

Everything starts with the curriculum: The case of Portugal

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Former Minister of Education and Science of Portugal (2011-2015)

Chapter 8 Curriculum and Educational Reforms in Portugal: An Analysis on Why and How Students' Knowledge and Skills Improved

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Abstract By the turn of the century, following the dismal first results in TIMSS and PISA, the Portuguese educational system was at a crossroads. It was clear that students were not attaining minimal levels of proficiency in reading, math, science, and other basic subjects. The system needed a deep reshaping, and so changes were made. By the time the last PISA and TIMSS international large-scale surveys' results were released in 2015, Portugal registered a quantum leap: in PISA, student achievement was above the OECD average and in TIMSS, 4th graders had higher scores in Mathematics than several usually high-performing countries, including Finland. How was this possible? To understand what happened, we need to look at what Portugal has done in the last 10–15 years. Although many different ministers from different ideological standpoints made different reforms, there is a common thread to most changes: they paid increased attention to results. This proved to be a powerful thrust for improvement, backed up by experienced teachers. However, this general thrust assumed many concrete different aspects and promoted different reforms. During the 2011–2015 period, these reforms went further and were very clear, intentional, and explicit: a clear curriculum, increased school autonomy, students' regular assessment, vocational paths, flexibility. All this helped to prepare

Fernando M. Reimers *Editor*

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Improving a Country's Education

PISA 2018 Results in 10 Countries

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authoritarian times
1933 - 1974

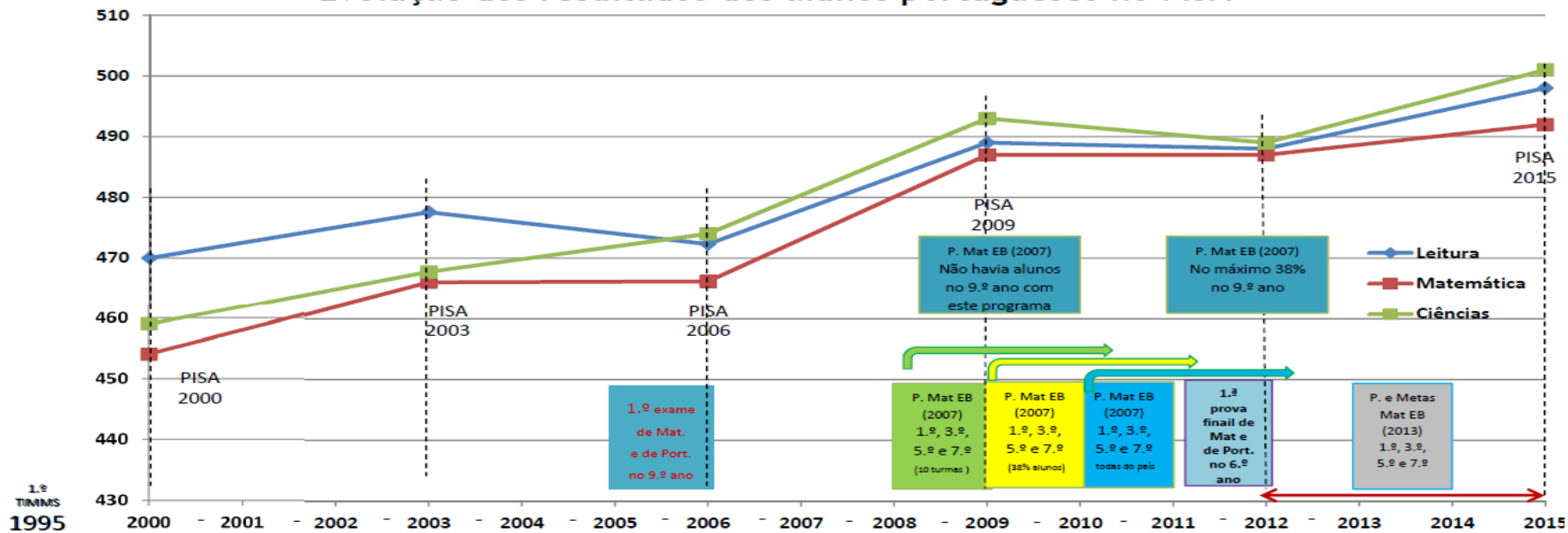
“romantic” era
1974 - 1995/2000

pragmatic times
2000 - 2011

knowledge curriculum
2011 - 2015

flexibility
2016 - ...

Evolução dos resultados dos alunos portugueses no PISA



Outubro 1999 Marçal Grião	Outubro 1999 Gui O. Martins	Setembro 2000 Augusto S. Silva	Julho 2001 Júlio Pedrosa	Abril 2002 David Justino	Julho 2004 Carmo Seabra	Março 2005 Maria de Lurdes Rodrigues	Outubro 2009 Isabel "Alçada"	Junho 2011 Nuno Crato
- Exames nacionais no ES (1996) - Exames nacionais como Prova de Ingresso ao E. Sup. (1998)		- 1.ª divulgação dos resultados dos exames/ escola no ES - Reorganização do curricular do EB	- Reforma do Ensino Secundário - Promove exames nacionais de Matemática e Português no 9.º ano	Prepara os 1.ºs exames nacionais de Mat. e Port. do 9.º ano	- AEC - Novos programas de português e Matemática (2007) - Plano da Matemática I (2006-2007) a (2008-2009) - Plano da Matemática II (2009-2010) a (2011-2012) - Plano Nacional de Leitura		- Metas de Aprendizagem - Aplicação do TIMSS 2011 (Interrompida após 1995)	- Revisão da estrutura curricular (+ horas a Por, Mat, Hist, Geog, Cién. e Fis.) - Programa de Mat. no EB - Programas de Português e Matemática e Fis.-Quím. no ES - Metas curriculares para o EB e ES - Provas finais no 4.º e 6.º anos a Português e Matemática e apoio extraordinário - Mais horas a gerir pelas escolas - Mais autonomia para as escolas - Melhor Formação inicial de Professores

Two different countries:

1995 - 2000
2001 - 2015

Specific factors

- 2001: School results
- 2004: Competences put aside
- 2005: Evaluation 9th grade
- 2006: Assessment 4th 6th, action programs, PAM
- 2007: Textbook evaluation
- 2011: Competences end, knowledge-based standards start
- 2012: Better standards
- 2012: Evaluation 4th 6th

But... what happened next ?

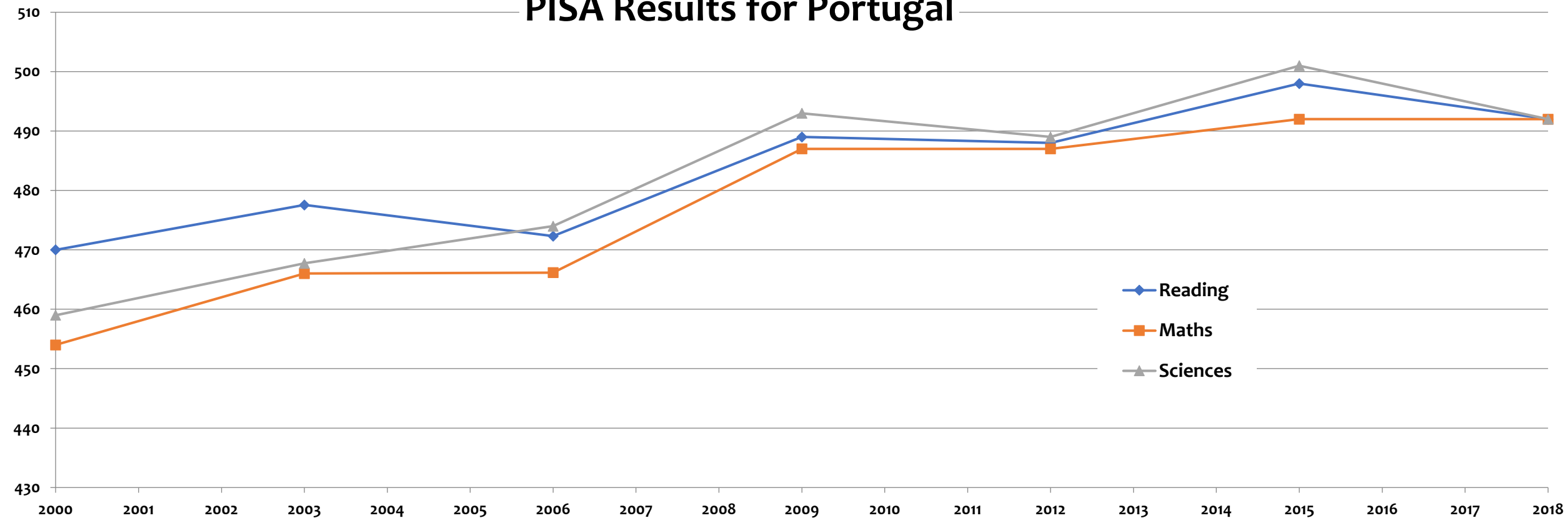
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knowledge
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2011 - 2015

vague competences again...
2016 - 2020

PISA Results for Portugal



“romantic” era
1974 - 1995/2000

pragmatic times
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knowledge
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2011 - 2015

vague competences again...
2016 - 2020

TIMSS Math 4th Grade – Results for Portugal



Sometimes, people think there is a dichotomy between quality and fairness.

So, let's have a closer look

The Portuguese case is clear

PISA - Portugal				
	2009	2011	2015	2018
Science: High-performers	4.2	4.5	7.4	5.6
Low-performers	16.5	19.0	17.4	20.2
Maths: High-performers	9.6	10.6	11.4	11.6
Low-performers	23.7	24.9	23.8	23.3
Reading: High-performers	4.8	5.8	7.5	7.3
Low-performers	17.6	18.8	17.2	19.6

High performers > 4; Low Performers < Level 2

TIMSS 4th Grade Math - Portugal			
	2011	2015	2019
High Performers	8	12	9
Low Performers	20	18	26

High performers = level 4; Low Performers ≤ Level 1

2006-2015

Increasing curricular ambition
 More precise standards
 More assessment

2016-2019

Less curricular ambition
 Standards devaluated
 Increased curricular flexibility
 Less assessment

This corroborates
larger scale studies on
inequity and excellence

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August 2018, Vol. 55, No. 4, pp. 836–858
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Inequity and Excellence in Academic Performance: Evidence From 27 Countries

Philip D. Parker 

Herbert W. Marsh

Australian Catholic University

John P. Jerrim

University College London

Jiesi Guo

Theresa Dicke

Australian Catholic University

Research suggests that a country does not need inequity to have high performance. However, such research has potentially suffered from confounders

Everything starts with the curriculum

Knowledge at the base

Evaluation is an incentive

Everybody can reach a reasonable level

Evaluating results = freedom of processes

Alternatives make all progress

A demanding curriculum

Frequent assessment

Program to fight failure

School autonomy

Alternate paths

Centred on the essential subjects

4, 6, 9, 12 years

Intervention at first difficulties

Credits to schools to support students with difficulties

Vocational paths in high school

Structured, progressive, and detailed standards

Comparison of internal and external assessments

Special hours

Incentives based on progress

Two vocational pathways

Temporary groupings

Businesses support from start to finish

Thank you!



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