

*The following text was originally published in
PROSPECTS: the quarterly review of education
(Paris, UNESCO: International Bureau of Education), vol. 24. no. 3/4, 1994, p. 501–18
©UNESCO: International Bureau of Education, 2001*

This document may be reproduced free of charge as long as acknowledgement is made of the source.

ANTÓNIO SÉRGIO¹

(1883-1969)
António Nóvoa²

António Sérgio de Sousa³ was one of the most influential intellectuals in the culture and politics of twentieth-century Portugal. A philosopher and journalist, sociologist and essayist, he was especially noted for his work as an educationist:⁴ ‘Sérgio’s philosophy, like that of the Greeks, was essentially a social theory of education, or, to put it more correctly, a $\pi\alpha\iota\delta\epsilon\upsilon\sigma\iota\varsigma$ (paideia)’ (Magalhães-Vilhena, 1975, p 97). The academic training and professional career of António Sérgio was marked by extraordinary diversity, with education playing an integrating role: ‘I do not consider myself to be a literary hack or a writer, but an educationist or a moralist who writes’ (1940).⁵ In 1958, when asked whether he would rather be known as a teacher, writer, economist or sociologist, he replied without hesitation: ‘Maybe as a philosopher, sociologist and social reformer and an educationist.’

Strictly speaking, António Sérgio had no detailed educational agenda. His work is not outstanding for technicalities or method, but rather for the mental ability to project education beyond the specific field of teaching. He belonged to a generation of intellectuals who were true scholars, endowed with a broad historical, philosophical and literary culture and able to see the overall picture of the major issues facing society.

However, unlike some of his contemporaries, Sérgio did not consider specific teaching problems to be beneath him. Education was not the mere (instrumental) extension of a wider philosophy. It was the kernel of his vision of society:

Everything comes down to one problem: the question of education, the public education system. It is, above all else, both a theoretical issue and a practical issue. Addressing the problem accurately implies drawing on all the resources of a nation’ [1918a, p. 43].

Born in Damão (a Portuguese colony in India at the time), António Sérgio went through childhood without schooling, which, in his opinion, did him no harm at all, even from a purely academic point of view:

Until I was nearly 10 years old (and even at the age of 10), I had no experience of school. After my subsequent arrival in Portugal, I was able to prepare myself rapidly for the elementary school examination for entrance to the Military College. I quickly found my feet and rose to be top of the class, which proves that my classmates’ previous schooling did not give them any particular advantage. I will not go into the educational problems implied by such a case (*Autobiography*).⁶

Having chosen a career in the armed forces, Sérgio soon lost interest in military affairs: the Republican Revolution of 1910 only hastened his decision to leave the Navy. He then went on a series of journeys to different destinations, including Brazil. Very significant was his stay in Geneva (1914–16) where he attended the Institut Jean-Jacques Rousseau; he developed the core of his vision of education in that crucible of the New Education. The first part of this paper will attempt to describe Sérgio’s time in Geneva and to indicate the sources of his educational

thought.

At the beginning of the 1920s, Sérgio settled in Portugal, where he had an opportunity to put some of his ideas for reform into practice. At the time, the group to which he belonged, A Seara Nova (New Harvest) exerted considerable influence on culture and politics. Sérgio was Minister of Education for a brief period and played a key role throughout the 'springtime of educational theory', notably as head of the Portuguese section of the International League for the New Education. The second section of this paper will deal with his activities for social reform through education.

In 1926, a military dictatorship was set up in Portugal, a prelude to the authoritarian and totalitarian regime of the 'New State'. Before long, António Sérgio was forced into exile. He worked both in the political opposition and as an essayist, systematizing a set of thoughts that included educational issues. In Portugal in the mid-1930s, education faded as the focus of his civic vocation; this makes Sérgio virtually indistinguishable from the founders of the New Education, for whom by this time education was no longer the launch pad for plans of social regeneration. Nevertheless, concerns of an educational nature still ran just below the surface of his thinking. In the third part of this paper, we will consider this period only in order to try to identify the lasting educational principles that constitute the foundation of Sérgio's work.

The death of António Sérgio in 1969—by coincidence, at the very time when Salazar, the man he had so stubbornly opposed, was himself on his death-bed—marks the end of a generation of intellectuals who saw education not merely as a specialized, professional field, but as the bedrock of the processes of social, economic and political change. The 1974 'Carnation Revolution' opened up a new phase in the history of Portugal, and it is not surprising that it witnessed the development of educational policies claiming Sérgio as their mentor. The final section looks at the relevance of Sérgio's thought in Portugal today.

Sérgio at the Institut Jean-Jacques Rousseau

This school for educational sciences was established in 1912 on the initiative of the Genevan psychologist Edouard Claparède,⁷ who arranged for its management to be entrusted to a philosopher from Neuchâtel, Pierre Bovet. It soon owed its fame to the second part of its name, which represented a whole programme in itself: the Institut Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

Between October 1912 and July 1916, just over 100 students attended the Institute, 80 of being foreigners. With its motley gathering of nationalities (sometimes from countries on opposing sides in the First World War), highly varied personal agendas, ages and intellectual levels, experimentation with methods, curricula and examinations and the desire to marry scientific research with harmonious coexistence, it was a world in miniature with a universal vocation imparted by its ambition to lead the field in the movement to reform education, even though, according to Bovet, 'one sometimes finds more cordiality than competence there' (quoted by Lavachery, 1935, p. 19).

Many of the students in those first intakes were content with this. Then along came Sérgio who, with several others, seemed to place intellectual demands on a different scale altogether. This 'student' was no 'disciple', neither when he arrived nor when he left. That does not mean that Sérgio's stay in Geneva was unproductive, and there is no reason to believe that he was disappointed by the experience. In fact, he found himself confirmed in a two-fold conviction: that his ideas on education were not those of an isolated, self-taught individual; and that being self-taught enabled him to see and think more clearly.

António Sérgio and his wife Luísa enrolled for the first time as ordinary students at the Institut Jean-Jacques Rousseau for the summer semester of 1914. Their stay in Geneva was interrupted for an unknown reason (the outbreak of the First World War?), but they enrolled again for the two semesters of the academic year 1915/16. The institute's chronicle welcomes the 'return' of the 'former students'.⁸ Sérgio, known there as Mr de Sousa, was clearly not an

obscure individual and there is no doubt that he made an impression: on 20 November 1915, he was elected president for the winter semester of the institute's teacher/student association. The proceedings of the association map out his career in this position: the strong impression that Sérgio made on the institute's director was apparent when, in 1932, the latter reported on the establishment's first twenty years. Recalling 'the mature students smiling condescendingly on the rather frivolous antics of the young', he includes in the former category 'a sometime officer in the Portuguese Navy' (Bovet, 1932, p. 191).

One of the most noteworthy impressions left by Sérgio in Geneva is the way in which he threw himself into an exercise which Claparède considered particularly important: writing an autobiography in the students' *Livre d'or* [Visitor's Book]. Claparède stressed the role that the institute he had founded should play as a centre of enlightenment and information. He believed that it should therefore be at the heart of a network through which one could trace the gradual expansion of the educational movement and the initiatives of those who were a part of it. Where did the students come from? Who were they? What would happen to them afterwards?

Sérgio found the idea not uninteresting, receptive as he probably was to its organizing and 'political' intent. Perhaps, too, he found some pleasure in putting himself seriously to the test and giving a lesson of sorts to his peers and even his teachers: 'I will write what could be a document for the educator. I would have found this book most interesting if my predecessors had done the same.'

In fact, when Sérgio wrote his autobiography, there were about ten curricula vitae in the book, but none longer than twenty lines nor set out to be anything more than a list of professional activities, a record of a series of events or an admission that the writer lacked any teaching experience to speak of. It is not surprising that Sérgio's contribution should have made a strong impression on the other students and served as both a catalyst and an example. Intended as a model, his entry did indeed serve that purpose.

First of all, several later autobiographies were based on Sérgio's. His own text was not really very original (parents, childhood, first steps in learning, relations with those around him, discovery of the world, experience of school, formative reading, choice of direction, etc.), but it was well in line with the spirit of the institute. He balanced commitment and detachment in a way that must have rung true in an intellectual environment which was both 'emotional' and science-oriented. On the strength of his own experiences, he put forward a critique of academic habits as if it were self-evident. The other influence exerted by the autobiography is possibly to have encouraged not straightforward imitation but emulation, the desire to equal his achievements, but without producing a carbon copy.

This effect of being a 'model' or 'counter-model' may have acted over the years on new students, who always browsed through the *Livre d'or* before starting to write themselves. Probably one of the autobiography's self-formative effects was that it allowed Sérgio to take stock of his own past and identify the main influences on his intellectual development. In that sense the stay in Geneva must have been an opportunity for him to redefine his position, or at the very least to confirm his identity as an 'educationist'. Here are some passages from the autobiography:⁹

Raised in a very easy-going family, I do not think that I was ever scolded or beaten. My father treated me almost like a brother; I was his companion; the people around him imitated him in that, and treated me like a little man. This was not a deliberate method or system or intention of my father's. The freedom was great, but the lack of purpose had two disadvantages: no treatment or physical education to counteract the ravages of the very unhealthy climate of Portuguese Congo; later, when I reached the age of great intellectual and emotional upheavals (18 to 21), he did not understand me very well and I did not find him to be the ideal companion he could have been. [...] I spent one year at the Polytechnic and then entered the Naval Academy. The years there (between the ages of 18 and 21) were my—very exciting—*Sturm und Drang* period. My taste for mathematics was succeeded by a taste for philosophy, literature and art. This change corresponds to a change in attitude towards my profession, particularly towards the

long, stultifying sojourns in African ports. At that time (aged 19-26) I read at random, Descartes, Pascal, Leibnitz, Berkeley, Kant, Schopenhauer, Comte, Taine, John Stuart Mill, Spencer, Guyau, Fouillée; the French classics (Montaigne, Ronsard, Corneille, Racine, Bossuet, Molière, Rousseau, Buffon, Montesquieu), modern French poets, Hugo, Lamartine, Musset, Leconte de Lisle, Sully Prudhomme, Heredia; Cervantes and the Spanish tragedies as well as the modern poet Zorrilla; the English, especially Shelley; a few Italians and, of course, the Portuguese. [...] Political and social events in my own country awoke in me an interest in social and historical affairs; my thinking led me to despise the solutions of party politics or vote-catching (which in fact have never interested me and whose procedures I find outrageous) and to acknowledge the value of educational factors (in the family, in the work community and in school). [...] I think that this work (where I am in contact with Anglo-Saxons) has given me a fairly accurate sense of social realities and social needs that I have found to be quite often missing in teachers of young people, even when they are first-rate teachers, trainers and psychologists; in my view they have not seen enough of the world of work in factories, offices, banks, industry, trade and manual occupations. These are vantage points on modern *life*, where we should do well to position ourselves, since what is demanded (repeatedly these days, and quite rightly, too) is education *for life*.

A further indication of Sérgio's impact at the institute is that he was among the few students who had work published during their 'school-days' in its journal, *L'intermédiaire des éducateurs* [The Educators' Go-between]. A first piece appeared in January-March 1916, using the title of a study by Claparède which had come out in April-May 1915, *Droite et gauche* [Right and Left], in which he had put forward an equation designed to calculate the 'coefficient of symmetry': Sérgio criticized its mathematical validity and modified the formula. By publishing this correction, whereby the student debated on equal terms with the teacher, the institute lived up to its principles; the 'autonomous' authority of Sérgio certainly gained by it. In June-July of the same year, the journal published a note by Sérgio, *Research on the Imagination*, in which he seems just as comfortable in the clinical domain this time, because of this issue is the interpretation of 'ink blots'. In the same frame of mind that led him to criticize Claparède, Sérgio proposed improving on research carried out by several students under the direction of Aline Giroud. Sérgio appears therefore to have had the ear of the institute's researcher-lecturers, who seem to have set great store by his opinions. He took their work seriously but did not hesitate to respond to it, his own ideas being stimulated by those of others. That was perhaps the main advantage gained from his time in Geneva, where he found the time and place for a genuine dialogue among equals and an exchange in which he could both give and receive.

António Sérgio always showed consideration for his teachers in Geneva, as his private correspondence shows: 'I went there [Geneva] because of the recently established Institut Jean-Jacques Rousseau (School of Educational Sciences). For the moment it is operating in very modest circumstances, but the teachers are first rate'.¹⁰ Furthermore, Sérgio often praised the institute's teachers in public. His favourite was Claparède, whose scientific authority he invoked when claiming that he himself had a scientific, and not exclusively literary, background: 'I was bound by firm bonds of friendship to real scientists (as eminent as Paul Langevin and Edouard Claparède), who always talked to me as to someone who had an essentially scientific frame of mind' (1950, p. 45).

However, apart from this personal respect, António Sérgio maintained a certain distance with regard to the Institut Jean-Jacques Rousseau. In some letters he even hinted that he had only gone to Geneva to accompany his wife;¹¹ This would be typical of Sérgio, who was often secretive about the real influences on him. Another letter to Claparède,¹² recommending a relative to him, shows more politeness than open warmth. It makes no allusion to Sérgio's attendance at the institute, adding to the impression that for him this brief episode in his life was not exactly 'unforgettable'.

We shall nevertheless be able to demonstrate that the years 1914-16 were the crucial seedtime of Sérgio's educational theory. It was in Geneva that he learnt his 'educational lessons'.

From educational theory to reform

António Sérgio first went into action in the civic arena, motivated by an obsessive concern for the rebirth of Portugal. This was not a backward-looking attitude, but reflected the need to carry out a constructive revolution. Education was central to that agenda. One of his main works, published in the last year of the First World War, is actually entitled *Education as a Factor in National Renewal*¹³ and which states:

The New Education must be seen as a function which, in close symbiosis with other functions, resolutely contributes with all the others to Portuguese renewal; the reformed school of the future should influence adults—and not only children—in a spirit of solidarity, co-operation and tolerance, as the focal point of society that it ought to be; the science of education should be seen as a tool of life in society; the school itself should be, in the strongest sense of the word, a society; and at all times the teacher should feel like a warrior fighting to reform the nation' (1918a, p. 8).

Sérgio's stay in Geneva served only to strengthen this attitude, which seemed to be motivated by an almost limitless belief in the potential of education to transform. It was from this Swiss city that the Education Library was run, founded by the civic movement Portuguese Renaissance, which tried to mobilize 'everyone of good faith in the work of educational propaganda'. A quote from Condorcet, used as an epigraph for the founding document, sets the tone of the project: 'the art of raising children is closely linked to the art of governing people. The science of education becomes a branch of politics, *or rather it is the whole of politics.*'

The aim of reform is at the heart of Sérgio's 'social theory of education'. For him, education is a vital commitment of the individual and of the community. The country's 'radical therapy' should be sought in an educational theory of work and in the reform of the Portuguese school system with productive work as the driving force. There are two arguments constantly present in Sérgio's educational writings: the need to prepare a governing elite, and the urgency of replacing bookish and formalist education with a school geared to work.

In 1918, Sérgio became the leader of a new civic movement that gave him an opportunity to present the outline of a national policy. The section on education reflects the influence of the Geneva circles and the ideas that were in fashion at the time in the New Education: 'a school for productive work'; education centred on the experience and spontaneous activity of the schoolchild; teacher training carried out according to new methods of educational theory and child psychology; the establishment of agricultural high schools; the opening of a 'new school' in the countryside (modelled on Abbotsholme, Bedales, Odenwald); civic education and self-government, etc. (1918b).¹⁴

While it is true that these ideas are difficult to put into practice in a real school, the post-war social and political situation was nevertheless conducive to radical change in the education system as a whole. In Portugal, as indeed in most countries of Europe and on the American continent as well, the 1920s were the 'heyday' of education and educational theory. Completely absorbed in his reforming activities, Sérgio rejoined Faria de Vasconcelos, back from Latin America, in the group A Seara Nova.

Faria de Vasconcelos is, without a doubt, the most well known Portuguese educationist in international education circles. His work, *A New School in Belgium* (1915), is one of the first systematic descriptions of a typical 'new school'.¹⁵ World War I put an end to the experiment of the New School of Bierges-les-Wawre, forcing Faria de Vasconcelos to seek refuge with Adolphe Ferrière. In Geneva, he gave a series of lectures, warmly welcomed by *L'intermédiaire des éducateurs* (No. 31-33, 1915, p. 24) which also hailed the publication of his book: 'Mr Faria takes his place with dignity in the ranks of Decroly, Dewey, Förster and Montessori'. After his brief stay in Geneva, Faria de Vasconcelos left for Cuba and Bolivia where, with the support of Claparède and Ferrière, he devoted himself to spreading the ideas of the New Education.

In 1923, António Sérgio and Faria de Vasconcelos met again to discuss a plan for educational reform, which marked the zenith of liberal thinking in Portugal and the culmination of all the efforts to overhaul education carried out in the transition from the nineteenth to the twentieth century. The First Republic (1910–26), parliamentary and democratic, was going through a difficult time and their plan was the most daring and innovative attempt to reorganize Portuguese education.

The preamble attempts to justify the plan by referring to the aftermath of war, ‘which has highlighted the pressing need, in all fields, for a new definition of the requirements of life and a further adjustment of social bodies’. It goes on to lay down the plan’s major lines of emphasis: after describing the state of education in Portugal, it makes a set of proposals that bear the unmistakable stamp of New Education ideas. Towards the end, there is this far-sighted injunction:

There is undeniable and overwhelming evidence that we cannot possibly continue as we are, for otherwise we risk national suicide. We react either energetically and salvation is possible, or we continue with the same unthinking, passive and conformist attitude, and we are lost (*Reforma de Educação*, 1923).

Given the task of publicizing the reform plan, Sérgio made several public statements. Here are two of the six points he made:

The new plan follows the principles of modern educational theory, whereas the current law damages children’s development in several respects. [...] The reforms are democratic in the noblest sense of the word, liberal and modern. They set up school bodies adapted to democracy; they establish civic education through the method of self-government; and they pay particular attention to the technical education of the people, and to people’s universities’ (1923, pp. 12–20).

Despite the backing of educationists and teachers, the political instability at that time prevented the reforms from being implemented. It was the swan song of republican educational theory. Soon afterwards, the 1926 military coup ushered in a retrogressive and educationally conservative dictatorship. Previously, Sérgio had had an opportunity to be a cabinet minister, holding the education portfolio on behalf of A Seara Nova, but the episode, which lasted less than three months (18 December 1923 to 28 February 1924) was not a particularly happy one. This was because the necessary political conditions had not all been met—or it had not been possible to determine the best governmental course of action—to implement the plan to change the structure of Portuguese education. The only gain that could be put down to Sérgio was the creation of a Council to Promote Education; but it must be admitted that the outcome was rather insubstantial:

In my opinion, the principal agent for a genuine reform of public education in the country must be the Council to Promote Education, which grants foreign study bursaries and which sets up and manages pilot, or experimental, schools at the nursery, primary, secondary and higher levels. [...] Why did I accept the post of minister? In order to establish the Council; there was no other reason. I do not think I possess the talents of a politician and have no inclination at all for that profession (1934, p. 3–7).

After 1926, the generation of New Education intellectuals became totally disillusioned about the possibility of far-reaching change to the education system. The First Republic had committed itself to ‘shaping a new individual’; the disenchantment was as deep as the ambition had been lofty. At a distance of more than a century, the words of F. Guizot seem also to predict what happened in Portugal:

In the midst of revolutionary turmoil, all these plans, all these dreams, generous, dangerous and puerile by turns, came to naught. [...] We had promised to ourselves, and had been promised, much; nothing was done. Illusions

lingered over ruins (quoted by Baczko, 1980, p. 90).

Gradually, the reforming educationists determined to engage in action that was closer to everyday life and less directed towards social change. Teacher-training colleges were the places where the new ideas on education prospered, because the men and women there were still convinced that the priority was and always would be to train an educational elite: 'Do not fail to compile a register of young people with a marked pedagogical bent, on whom we can rely for the pilot schools of the future'; 'We must set up a register of former students of teacher-training colleges who believe in the cause, for they are the ones who should go abroad (Institut Rousseau, Decroly, Montessori, etc.)'.¹⁶

The journal *Educação social* [Social Education] (1924-27) became the mouthpiece of the Portuguese section of the International League for the New Education. On Adolphe Ferrière's suggestion, its management was taken over in 1927 by António Sérgio, who was still in voluntary exile in Paris (Nóvoa, 1987). In the preface to the Portuguese edition of *Transformons l'école* [Let's Change the School] and in a series of articles published in the newspaper *Le Volontaire* [The Volunteer], Sérgio did not hide his hopes of a political reversal, and returned to educational activism:

Since the idea of freedom is one of the cornerstones of all modern educational theory, it is not only on the strength of philosophical beliefs or political ideals that I am speaking to you today from exile, but also in my capacity as an educationist. It is an exile which is an integral part of the consistent work of a moralist (1928, p. 8).

It should be added that, in Italy and Spain, the dictatorship could remain in power without too much difficulty, whereas in Portugal the liberal tendencies of our people mean that it meets with resistance on a daily basis, despite the appalling violence of its conduct. It is in Portugal that the fight for freedom is now most intense and dramatic; in Portugal that it is meaningful and fine (1929b, p. 2).

Sérgio was wrong, however, about the longevity of the regime: Salazar's New State endured for half a century, and the situation became intolerable for the reforming educationists. Adolphe Ferrière realized this as early as 1930 and, during a trip to Portugal, played a decisive role in shaking up the Portuguese New Education group: people close to the nationalist and conservative regime took the places of António Sérgio and his friends, thus marking the end of an educational movement open to the outside world which had built up the most significant contribution to teaching in the history of education in Portugal.

Sérgio gradually distanced himself from educational affairs as he committed himself to political and cultural battles and to the spread of the co-operative movement, which was from then on the focus of his thought. Although he continued to describe himself as an educationist—and to write about education—it is obvious that his civic campaigns and his moves for reform placed emphasis on other fields. It was, however, his 'social theory of education' that exerted a profound influence over several generations of educators in Portugal.

Sérgio's educational motto: 'Work and Autonomy'

In a late piece of writing, published in 1957, Sérgio recapitulated his main theses on education and teaching, producing a sort of itinerary of his educational thought and writings:

- New processes in children's education, introduced in the preface to *The Montessori Method* by Luísa Sérgio (1915a);
- Linking social education to the productive activities of the region, an idea defended in *The Social Role of Students* (1917a) and *Letters about Vocational Education* (1916a), *inter alia*;
- Studying the history of the country in the light of key economic and social, along the lines suggested in *Observations on History and Educational Theory* (1915b);

- The urgent need to grant foreign study bursaries, as stipulated in *The Problem of the Culture and the Isolation of the Peninsular Nations* (1914);
- Getting rid of rote learning, an argument put forward in *Notions of Zoology* (1917b);
- Introducing future citizens to democracy by using methods of political democracy, the central argument of *Civic Education* (1915c);
- Reorganizing public education on clearly specified lines, giving priority to post-primary education, a proposal put forward in *Education as a Factor in National Renewal* (1918a).

So, in 1957, when tracing the development of his educational thought, Sérgio refers only to writings published between 1914 and 1919. In other words, what he had to say about education had already been expressed at that time, as he was perfectly aware at the age of 70 when he looked back on his work as a whole. The period concerned can even be reduced to the years 1914-16 alone, when he published the founding trilogy of his thought: *Civic Education*, *Observations on History and Educational Theory* and *Letters about Vocational Education*. It is no mere chance that these dates coincide exactly with Sérgio's stay in Geneva: April 1914—July 1916. It was thus in Geneva, the nerve centre of the New Education, that Sérgio drew up his educational agenda.

In 1914, in a letter in which he applied for the post of librarian of the Education Library of the Portuguese Renaissance, Sérgio suggested inserting a book-plate in every book outlining the main points of his plan: 'I should like the labels to bear the words *Work* and *Autonomy*'.¹⁷ In the late 1920s, when he took charge of the Educator's Library, the same theme recurs:

Two major aims are imperative for the school of the future: on the one hand, the progressive elimination of social antagonism and the establishment of a just society, the Single School of Work; on the other, the attainment of Freedom at an adult age, through the education of children in a climate of Freedom' (1928, p. 8).

The vindication of a school geared to work appeared very early in Sérgio's educational discourse. For him, it was a matter of ensuring 'the liaison between education and productive activity' (1917c). In his view, the school of work was not simply a matter of method, but also a key concept of educational action; hence his riposte to those who accused him of preaching a utilitarian philosophy:

What I have been defending for several years under the name of vocational education is *general* education, non-specialized, where exercising an activity in society is seen as a *means to an end*, as the *raison d'être* of education: this is education *through* (and not *for the sake of*) vocational activities (1918b, p. 215).

Those who accuse me of being a utilitarian when I call for a primary school of Work, and not a primary school of the Alphabet, and a secondary school of Work (social and scientific work) instead of a secondary school for Cramming, show that they have only very old-fashioned ideas of work and workers (1925, p. 65).

The association of education and work would be expanded, according to Sérgio, thanks to the establishment of 'further education' schools, that is, institutions able to give students a comprehensive training with a view to exercising a function in society. In short, he saw 'work as a foundation, a programme and a means: work is the instrument of all progress towards awareness' (1916a, p. 35).

The other concept in Sérgio's system is autonomy, which recurs at various stages in his writings: in civic education through self-government, in the introduction of the social dimension into schools, in the conception of the school as a social centre and in the formation of school communities (1917a, pp. 26-27). Three arguments underpin the defence of the concept of autonomy:

- Autonomy, like civic education, is learned through practice, never through mere school

attendance or through an academic discipline: ‘In that respect, the municipium-school might be called the laboratory for the civics class’ (1915c, p. 49); the concept of a *municipium-school* or *school-municipium* refers to the idea of a school that governs itself, running itself according to laws similar to those of civic democracy: a school which prepares its pupils to become citizens;

- action with a view to autonomy ‘must be carried out not only in the school environment, through vocational activities and self-government, but also in the world outside’ (1917d, p. 23);
- in schools, as in society, ‘autonomy cannot be granted by leaders: it must be won by those who are led, patiently, day by day’ (1917e, p. 62).

‘Work and autonomy’ was a fashionable slogan in the international milieu of the New Education, and Sérgio was strongly influenced by the ideas circulating at the Institut Jean-Jacques Rousseau. The works of Georg Kerschensteiner and John Dewey, rather than those of Claparède and Ferrière, were those which most thoroughly permeated his writings: the German writer taught him the educational value of work and the basics of the *Arbeitschulen* and *Fortbildungsschulen*, for which he became an ardent propagandist; the American philosopher introduced him to the social dimension of educational work, showing him the importance of democratic experience in the school environment.¹⁸

Sérgio’s educational thought was not, of course, confined to the lines of emphasis just mentioned. In many ways, Strategic developments of those ideas were what contributed to his writings on education and made his work in the world of education and teaching particularly meaningful. For instance, we could mention:

- Systematic criticism of the shibboleth of the alphabet and debunking of the positive value of academic subjects: ‘Teaching in schools can be educational only when the teachers come to understand that physics, chemistry, mathematics, history, the natural sciences, and so on, are mere pretexts or tools’ (1939, p. 23);
- The defence of decentralization, based essentially on making professional bodies more accountable: ‘In principle and ideally, there should be no state education because official education is unjust, anti-liberal and soporific, and results in a temptation to be tyrannical; but since it does exist, it should be run by a National Education Council elected by teachers’ (1916a, p. 37);
- Awareness of the fact that educational innovation is an ongoing process and must be practised every day, an idea he illustrates with a sporting metaphor: ‘To be good at sport, you must have the patience to train every day; if you do not train every day, you get out of shape; you become weaker and are incapable of winning’ (1929c, p. 2).

Georg Kerschensteiner and John Dewey indisputably occupy pride of place in António Sérgio’s ‘educational family’ portrait. Other influences also warrant a mention, however: firstly, Maria Montessori, for her methodology, since he did not agree with her philosophical principles (‘because the unreliable aspects of the theory did not blight the—excellent—results of the practice, we are probably entitled to ask questions about procedures, as we seek a more cogent and accurate theoretical interpretation than that provided by the author herself’ (1915a, p. 13)); next, Adolphe Ferrière, from whom he derived his educational activism and most of the characteristics of the active school; lastly, Edouard Claparède, whose theory of the ‘functional conception of childhood’ he borrowed and extended into the ‘functional conception of education’ (1940, p. 15). We could add Kilpatrick, Bovet, Decroly, Desmolins, not forgetting the ‘founding father’ whose work Sérgio subjected to particularly close scrutiny: Jean-Jacques Rousseau. This is the background to António Sérgio’s educational philosophy.

Unlike other Portuguese thinkers of the New Education, António Sérgio was never really the creator of innovative educational ideas. His wish to devote himself to education was not

granted, and so he was unable to experiment personally with new educational practices and processes. Where education was concerned, António Sérgio was above all an excellent popularizer, a thinker capable of placing ‘the education question’ in a wider social context and of envisaging the organization of education as part of a cultural and social revolution.

Even though he did not leave an original body of work behind him, Sérgio managed to transplant into Portuguese culture the new ideas that were sprouting up in international centres of education. In the process, he succeeded in placing them in a historical and philosophical perspective and giving a lucid account of Portuguese circumstances. He was able to bring together a lot of different ideas, unite them and confer upon them a social significance that they did not possess when taken in isolation. Did the words he wrote about the *Plagiarisms of Mr Jean-Jacques Rousseau of Geneva on Education* apply to him?:

It is always possible to talk about plagiarism if you look at isolated sentences by any author, and it is impossible to assess the originality of a thinker’s doctrine on the basis of a single sentence. The many principles contained in *Emile* are probably to be found in the work of earlier writers; however, it is not the principles that are important, but the new root to which Rousseau attached them, by providing the basis, the organization and the criterion and creating a doctrine out of that which had not been one hitherto (1940, p. 21–22).

Taking this to its logical conclusion, it could almost be said that there is nothing in the educational work of António Sérgio which cannot be found already in that of Kerschensteiner, Dewey or Ferrière. He did, however, create a forceful synthesis, adding a significant bonus: the social dimension of education. This is what gives António Sérgio and his agenda for reform a special place in the history of educational theory in Portugal.

The social dimension: relevance and topicality

In 1974, the ‘Carnation Revolution’ toppled the authoritarian regime that had held sway for forty-eight years. Suddenly, anything was possible and within the grasp of everyone. Once again education was at the crossroads, with different futures beckoning. In this context, the priority was to change what had to be changed.

It was all too clear that Salazar’s New State had erased the memory of the new educational theory of the 1920s. Was it possible to turn to more distant inherited values? No one could ignore the civic action and political battles waged by António Sérgio, and thus his educational theory was rediscovered and it became possible to reconstruct a significant chapter in the history of Portuguese education.

Sérgio’s work could indeed be reassessed, because the Portuguese were ‘confronted with an inherited project, which was not a mere legacy, and with aspirations rooted in the mists of time’ (Godinho, 1984, p. 17). This man had preached a doctrine that could be taken up and used despite the obsolescence of its techniques and methodology; a doctrine whose core remained to be implemented because the school of work had still not replaced that of the alphabet, any more than autonomy had replaced dependence.

Sérgio’s ‘heritage project’ was first of all taken up in a context of civic education through autonomy. The aim was to update the proposal for national renewal through education around the *municipium-school* and the school of work (ibid., p. 6). Not surprisingly, during a revolutionary period, the idea that schoolchildren could organize themselves at school rather like adults did at the municipal level, learning in and by practice to play the social roles of citizenship, was welcomed. It made even greater headway in that it was linked to manual and scientific work and local economic activity. Many of the reforms proposed in Portugal during the ‘Carnation Revolution’ must be interpreted in that light.

Sérgio’s second lesson—and that of the New Education generation—as that it was

crucial to open up the school to the outside world. It is now acknowledged without hesitation that the high points of Portuguese education coincided with periods of new internal and external political openness. Innovation in education occurs only through an ongoing exchange of ideas and experiences. Sérgio understood the importance of mutual enrichment better than anyone did and he put it into practice. By putting a stop to communication and exchange, Salazar's New State sought to stifle a cultural and scientific heritage developed by successive generations of educators. However, the need for change resurfaces even when consciences appear to have been definitively sedated. After 1974, Sérgio's work went constantly hand-in-hand with the renaissance. It is therefore not surprising that, just recently, in response to an invitation from a journal, the President of the Republic referred to the man who 'long dominated civic and educational theory, [who] is still relevant and who can stimulate reflection and debate at a time when the challenge for education, culture and science is a national priority and a prerequisite for Portugal's modernization as a country taking part in the building of Europe' (Soares, 1992, p. 81).

To conclude, let us mention the attention paid to the social dimension of education that is so prominent in Sérgio's thinking: the duty of teachers to know the world as a navigator knows the sea (1918*a*); the appeal to the authorities to solve the problems of 'living stones' before turning to the problems of 'dead stones' (1957); the appeal to educators to raise children's awareness of social and civic issues in the same way that they teach them mathematics (1915*c*). These three injunctions stem from a single belief, which is reaffirmed in each of them: that the main aim of education is not the adaptation of an individual to a particular society, but his or her capacity to contribute to the transformation of that society.

Like Vitorino Magalhães Godinho, we would not claim that Sérgio's work is relevant today because it appears to contain solutions to current problems:

but it is topical because, seen in the context of its time and against the deep backdrop of our history, it raised basic questions about what we are and opened up new perspectives on what we aspire to become. In order to attain that, and among various other forms of action, we can rely on the influence of education, which is indispensable, although we must guide it in such a way as to avoid the pitfalls that Sérgio pointed out [Godinho, 1984, p. 17].

Educational philosophy at the latter end of this century seems to be trapped in existing organizational and intellectual moulds. We are no longer able to think of breaking with the past. Worse still, we are no longer capable of wanting anything else. We are not strong enough to attempt the radicalism that was the very origin of the New Education.

Reading António Sérgio brings us face to face with the poverty of our imagination, our lack of ambition, the impossibility of proposing genuinely innovative solutions. Sérgio knew how to want something and how to want something different. The vitality of his philosophy made it felt by the radical nature of the reforms he advocated. He simply called for a different kind of school, or, failing that, *no school at all*:

Schools were invented in Antiquity, in the days of superstition; they were renewed in the nineteenth century, in the days of superstition about science; now we must alter them, not through a cult of Antiquity or a cult of science, but so as to place real value on human life (1917*b*, p. 11).

Notes

1. Parts of this text reproduce an article written in collaboration with Daniel Hameline based on the transcription of an unpublished work by António Sérgio: his autobiography which appears in the *Livre d'or* of the Institut Jean-Jacques Rousseau. This article was published in the *Revista crítica de ciências sociais* (Coimbra), No. 29, 1990, p. 141–77.
2. *António Nóvoa (Portugal)* Ph.D. in educational sciences from the University of Geneva. Professor of the history of education in the Faculties of Psychology and Educational Sciences at the University of Lisbon. Chairman of the Scientific Council of the Institute of Educational Innovations. Recent publications include

- Profissão professor [Profession Professor] (1992), As organizações escolares em análise [School Organization under Analysis] (1992) and Repertório analítico da imprensa pedagógica portuguesa (seculos XIX-XX) [An Analytic Directory of the Portuguese Educational Press (nineteenth and twentieth centuries)] (1993).
3. In this text we will use only the name António Sérgio, by which he is known in Portugal and is also the form he used to sign his work.
 4. António Sérgio often distinguished between the concepts of *educationist* and *educator* (or teacher): the former was supposed to study educational matters and systematize knowledge in the field; the latter should place his or her art and intuition at the service of the practicalities of education.
 5. References to works by António Sérgio bear the date only. See below, ‘Works by António Sérgio on Education’.
 6. The *Autobiography* was written in the *Livre d’or* of the Institut Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Geneva, in 1915–16.
 7. Profiles of Edouard Claparède and Adolphe Ferrière appear in this series of ‘100 Thinkers on Education’.
 8. Chronicle of the Institute, *L’intermédiaire des éducateurs* [The Educators’ Go-between], Vol. 4, No. 31–33, 1915, p. 28.
 9. In transcribing the text, we have standardized the spelling but otherwise respected the original manuscript (syntax, punctuation, capital letters and so on).
 10. Letter from António Sérgio to Raul Proença, 1914.
 11. The following extracts are proof enough: ‘I do not know whether I have already told you that my wife has registered at the University and at an institute in Geneva, where she is studying early childhood education’ (letter to Álvaro Pinto, May 1914); ‘My wife is studying the regular theoretical and practical aspects of educational theory and psychology at Geneva schools, under my guidance’ (letter to Manuel da Silva Galo, 17 June 1916).
 12. Letter to Claparède, 20 August 1925.
 13. In order to make the text easier to read, the titles of works published by Sérgio in Portuguese have been translated into English. The reader will find the original Portuguese in ‘Works by António Sérgio on Education’ below.
 14. Cf. *Pela Grei* [By the People], No. 3, p. 10–11, 1918.
 15. In the Preface to this work (p. 7–20), Adolphe Ferrière published for the first time the ‘thirty characteristic features, taken from the actual experience of New Schools, against which they may be measured, so to speak’ (p. 17).
 16. Unpublished letters from António Sérgio to Álvaro Viana de Lemos (8 November 1927 to 7 February 1930), held in an archive of the Modern School Movement in Lisbon.
 17. Letter to Álvaro Pinto in 1914 (cf. Fernandes, 1972, p. 31).
 18. Research in António Sérgio’s archives confirms that between 1914 and 1916 he acquired a whole set of books recommended by the institute’s professors from the Librairie Eggiman in Geneva. In my own personal library are Sérgio’s copies of the main works of, among others, Claparède, Dewey, Ferrière, Kerschensteiner and Montessori, copiously annotated.

References

- Baczko, B. 1980. Former l’homme nouveau [Training the New Man]. In: *Libre politique-anthropologie-philosophie*, p. 89–132, Paris, Payot. (Petite Bibliothèque Payot, No. 8)
- Bovet, P. 1932. *Vingt ans de vie. L’Institut Jean-Jacques Rousseau de 1912 à 1932* [Twenty Years of Existence: The Institut Jean-Jacques Rousseau from 1912 to 1932]. Neuchâtel; Paris, Delachaux and Niestlé.
- Claparède, E. 1912. Un institut des sciences de l’éducation et les besoins auxquels il répond [An Institute for the Educational Sciences and the Needs which It Satisfies]. *Archives de psychologie* (Geneva), Vol. XII.
- Fernandes, R. *Cartas de António Sérgio a Álvaro Pinto (1911–1919)*, p. 13, Lisbon, Edição da Revista Ocidente, 1972.
- Godinho, V. M. 1984. Preface. In: António Sérgio. *Educação cívica*. Lisbon, Ministério da Educação.
- Hameline, D.; Nóvoa, A. 1990. Autobiografia inédita de António Sérgio - Escrita aos 32 anos no Livre d’or do Institut Jean-Jacques Rousseau (Geneva) [Unpublished Autobiography of António Sérgio: Written at the Age of 32 in the ‘Livre d’or’ of the Institut Jean-Jacques Rousseau (Geneva)]. *Revista crítica de ciências sociais* (Coimbra), No. 29, p. 141–77.
- L’intermédiaire des éducateurs* (Geneva), No. 31–33, 1915. p. 24.
- Lavachery, J. 1935. L’Institut des sciences de l’éducation de Genève (Institut Jean-Jacques Rousseau) [The Genevan Institute of Educational Sciences (The Institut Jean-Jacques Rousseau)]. *Revue de pédagogie* (Brussels),

No. 9, p. 18–21.

Magalhães-Vilhena, V. 1975. *António Sérgio: o idealismo crítico e a crise da ideologia burguesa* [António Sérgio: Critical Idealism and the Crisis of Republican Ideology]. Lisbon, Cosmos.

Nóvoa, A. 1987. *Le temps des professeurs* [The Era of Teachers]. 2 vols. Lisbon, INIC.

Reforma de Educação—Proposta de Lei [Educational Reform: A Draft Law]. 1923. Lisbon, Imprensa Nacional.

Soares, M. 1992. A escolha de....*Colóquio - Educação e Sociedade* (Lisbon), No. 1, p. 81–89.

Vasconcelos, F. de. *A New School in Belgium*. Neuchâtel, Delachaux et Niestlé, 1915.

Works by António Sérgio on education

In chronological order

1914. *O problema da cultura e o isolamento dos povos peninsulares* [The Problem of the Culture and the Isolation of the Peninsular Nations]. Oporto, Renascença Portuguesa.
- 1915a. Preface. In: Luísa Sérgio. *O método Montessori* [The Montessori Method]. Oporto, Renascença Portuguesa.
- 1915b. *Considerações histórico-pedagógicas* [Observations on History and Educational Theory]. Oporto, Renascença Portuguesa.
- 1915c. *Educação cívica* [Civic Education]. Oporto, Renascença Portuguesa.
- 1916a. *Cartas sobre educação profissional* [Letters about Vocational Education]. Oporto, Renascença Portuguesa.
- 1916b. Droite et gauche [Left and Right]. *L'intermédiaire des éducateurs* (Geneva), No. 34-35, January-March, p. 54-55.
- 1916c. Recherches sur l'imagination [Research on the Imagination]. *L'intermédiaire des éducateurs* (Geneva), No. 39-40, June-July, p. 83-88.
- 1917a. *A função social dos estudantes* [The Social Role of Students]. Oporto, Renascença Portuguesa.
- 1917b. *Noções de zoologia* [Notions of Zoology]. Oporto, Renascença Portuguesa.
- 1917c. Preface. In: H. Le Châtelier. *Indústria e ciência* [Industry and Science]. Oporto, Renascença Portuguesa.
- 1917d. Carta ao director da *Agros* sobre a função social dos estudantes [Letter to the Director of *Agros* on the Social Role of Students]. *Agros* (Lisbon), No. 1, p. 18-24.
- 1917e. Os métodos do regionalismo [The Methods of Regionalism]. *Agros* (Lisbon), No. 2-3, p. 60-63.
- 1918a. *O ensino como factor do ressurgimento nacional* [Education as a Factor in National Renewal]. Oporto, Renascença Portuguesa.
- 1918b. A escola portuguesa, órgão parasitário; necessidade da sua reforma sob a ideia directriz do trabalho produtivo [The Portuguese School, a Parasitical Organ: The Need to Reform It According to the Guiding Principle of Productive Work]. *Pela Grei*, Vol. 1, No. 4, p. 210-22.
1923. 'Virtudes fundamentais da reforma da educação' [Fundamental Truths of the Educational Reform]. Lecture to the Lisbon Society of Geography, 25 July 1923.
1925. A escola primária dos novos tempos [A Primary School for a New Era]. *Escola Nova*, No. 5, p. 65-66.
1928. Preface. In: Adolphe Ferrière. *Transformemos a escola* [Let's Change the School]. Livraria Truchy-Leroy.
- 1929a. *Ensaaios* [Essays]. Lisbon, Livraria Sá da Costa.
- 1929b. La jeunesse portugaise et la paix [Portuguese Youth and Peace]. *Le Volontaire* (Paris), No. 2, 27 January.
- 1929c. Le sport du volontaire [Voluntary Sport]. *Le Volontaire* (Paris), No. 22, 24 November.
1934. *Aspectos do problema pedagógico em Portugal* [Aspects of the Portuguese Educational Problem]. Lisbon, Sociedade de Estudos Pedagógicos.
1939. *Sobre educação primária e infantil* [On Primary and Pre-primary Education]. Lisbon, Editorial Inquérito.
1940. Interview with António Sérgio. *O Diabo* (Lisbon), No. 174, 27 January.
1950. *Notas de esclarecimento* [Clarifying Notes]. Oporto, Empresa Industrial Gráfica do Porto.
1957. *Cartas do terceiro homem* [Letters from the Third Man]. Lisbon, Editorial Inquérito.
1958. Radio interview of 29 July 1958 (issued as a record by Sassetti).

Main works on António Sérgio

- Branco, J. O. *O humanismo crítico de António Sérgio* [The Critical Humanism of António Sérgio]. Coimbra, Gráfica de Coimbra, 1986.
- Carvalho, J. M. *António Sérgio - A obra e o homem* [António Sérgio: The Works and the Man]. Lisbon, Arcádia, 1979.
- Fernandes, R. *A pedagogia portuguesa contemporânea* [Modern Portuguese Education]. Lisbon, Instituto de Cultura Portuguesa, 1979.
- Grácio, R. *Educação e educadores* [Education and Educators]. Lisbon, Livros Horizonte, 1968.
- Magalhães-Vilhena, V. *António Sérgio: o idealismo crítico e a crise da ideologia burguesa* [António Sérgio: Critical Idealism and the Crisis of Republican Ideology]. Lisbon, Cosmos, 1975.
- Patrício, M. *Figuras da pedagogia portuguesa contemporânea* [Personalities of Modern Portuguese Education]. Évora, Universidade de Évora, 1984.
- Revista de História das Ideias* (Coimbra), No. 5, 1983. (Special double edition on António Sérgio.)
- Serrão, J. *Portugueses somos* [We Are Portuguese]. Lisbon, Livros Horizonte, 1975.
- Silveira, A. et al. *Homenagem a António Sérgio* [Hommage to António Sérgio]. Lisbon, Academia das Ciências de Lisboa, 1976.
- O Tempo e o Modo* (Lisbon), No. 69-70, 1969. (Special edition on António Sérgio.)