

PORTUGAL

PISA was like a mirror. Each time the results from PISA came out, the country would see itself in the mirror. When we compared ourselves to others who were in the image, we would see that we're not as tall as we thought, not as skinny, not as fat, or not as pretty as we had thought. So we needed to work towards becoming taller, and prettier in this image.

TITLE: "Strong Performers and Successful Reformers in Education: Portugal"

ANTONIO FIRMINO DA COSTA, *Professor of Sociology, University Institute of Lisbon*: In Portugal, we have a history of lagging behind in education. It took many years for this to be addressed. This lagging carried over from the 19th century, and was intensified during the long era of traditionalist dictatorship in Portugal.

ANTONIO NOVOA, *Professor of Education, Rector of the University of Lisbon*: At the beginning of the 20th century, the illiteracy rate was around 80 percent. Four in five Portuguese people were illiterate. This was a time when in most countries in northern Europe there was almost no illiteracy. So there was a very big gap here. Only after the revolution of 1974, the Carnation Revolution, only then did a process of investment, economic, public, social, professional investment in education, start to take place.

ISABEL ALCADA, *Minister of Education (2009-2011)*: The main goal was to make education universally accessible. To guarantee a quality education to everyone, and focus on the effectiveness of schools and the competency of teachers. To make sure that at every level of the education system, students could achieve results.

JOAO DIAS DA SILVA, *General Secretary, National Federation of Education (FNE) Teachers' Union*: Ten years ago we had a very high dropout and failure rate, and high rates of grade repetition. And we had a very high level of illiteracy among the families of our students.

STUDENT: *The raven and the fox.*

ANTONIO FIRMINO DA COSTA: So in this moment, several integrated public policies were put in place that tried to address this educational and competency deficit.

TEXT SLIDE: One important reform was to group schools that previously operated in isolation into "clusters" under centralized leadership.

TEXT SLIDE: This involved closing many small schools in rural areas and transferring students to larger schools, many of them newly built and with better facilities. The cluster system enables teachers to share ideas and gain from each other's experience and gives students wider learning opportunities.

DAVID JUSTINO, *Minister of Education (2002-2004)*: In 2002, we were going through a considerable crisis. We became aware that resources for education were not being used properly, there was low efficiency. To a large extent, this was because, since 1995, the school population had been decreasing, and we were still hiring a lot of teachers. The second problem was that we had a very high number of small schools in rural areas, very isolated, with very few students. So at this time we started a process of rationalization of the use of resources.

NUNO CRATO, *Minister of Education Since June 2011*: Very small schools with very few students, five or ten students in a classroom, those are the schools where students cannot progress because they're not in touch with others, they're not exposed to different experiences, with other religions, other life experiences, other social environments. Ten or twenty students in a school is just too few.

ANTONIO NOVOA: So it was necessary to close these schools, so we could consolidate them into schools that have a library, schools that have laboratories, schools that have critical mass, schools that have qualified teachers. Schools where it's not just this rural culture, this basic culture, that prevails. I think this is the greatest reform, the biggest change in Portugal in the last 20 or 30 years.

TEACHER: *This was a time of revolution for mankind. Ptolemy was born shortly after Christ. What did he discover?*

MARIA DE LURDES RODRIGUES, *Minister of Education (2005-2009)*: To date over 3,200 schools have been closed, and there are about 500 education centers that have been built, in some cases replacing these schools with many improvements. You can see that there are many examples of this all over the country. It is a process that in my opinion is irreversible.

TEXT SLIDE: Initially, schools consolidation sparked widespread protest. Parents worried that children would spend too long traveling to new schools.

TEXT SLIDE: Some teachers protested against what they perceived as negative change. But gradually school clusters won acceptance because of the benefits they brought for students.

TEACHER: *And what about you, what about your fingerprint? So, take the magnifying glass. If you can't make it out on the fingerprint, look at your finger.*

MANUEL ESPERANCA, *President of the Council of Schools*: I agree that schools with very few students and few or no facilities or links with other schools should be closed. Where they don't have a recreational space, a gym for physical education, or a library. I 100 percent applaud the idea of closing a school like that. But we have to be extremely careful about the size of these clusters we are creating.

JOAO DIAS DA SILVA: Many times we do our reforms from the roof down to the ground, instead of starting from the bottom up. What worries us, and we think this can be addressed, is the time that children spend travelling to and from school. This should be as short as possible.

CARLOS PINTO FERREIRA, *Director of Education, Ministry's Office for Education, Statistics and Planning*: At the same time, we have to take students from these places where there are disadvantages, and bring them to schools where the environment is stimulating. Where they can be more social, where they can achieve better results, and develop to the full extent of their potential.

DAVID JUSTINO: Mafra was the first school center that I helped inaugurate. It's a good example of a local politician who took on the responsibility of leading this merging process, and in this way made an important contribution to education.

TEXT SLIDE: Mafra, a municipality northwest of Lisbon with a population of around 70,000, has been one of the leaders in school consolidation. Mafra municipality's 17 parishes range from rural hamlets with a few hundred inhabitants to sprawling urban developments.

TEXT SLIDE: Mafra mayor Jose Maria Ministro dos Santos has pioneered a process of school modernization, closing down village schools and opening new, centrally located facilities.

JOSE MARIA MINISTRO DOS SANTOS, *Mayor of Mafra*: This park covers 27 hectares, it was a large area of farmland that was purchased by the municipality. We decided to build an area for sports here, to complement the curriculum of these two schools that have about 4000 students. The sports park has everything that is necessary for the sports development of the children. Football fields, athletic tracks, tennis courts, gymnasiums, swimming pools. The schools, and the children in general, use this space very intensively. Each one of our schools has libraries, computer rooms, cafeterias, and of course classrooms, fundamental to the educational process. But there are also rooms for parents, so that they have their space to meet inside. There are rooms for teacher education. The whole community should share in the use of this building. But it wasn't easy. Once the first part had been done, which was to construct the building, we then had to make the best use of it. How? By talking to the parents. There was a concept in Portugal, and in some places that still remains, that each village needs to have a school. It needs a school, a church, a graveyard, and various other things. What I was about to do was the antithesis of that, to centralize all of these schools into clusters. Imagine how dramatic that was, to remove the children who were often the life of these villages, and put them into these educational centers.

MARIA DE JESUS GERALDES PIRES, *Principal, Mafra Schools Cluster*: It hasn't been easy. If we think about it, we had come from a situation where the school in the village was very close to the people. The school was right there on the street. The

teacher was an important figure in these small villages. And all the everyday tasks were done by the teacher. He was the one who opened the door, closed the door, opened the school, closed the school, answered the phone. We lost this closeness, this central figure, this affective link between the teacher and the locality.

JOSE MARIA MINISTRO DOS SANTOS: There were communities that did not react well. And then what did I do? The school was ready. So the next step was to call the parents from the most problematic areas. And invite them to visit the school with me. And eat in the cafeteria, and sit in the computer rooms. And look at the library, and look at the gymnasium. We would spend a whole morning there. And then we would ask them: "Don't you think your children would be better here, rather than isolated in the village, with no one to play with?" "Yes, really, this would be better," they would say.

MARIA FILOMENA OUTEIRO, *Teacher, Mafra Schools Cluster: Come on, tell us what we're going to do today? What were we doing yesterday? A film about what? A film about what? It talked about who? Families of what?*

STUDENTS: *Animals.*

MARIA FILOMENA OUTEIRO: Before I was at this school, I was at a school in a more rural area. We didn't have a computer room, we didn't have a library, no cafeteria, the classrooms were very run down. And I was excited to come to work in an environment where I could be with other colleagues. And we sit together daily, and we share everything we do, each one shares any idea she might have.

MARIA DE JESUS GERALDES PIRES: *I'll talk to the department coordinator about this, but for the fourth year mathematics manual, you need to coordinate with the fifth year mathematics department, as well as the coordinator.*

MARIA DE JESUS GERALDES PIRES: Nowadays this organization works in a vertical way, so there is more sharing. We have pre-school teachers transferring their experience to primary school teachers, and this carries on, from one stage to the next. From the "first cycle" or junior primary school teacher to the "second cycle" teacher. There is a kind of "handing over" of the students from when they are three or four years old, when they come into kindergarten, until they are 15 and they leave the cluster.

PARENT: Of course, the new school has advantages. For the parents who work, the children can stay later. They can learn new things, English, fun science, and have after-school tutoring.

STUDENT: I notice that there is a difference, because in my old school, in the first year, there were only two boys. And now there are more, even though they are a little strange. I also like the other people, one of them is now my best friend.

TEXT SLIDE: In the PISA tests, Portugal continues to perform below the OECD average. But its results have improved across the board.

TEXT SLIDE: In PISA 2009, Portuguese students scored an average 489 points in reading, up from 470 in 2000. In mathematics, they scored an average 487 points, up from 466 points in 2003, and in science they scored an average 493 points, up from 474 in 2006.

TEXT SLIDE: Family background now has much less impact on students' performance. And the gap in reading skills between children from different backgrounds is now one of the narrowest in OECD countries.

DAVID JUSTINO: I think students benefit greatly from this school concentration, because they can leave the village environment. They are able to socialize better with their peers. They have all the resources they require for a good education.

JOSE MARIA MINISTRO DOS SANTOS: The difference between when I was growing up here, and now, is incomparable. When I was small, I walked around these fields, playing in my shorts, throwing water at each other, running from the police. Those were hard times. My mother would buy a pencil, a regular black pencil. We would split it in half, so I would share it with my brother. It was half a pencil for each. And when the pencil got too small, we would look for a straw and attach it, to make it into a longer pencil. That's how those times were, and I learned how to read like that. But I believe that my children, and the children that depend on me now, can have a different kind of success, and different kind of opportunities. And they notice it, they feel it, they get excited about these opportunities. I am absolutely convinced that this generation of students coming out of these schools will help improve this country.