national path towards creating and developing mainstream schools that accept and are committed to supporting the success of all the students seems to be more than simply a policy initiative, based on policy borrowing (Lingard 2010). There seems to be a strong cultural commitment to inclusion in Portugal. For example the DL3/2008 stated 'inclusion has been supported widely by professionals, scientific community and

parents'. This could be linked to the fact of inclusion being 'a concept with a positive value' (Nilholm 2006, 436). However, the current commitment from many mainstream and special education teachers, school leaders, parents, academics, and even the media, to create better, more inclusive responses to all students within mainstream schools seems to go past the 'valuing diversity discourse'.

## **Conclusions**

This article started from the principle that educational policies are complex systems in which various international and national dynamics interact (Weaver-Hightower 2008; Lingard 2010), and that government written policies only play one part in what happens in schools. By analysing Portuguese national educational policies related to inclusive education over an almost thirty years period, it is clear that international discourses have a strong influence in the rationale for the development of more inclusive schools and practices. However, internationally, there are conflicting discourses, such as the competing 'standards versus equity' agendas well reviewed in the context of England (Dyson, Gallannaugh, and Millward 2002; Ainscow, Booth, and Dyson 2006) and these, albeit present, do not seem to have had such a strong impact in Portugal. Another international trend is education being politicised, and Portugal is no exception, changes in political parties in government, often result in changes in educational policies. Nevertheless, there never has been a move back to creating a system that segregates students according to their characteristics. Portugal has made a significant path towards developing an inclusive educational system and needs to acknowledge and build on existing inclusive educational practices that are taking place in Portuguese schools and classrooms for a number of years. This country seems to have 'allowed in' international policies that serve as inspiration for the national aspirations of

developing an inclusive school for all, a mainstream school that responds to the needs of ‘each and every student’.

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