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The Pedagogical Congresses of Portuguese Secondary Teaching: the participation of female teachers (1927-1928)¹

Abstract

This paper was written within the context of the research project “*The development of teacher’ associative organizations and unionism (1889-1990)*” funded by the *Fundação para a Ciência e Tecnologia* (Foundation for Science and Technology). Five important congresses about secondary education were organized in Portugal between 1927 and 1931. These congresses served to claim the rights of teachers and the consolidation of the class, as well as to promote the discussion of scientific and pedagogical problems. In these congresses, the presence of female teachers was residual. However, the few teachers who participated had a significant contribution to the definition of secondary education during the following decades. Among other issues, it contributed to the discussion of female education and to analyze the importance of Biology and Physical Education in high schools. This paper presents the analysis of the minutes of the 1927s and 1928s Congresses. This analysis allowed the assessment of the important role played by a group of teachers to define, at the end of the first third of the 20th century, the future guidelines of Portuguese secondary education. It also reported that these teachers were pioneers who opened the way for the increasing number of teachers in secondary education during the 20th century.

Keywords: Pedagogical congresses; secondary schools; teachers.

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Os Congressos Pedagógicos do Ensino Secundário: a participação das professoras (1927-1928)

Resumo

Esta comunicação enquadra-se no trabalho de investigação *Percursos do associativismo e do sindicalismo docentes em Portugal, 1890-1990*, financiado pela Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia. Em Portugal, entre 1927 e 1931, organizaram-se cinco importantes congressos sobre o ensino secundário. Esses congressos, para além de serem dedicados à discussão de problemas pedagógicos e científicos, serviram para a reivindicação de direitos dos professores, para a construção da sua identidade e para a consolidação da classe. Nesses congressos, a presença de docentes congressistas do sexo feminino foi residual (começou por representar 15% do número total dos congressistas). Contudo, as poucas professoras que neles participaram tiveram um contributo significativo para a definição da educação secundária durante as décadas seguintes. Entre outros assuntos, contribuíram para a discussão sobre o ensino feminino e para o estudo da importância da Biologia e da Educação Física nos liceus. Este trabalho apresenta os resultados da análise das actas dos Congressos de 1927 e 1928. Essa análise permitiu aferir o importante papel de um grupo de professoras para a definição, no culminar do primeiro terço do século XX, das linhas orientadoras futuras do ensino secundário português. Mostrou, ainda, que essas docentes foram as pioneiras que abriram o caminho para o aumento crescente do número de professoras do ensino secundário durante o século XX.

Palavras-chave: Congressos pedagógicos; liceus; professores.

From the creation of the Federation of High-school Teachers Associations in Portugal to the 1st Pedagogical Congress

From the beginning of the 20th century, the number of students in high schools (created in 1836) had been growing, but not at a regular pace. In the academic year of 1899-1900 a total of 3.265 students were registered, whereas in the academic year of 1926-27, the secondary school population was 11.430 male students and 3.666 female students. That comes to a total of 15.096 (Nóvoa e Santa-Clara, 2003). This growth continued into the next academic year. However, it didn't occur in the next two years, when this attendance decreased (Sampaio, 1929). At that time, high schools were basically organized according to the reformation by Jaime Moniz (1894-95) and they continued this way until the reformation by Pires de Lima, in 1947. The curriculum was structured by classes (as opposed to the loose subjects that resulted from the reformation of Marquês de Pombal), focused more on teaching a classic curriculum, without despising the scientific one, with teachers that were experts in each subject, strict schedules and with classes whose duration was usually of one hour.

During the period between 1917 and 1925, the high-school teachers associations were residual, despite the existence of the Associação do Magistério Oficial (*Association of the Official Teaching*) (Bento, 1973). However, it was mainly from the 1st Republic onwards that we noticed a growing concern on the part of high-school teachers, especially from high schools in the countryside, about pedagogy and job's conditions. That new generation of teachers who appeared in the 1st Republic and was trained in regular schools, had an interest for debate and a higher knowledge of pedagogical subjects (Bento, 1973). Actually, it was during the 1st Republic that the teachers associations started to raise their voices demanding in the Parliament through representations, telegrams and callings, and where the teachers showed awareness of the need to initiate and consolidate the process of professionalization (Brás *et al.*, 2010).

Those first initiatives led to a great development of the social and historic building of the high-school teaching profession that had a strong impulse in 1925 and that began with a group of teachers of the Liceu de Aveiro (Aveiro Lyceum). Besides other initiatives in favour of the class, they idealized the publication of a journal whose first issue would eventually be published in January the following year. That journal, the *Labor*, was the descendant of previous periodic associative publications, such as the *Revista do Ensino Médio e Profissional (Journal of the Medium and Professional Teaching)* (1913-1916), an organ of the Associação dos Professores dos Liceus do Norte (Association of the

Official Teaching of Industrial and High Schools), the *Revista dos Liceus* (*Journal of High Schools*) (1916), published by the Associação dos Professores dos Liceus do Norte (Association of Teachers from North High Schools), and the *Boletim da Associação dos Professores das Escolas Industriais e Comerciais* (*Bulletin of the Association of Teachers of Industrial and Commercial Schools*) (1921-1927), published by the association with the same name (Pintassilgo, 2008). Those journals were the catharsis of problems in the educational and professional development of teachers, who complained about their social dignity and aimed at exerting pressure on the republican political power, so that measures about their interests were applied. The concerns presented to the republican political power were about the academic schedule, the career, the salaries, overtime payment and the manner of election of organs of schools direction (Pintassilgo, 2008). Those requirements fit a kind of association of multiple references, different from the union model that characterized the primary school teachers (Pintassilgo, 2008). However, despite many claims and some initiatives in the field, there was always disenchantment with the Ministry of Public Instruction. Thus, the access to the rulers was not easy. This was unable to solve the teachers' problems which led to the disappointment generated by the high expectation attached to the redeeming virtues of the 1st Republic.

The new journal, the *Labor*, initially directed by José Tavares and Álvaro Sampaio, gave a new breath to the teachers' fight and would become the centre of the action of the high-school teachers associations (Bento, 1973). It was one of those associations – the Associação do Liceu de Passos Manuel (Association of Passos Manuel Lyceum) (Lisbon) – that together with the editor of the journal and the Núcleo do Liceu da Póvoa de Varzim (Nuclei of the Póvoa de Varzim Lyceum), decided to convene the teachers in order to try the class organization. In result, twenty-seven delegates of different high schools got together in Passos Manuel. From that meeting was born the Federação das Associações dos Professores dos Liceus Portugueses (Federation of Portuguese High-School Teachers Associations). Thus, the statutes were approved and they proceeded to the election of management bodies, of which several ladies were part, such as Seomara da Costa Primo, Alice Guardiola, and Maria Emília Medina. Carvalho Santos was the elected president.

The reorganization of the secondary school teachers created a breaking point with governments, considered by Sampaio (1927) as inept: “From the governments, whatever they are, we can expect nothing” (p. 256). According to the director of the

Labor, the Ministry of Public Instruction had not welcomed this initiative. The Federation was perceived as another instrument of control of government policies that sometimes expressed themselves in decrees made to benefit certain individuals or groups over others. Sampaio (1927) fiercely defended that “the established base for the conquest of the place of high school teacher in any school is the competition (p. 257). However, the combativeness of the *Labor* was not aimed exclusively at government action as the very direction of the Federation was severely criticized by the leadership of *Labor*. As a result, there were new elections in the Federation and Carvalho Santos loses his place to Cirilo Soares (Bento, 1973). At the same time, they voted the realization of the *1st Pedagogical Congress of the Official Secondary Teaching*, to be held on the 10th, 11th and 12th of June of 1927.

This meeting, which had been desired by the teachers for years, had finally put itself in motion, in the path of awareness of secondary teachers as a class, as it can be seen in the words of Braga Paixão (1927): “Only now in high schools you can feel the spirit of corporation, only now all of us have the conscience of proximity of our effort and of our mutual dependence of our work.” (p. 186). Coinciding intentionally with the Day of Camões, the first meeting of the *1st Pedagogical Congress of the Official Secondary Teaching* happened in the Liceu José Estevão (José Estevão Lyceum), in Aveiro, in order to address educational issues and other concerns that worried the class.

When the *1st Pedagogical Congress* was organized, the female presence, despite not being high (it represented only 15% of the total of the participants, was still evident as the press acknowledged at the time. In the newspaper *O Comércio do Porto*, an author identified just as C. (1927), announced on the first page the news about the opening of the *1st Pedagogical Congress*: “There were more than 200 participants, among them many female teachers” (p. 1). The journalist Aniceto (1927), in the newspaper *A Ideia Nacional*, enthusiastically pointed the important role played by the female teachers that were present:

On the first working session the ladies brightly marked their place [...] Maria Emília Medina, a teacher in Liceu Maria Pia [Maria Pia Lyceum], in Lisbon, began the feminine debate. Peaceful and quiet, revolved around the issue that was interesting to her – the situation of the trainees and the unjustifiable inequality of treatment compared to the effective teachers [...] Then, she was followed by Maria Soares, from the Liceu Carolina Michaëlis [Carolina Michaëlis Lyceum (Oporto)] who talked about the same issue. (p. 2).

The bad working conditions of the trainees of the Liceu Carolina Michaëlis (Oporto) was not an isolated case as the operating conditions of the school Infanta D. Maria (Coimbra) were also very deficient, almost shameful. Maria Emília Duarte Costa, president of the Liceu Carolina Michaëlis (Oporto), took the opportunity to acknowledge the situation of the lands belonging to the high school where she taught, ordered by the Department of Engineering, which threatened the claim of the building, asking for more room and better conditions for the installation of the high school.

The female communications presented in the *1st Pedagogical Congress* was of an undeniable quality, such as the one by Judite Coelho, with her requirements for the high school system of physical education, the paper from Seomara da Costa Primo, who highlighted the importance of the science teaching for the training of students in high schools and the paper of Maria Soares, who fought for female education. For these women with higher education, education was a worthy career choice, however it was just within reach of some elected as a sort of reward for their academic abilities. Therefore, it is not surprising that the quality of those communications showed a better knowledge of the subjects by the women than by the men. They all showed a deep knowledge of the subject and they also proved that they knew about the best developments that occurred in Europe at that time. This situation would continue in the next congresses. In the second, the female participation would amount to 28%; in the third to 30% and in the fourth to 30%.² The female participation contributed to the close relationship that Pintassilgo (2008) identified between the development of the teaching association, the affirmation of the professional concerns and the investment of the teaching associative organizations and the investment of the building of identity forms.

Seomara da Costa Primo and the Biology teaching

The *1st Pedagogical Congress* was chaired by José Tavares, principal of the Liceu José Estevão (Aveiro), in representation of the Ministry of Public Instruction, Alfredo de Magalhães. The principal of the Liceu de Aveiro, in his opening communication of the Congress, presented many compliments to the development of the science teaching in secondary schools. He also presented many complaints regarding the ancient science teaching because it was focused on the textbooks:

² This slight increase in the feminine participation in the congresses is in line with the increase in the number of female teachers in high schools, a phenomenon that finds a parallel in the slow, yet steady, growth of female teachers in the Spanish *Institutos de Ensino Secundário* (Institutes of Secondary Education) of that time (Flecha García, 2008).

The Natural Science and the Physical and Chemical Sciences were pretexts to surprising and useless memory exercises. The textbook was everything: the research, experimentation and the observation, typical of those disciplines, which were secondary to the science teaching, and a minor preoccupation of the teachers. (*Federação*, 1928, p. 14)

About the actual teaching of those sciences, José Tavares highlighted that they were really positive because they are experimental and centred in the observation. However, despite his interest in science teaching, he showed his conservative ideas by proclaiming the need to give the secondary teaching a classical and humanistic character, putting in the second place the utility of science teaching.

Thus, it was in that two-way context of support to the science teaching and, at the same time, valorisation of a more traditional teaching, that Seomara da Costa Primo, a sciences teacher with a relevant curriculum (Primo, 1943), presented the communication *The success of the biological sciences in the secondary schools*. This teacher, an important “activist of the associative movement of the secondary school teachers” (Nóvoa, 2003, p. 1120), developed great part of her career in the Liceu Maria Amália Vaz de Carvalho (Maria Amália Vaz de Carvalho Lyceum) (Primo, 1943). It was during her teaching activity in the secondary school, that she had accumulated with her work in Universidade de Lisboa (University of Lisbon), she developed an “intense activity in the scientific, pedagogical and associative fields” (Nóvoa, 2003, p. 1120). One of the many expressions of that activity was shown in her communication that started with a negative judgement about the typical student of the secondary schools, considering him/her “incapable of observing and judging the facts and manipulating the simplest instruments that helped him/her in his/her studies” (*Federação*, 1928, p. 114). To Primo, that undeveloped intellectual state was the result of the secondary school culture of the memory instead of the development of the required abilities to the practical life. The author considered a priority to transform the undeveloped intellectual abilities of the youngster caused by the insistence on learning by memorisation into a cognitive growth, by experiencing practical situations through the science disciplines. In a Darwinist line of thought, and extrapolating the argumentation of natural selection, the author made an alert:

[...] if contemporary education doesn't bring to the subject all of its beneficial effects – that selection and growth of the qualities of the race – making him ready to act and to win in his environment, the education doesn't use all its potentialities. (*Federação*, 1928, p. 116)

To prepare the student in order to overcome the difficulties that he/she will find in the modern life, she advised that the secondary teaching should foment: i) the physical education, to avoid physical deterioration of the race; ii) the moral culture, to improve the will of the youngsters and their habits of effort, responsibility, honour and duty; iii) the intellectual culture, putting in second plan the memorisation and in the first plan the experimentation. For the achievement of those fundamental objectives of the secondary teaching, Primo considered that Biology is a primary force:

Biology, through its problems of immediate interest to the human being, its multiple applications, the moral concepts that it develops, and as an engine of the discipline of thought, constitutes the most important material to use in secondary teaching, because it concerns health, interests, information, habits of thought and ideas. (*Federação*, 1928, p. 117)

She also said that the study of living things gives to “Biology a deep moral side” (*Federação*, 1928, p. 117), and consequently, this teaching promotes the formation of the character and the modelling of the working habits, effort and initiative of students. This Biology teaching leads to the considerations of Pintassilgo (2008) about the pedagogical fight against the “character crisis” (p. 83), as a way of rejuvenating Portugal, a discourse that already permeates the Portuguese education in the transition from the 19th to the 20th century. The renovation that Biology teaching brings to education is also linked to the construction process of the teachers identity because “believing in the social higher function of teaching” (Pintassilgo, 2008, p. 83), gives education the statute of a “superior mission”, not only of educating the youngest students, but also of globally influencing the student, modelling his/her character according to social acceptable characteristics.

The teaching of biological sciences had the maximum effect on the training of the youngest students. Primo considered that the teachers should use methods that bring the students closer to real life. In order to accomplish that goal, she suggested that methods should include laboratory classes and improvement of the students’ ability of observation. The observation should be used in the first classes, for the students to compare the similarities and differences between structures and organisms and, furthermore, to perform their classification. In the advanced classes, the Biology teacher should prefer the laboratory experiments, where the student could verify a phenomenon or find new relations between facts. For the success of that training, Primo insisted on the importance of textbooks, but only as a complement to the teacher’s Biology lesson.

In this way, she agrees with José Tavares when he points out that, in the past, the Natural Science and the Physical and Chemical Sciences were used to promote only the memory of the students, blaming the textbooks on occupying the centre of the science teaching.

The science teaching seems to have also inspired Primo when she was a student, because she was the first woman to gain a Ph.D. in Sciences in Portugal (Primo, 1943). This teacher stated that if the teacher remains involved in the interests and needs of the students, searching for the maximum accomplishment of each one and developing the natural tendencies they brought since they were children, the teacher will have educational success because “a student with attention and interest is a disciplined student because he works” (*Federação*, 1928, p. 121). In that way, the classroom will be a true centre of learning instead of a place of impositions where students work without pleasure.

The communication of Primo was applauded by the participants. Bento (1973) noted that this and other communications of pedagogical character searched to “retain and apply the fundamental principles of the active school of republicans” (p. 113). Primo is responsible for an important role in the consolidation of the “subject code” (Cuesta Fernández, 2003) of the Natural Science and Physical and Chemical Sciences in the Portuguese educational system, by attributing them the statute of irreplaceable subjects in the secondary school curriculum.

In the *2nd Pedagogical Congress*, she didn't present any communication, but she played the important role of presiding the last session. The way she was presented: “We have in the presidency a valuable element of the secondary school teachers, and a lady dedicated to education and to the teaching profession” (*Federação*, 1929, p. 127), shows the academic recognition of her work for the community of the secondary school teachers.

Judite Coelho and the teaching of physical education

Since the end of the 19th century, many educators had been warning about the importance of physical education teaching, whose practise could bring health benefits to the youngest that struggled against illnesses such as tuberculosis. These concerns were once again repeated in the *2nd Pedagogical Congress of the Official Secondary Teaching*, by Virgílio da Rocha Dinis, principal of Liceu Alves Martins (Alves Martins Lyceum), in Viseu. That teacher defended the idea that physical and moral decadence of

the race is one of the main causes of the decrease of students' intellectual level (*Federação*, 1929). In fact, Virgílio and other educators truly believed that the physical deterioration was the precursor of the intellectual and moral run-out (Ó, 2003). Thus, in the line of the latest hygienists' conceptions, they defended the teaching of this area from the first grade to the high school.

In this hygienist area, the first communication of the fourth session of 11th of June of the 1st *Pedagogical Congress*, entitled *Breeding gymnastic and the attitudes of the Swedish method of gymnastics*, was the responsibility of Judite Coelho, a physical education teacher. The subject of physical education didn't attract the teachers at that time, as it can be seen in the Spanish case, in which the languages, geography, history and drawing teachers prevailed (Flecha García, 2008). However, Judite Coelho was the daughter of Luís Coelho, one of the pioneers of pedagogic gymnastics, especially of the Ling method. Judite Coelho followed her father's steps. Her life was definitely marked by an effort of consolidation and development of physical education in high schools. (Nóvoa, 2003). Thus, in her paper she defended the obligation of Swedish gymnastics with the duration of three hours per week in the 1st and 2nd classes of high schools. However, she rejected that practice in large groups of students. She also revealed pedagogic concerns about the classification of students, suggesting that it should be numerical and not exclusive, and she still hoped for the creation of special gymnastics classes for disabled students.

Another requirement was the fact that the physical education teachers should have the same rights as the others and that their teaching should be solid. Therefore, she predicted that physical education would diverge from the undervalued social vision that consisted on "teaching how to move arms and legs at a time" (*Federação*, 1928, p. 107). This rejection led to the effective introduction of physical education in schools and had to face many obstacles, including the ones created by the students' families that considered the activity as a secondary one (Sacadura, 1907). In the 2nd *Pedagogical Congress*, the colonel Correia dos Santos, a teacher at the military school, warned the participants that physical education was neglected in high schools and that the students' parents used fraudulent means to prevent their children from attending those classes. Parents regarded this subject as being a waste of time that distracted the students from their intellectual tasks. These points of view about physical education led Ó (2003) to notice that it really played a symbolic struggle between families and other actors of the educational community like the teachers and the school doctor. Their final goal was to

do only what they named by “final rescue”, that means, to free the students from the negative influence of their families concerning their education. These power games on the part of the physical education teachers and school doctors aimed to make attendance in this area compulsory and, at the same time, they tried to make difficult to miss the classes (Ó, 2003).

Being on the same side of the battlefield of the physical education teachers, the participants accepted the majority of Judite Coelho’s proposals. However, Sá Oliveira (Lisbon) didn’t refrain from making some accusations. After arguing that all teachers, to a greater or lesser extent, are physical education teachers, mentioned that the ones who he designated as gym teachers, spent most of the year making measures and only gave lessons for three months. Although he agreed with the equiparation of gym teachers to other teachers, he referred that they had to go through a strict selection process and he didn’t understand why they didn’t stay together, at least in his school, with the other teachers. These charges referred to the consolidation of the social status of gym teachers, which proved to be a difficult process with not only external obstacles, but also with blames from the teachers of this area. About this, Lobão de Carvalho (Oporto) referred that in terms of their academic preparation, physical education teachers are divided into those who almost hold a medical degree and the attendance of a normal higher education school and those who do not hold those qualifications. This disparity occurred also between other subjects teachers. Despite this criticism, another participant, Sá Esteves (Bragança) recognized merit in the paper presented by Judite Coelho and he also proposed that her work should be sent to all physical education teachers of high schools.

Maria Soares and the feminine teaching

The teacher Maria Soares, from the Liceu Carolina Michaëlis (Oporto), made an important intervention in the *2nd Pedagogical Congress*. In a paper entitled *The feminine education in Portugal*, she defended the instruction of women and the creation of a typically feminine school system (*Federação*, 1929). According to this participant, this type of education had not existed in the country because the high school system was equal for both genders in feminine high schools and mixed ones [except for the Instituto de Educação e Trabalho de Odivelas (Institution of Education and Work of Odivelas)]. The feminine education should “meet the simultaneous action of women in family and society” (*Federação*, 1929, p. 98). Maria Soares went further and called for

“unconditional impediment of girls’ enrolment in masculine high schools, in cities where there are high schools with feminine sections” (*Federação*, 1929, p. 106). This measure would solve the problems raised by the families that do not allow their girls to study in schools attended by boys. It would also be a way to solve the abundance of female labour because there were enough properly qualified women to teach in those feminine high schools. By defending the separation of genders, and the pedagogic and curricular differentiation, she had stayed away from coeducation, a triumph of the 1st Republic. However, she linked a greater role for women in the conservative society of that time as she defended that “the Portuguese society lacks great offices of educated women to work in reshaping the decadent and selfish national spirit” (*Federação*, 1929, p. 100).

As for the education of the women who didn’t belong to the elites, she suggested that the complementary schools, already designated in decree, prepared them primarily for the domestic life. In those schools, the practice of feminine skills should be tested and developed in the subjects “*ménageres*”, where there are activities such as sewing workshops, working in nurseries next to schools, in the kitchen, in the canteen, in nursery services as well as in handicrafts, floriculture, poultry farming, apiculture, sericulture, etc. However, for the elite women, she defended that they should not be limited to a domestic preparation, but they should also develop their skills. Thus, the female high schools should play a different role: to prepare them for higher education degrees and to teach a general culture that would raise women’s mental level. These high schools should develop the women’s intelligence, their initiative effort; sharpen their willpower and their manual skills, preparing them for solving many problems without outside help, and finally to turn them into independent women.

Although, she didn’t deny access to a general culture from the women, which was necessary to raise their children adequately, she didn’t defend that high schools offered theoretical subjects, such as hygiene, as they were not well accepted by the students. For example, this subject existed in the Liceu Carolina Michäelis Lyceum, at that time attended by 900 students, but only a dozen of them, attended those classes. Maria Soares suggested that this knowledge should be taught during the holidays by the families.

As chair of the closing session of this congress, Seomara da Costa Primo also pointed out Maria Soares’s thesis and the importance of feminine education in Portugal, considering that “without it, all other problems, although well solved, will go together

disjointed in the work that we intent to do” (*Federação*, 1929, p. 129). She also established a relation between the origins of “men’s bad behaviour (...) in the poor education they receive from their mothers” (*Federação*, 1929, p. 129). Following her statements, she admitted the urgent need for a “feminine elite” (*Federação*, 1929, p. 129) that should work in collaboration with men, in order to create a more intelligent and happier country. Thus, she warned that the creation of another feminine high school “where women could use their effort and interest in the most difficult of arts, to educate, urged” (*Federação*, 1929, p. 129). Regarding these proposals, it is not surprising that in Primo’s line of thought, the assertion by Maria Soares that “It is not enough that women are ignorant and submissive”, (*Federação*, 1929, p. 99) has led to the approval of all proposals. However, it must be emphasized that about this discussion, two teachers were against the separation of the genders, continuing to defend the coeducation, which means that the teachers present in the *2nd Pedagogical Congress* would probably defend a separate education.

Conclusion

The first years of the authoritarian regime were to the secondary school teachers, paradoxically, a high point in their associative path, and, simultaneously, the back way of those initiatives due to the unfavourable political context (Pintassilgo, 2008). In that period between 1927 and 1931, five *Pedagogical Congresses of the Official Secondary Teaching* took place, promoted by the *Federation of the Associations of Portuguese Secondary Teachers*. Famous female educators from the previous century participated in those Congresses, and their communications created significant moments of sharing of educational experiences. They also instigated the reflection about the teacher profession and the Portuguese educational system, creating an important focus of analysis on the characteristics of the teacher’s associative organizations of that period. A vital role was allocated to the female teachers in those Congresses, mainly in those that occurred in 1927 and 1928, due to their considerable presence amongst the audience, and also due to the communications that some of them presented, which had major implications on the construction of the modern teaching profession.

Those teachers defended a new role by women in society that, like Maria Soares had said, led to “the action of the women outside home” (*Federação*, 1929, p. 99). Women desired their independence, an ambition that was even greater for those who held a higher education degree and who were secondary school teachers. With awareness of

their traditional family responsibilities, but also of the rights of their effort and merits, those teachers kept away from the traditional obedient role socially attributed to women. Being in places that were once, in their large majority, only attributed to men, those teachers brought new voices and ideas to the secondary teaching that contributed substantially to its modulation in the first half of the 20th century.

Amongst those teachers, besides Maria Soares, Seomara da Costa Primo and Judite Coelho were also very important. Seomara da Costa Primo had a place in the educational Portuguese history because she was the first woman who held a Ph.D. in sciences. She vigourously supported a practical science teaching, instead of a theoretical and memorethical science teaching. She was certain that transformation in science teaching was beneficial to the intellectual and moral formation of the youngest students. Therefore, Judite Coelho, being aware of the bad health of the youngest students, supported the physical education teaching by showing the advantages of the practice of physical exercises. Thus, these intellectuals, in a period of political and social transition in Portugal, characterised by the ideological uniformity that conducted to an educative eclipse, brought new pedagogical ideas and contributed substantially to the reflection about the secondary teaching.

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