

## SOME IMPLICATIONS OF INNOVATION IN THE ARTS FACULTY OF PORTO UNIVERSITY

With great changes being proposed and introduced in the field of «ensino superior» in Portugal, it seems appropriate to examine how the teachers and students of The Faculty of Letters (FLUP) might react to these changes.

In order for FLUP to be successful it should display that characteristic which has been identified as essential to all types of successful organisations: a bias towards action embodied in changing and developing rather than remaining routinised. Opportunities for the advancement of any institution have to be sought and discerned. This means the need to have a continuous interest in and commitment to new ideas, to the process of innovation, and in order that the danger of fossilisation might be avoided, «Role culture» predominates in the organisational culture of FLUP, whereby «role occupants» have effective role descriptions and requirements described for them and they are managed rather than led. The main feature here is of routinised procedures which does not provide very fertile ground for the cultivation of innovation. «Excellent organisations encourage ideas and never kill a likely one until it is tried out. Above all they foster communication and the infectious spread of ideas and they never penalise failure if it is learned from.»<sup>1</sup>

In the first place it may be necessary to point out that change is not an answer in itself but it is instead an on-going developmental kind of event which involves processes of adaptation, adjustment and refinement on a constant basis. This idea very much fits in with the notion that learning itself involves change. No-one would be likely to claim they are the same person they were ten years ago and in much the same way, no teacher would be likely to admit that his/her students were the same at the end of a course as they were at the beginning.<sup>2</sup> Indeed it is the student body which should be convinced of the need for a certain set of conditions to be put into action in order for them to be successful adopters of innovation. There must be «awareness», knowing that new responses are required; «evaluation», deciding that the innovation is personally useful; «knowledge», having the capacity to make use of the innovation; and «usage», a high level of frequency of use for the innovation.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> HANDY, C. A. — *Understanding Organisations*, London, Penguin, 1978, p. 29.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. HOUGHTON, A. — *A Spoonful of Trust*, Article to be published in «The British Council Newsletter for Portuguese Teachers of English», London, The British Council, 1993.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. COOPER, R. L. — *Language Planning, Language Spread and Language Change* in KENNEDY, C. (Ed) — *Language Planning and Language Education*, London, Allen and Unwin, 1983, pp. 20-22.

Going from the known to the unknown, going through change, is what is constantly required of students as part of their learning process. We ask our students to enquire, question and analyse and probably as a result change their attitudes, opinions and even their behaviour. This approach can perhaps be traced to the work of Piaget<sup>4</sup> where three fundamentals describing the learning process of children were outlined:

- 1) The need for active learning and «enquiry and discovery» techniques.
- 2) The need for active experience, which CANNOT be replaced by verbalising about experience.
- 3) The need for and the importance of social interaction as part of cognitive development.

These fundamentals have many direct applications in the field of education as a whole and especially in modern languages as they imply «the development of understanding rather than the acquisition of knowledge and the promotion of individual autonomy and a capacity for continuing learning:»<sup>5</sup> The importance of the role of modern languages, and especially English, in the development of FLUP and in the wider world cannot be underestimated: «No programme of translations ..... is ever going to keep up with the explosion of knowledge in all subjects. Therefore the ability of our students to have direct access to the ever-growing scientific and technical literature in English will continue to be a necessary condition for the economic development and industrial growth of our countries.»<sup>6</sup> Language and learning are both open-ended and creative. Further implications are that teaching must be seen as doing things *WITH* or *FOR* a learner rather than *TO* a learner and that the learner and the teacher are joint decision makers. Surely these are considerations which merit the attention of an institution which has among its aims the nurturing of rational, independent, mature, self-sufficient learners. In order to achieve these aims instructional programmes should be centred around the students needs and the students themselves should take on responsibility for the choice of learning objectives, content, methods and evaluation processes.

Most people, including teachers, like to consider themselves as having open minds but it is important not to forget to examine how true this is in practice, to ask the question: are we as open-minded as we think we are? Two statements often heard from the mouths of teachers will perhaps help to illustrate the problem of how resistant to change some members of the teaching body are:

- 1) It's a great idea but it wouldn't work in my classroom.
- 2) My students are too ——— for that to work.

In this way new ideas, innovation and change are rejected almost without hesitation. This is possibly, in a somewhat strange way, a consequence of teachers becoming trapped by their

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. PIAGET, J. — *The Child's Conception of the World*, Tutowa NJ, Littlefield Adams, 1967.

<sup>5</sup> WHITE, R. V. — *The ELT Curriculum: Design, Innovation and Management*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1988, p. 34.

<sup>6</sup> NADKARNI, M. K. — *Cultural Pluralism as a National Resource* in KENNEDY, C. (Ed) — *Op. cit.*, p. 154.

own intelligence: we presume that our first (negative) reaction is correct and then we use our intelligence to justify our initial dismissal rather than use it to explore potentially innovative situations.<sup>7</sup> But «Effective change calls for open-mindedness and a readiness to understand the feelings and position of others. Truth and reality are multifaceted, and the reality of other people's worlds is different from yours. Most people act rationally and sensibly within the reality of the world as they see it.»<sup>8</sup>

Perhaps one of the most difficult and challenging notions for teachers to accept is that long established practices may not in all truth necessarily be the best way of doing things. The apparent success of the past does not provoke any doubts about possible future ineffectiveness: it's always worked so it'll always work, so this axiom goes. The inability of teachers to view themselves in the same way as we view students in our commitment to the changes involved in the learning process leads many to fall back on what is undoubtedly the least valuable axiom of the teacher's trade: do as I say, not as I do. But this attitude should be interpreted in the light of teachers being part of a highly complex social organisation which has its own special features and rules: «Dynamic conservatism is a social phenomenon. It stems more from the propensity of social systems to protect their integrity and thus continue to provide a familiar framework within which individuals can order and make sense of their lives, rather than from the apparent stupidity of individuals who can't see what is good for them.»<sup>9</sup>

Our students also have to face a difficult and challenging notion: they must display an adult approach to innovation and learning and the relationship between the two at the earliest possible stage of their university careers. Past learning experiences must be valued as a resource, the foundation on which an individual cognitive style may be built. They should have developed ways of focusing on, taking in and processing information through multiple channels enabling them to establish cross-referenced patterns and distinctions so as to best learn from the presentation of new information.<sup>10</sup>

The complexity of our organisation, of our educational system, means that a change initiated at any one point will necessarily have effects at other points in the system, the linkages are every much as delicate and inter-locked as those of a spider's web. This makes it absolutely essential for communication to be maintained in an open, frank and undistorted manner wherein new ideas are considered primarily in terms of their content and not in terms of their source. Given that no person ever masters every aspect or skill in any subject and that the time available for instruction is extremely limited, it is inescapable that choices have to be made and consequently that debate must exist. We need «the creation of a climate in which ideas can be discussed openly, criticised and rejected, while those putting forward new ideas are accepted within the group, is more likely to lead to successful innovation.»<sup>11</sup>

The major responsibility lies with the power holding organs of FLUP in this present era of innovation and change in and around this institution. Intention and planning must be present, in anything that is as fundamental as innovation is, in order that the process does not become

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. HOUGHTON, A. — *Op. cit.*

<sup>8</sup> EVERARD, K. B.; MORRIS, G. — *Effective School Management*, London, Harper and Row, 1985, p. 171.

<sup>9</sup> EVERARD, K. B.; MORRIS, G. — *Op. cit.*, p. 169.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. NUMAN, D. — *The Learner-Centred Curriculum*, Cambridge, C.U.P., 1988, p. 22.

<sup>11</sup> NICHOLLS, A. — *Managing Educational Innovations*, London, Allen and Unwin, 1983, p. 139.

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simply a matter of ad hoc alterations occurring over a period of time. Changes in our teachers' attitudes and practices and in our students' preconceptions and habits are both intrinsically interlinked by the fact of our inhabiting the same institution, with its rational and irrational elements, as well as by both sets of people being the instruments of innovation. Without the willingness and participation of the entire institutional population there can be little hope of a successful outcome.

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