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Education that works

**The Education of Portuguese Children in Britain:  
Insights from Research and Practice in England  
and Overseas**

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## Chapter 10

# The Portuguese Education Department in the United Kingdom

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with  
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### Summary

Maria Amelia Estrela, the former coordinator of the Portuguese Education Department in the U.K. presents in this chapter an insight into how this organisation was formed and has subsequently developed. Overall, this department aims to support the bilingual education of Portuguese migrant children in the U.K. Another aim of this service is to disseminate and promote the Portuguese language and culture in the U.K. The department at present runs 151 courses of Portuguese language and culture and for this purpose employs 35 teachers. Two of them present within this chapter telling accounts of their experiences as Portuguese teachers in the U.K. They highlight the rewarding aspects of their work but aptly reiterate the challenges that they face described by Maria Amelia Estrela throughout this chapter.

### 10.1 The Portuguese community in the U.K.

In the last 40 years the number of Portuguese people living in London has increased rapidly. In the 60s and early 70s owing to the political situation in Portugal (the last years of the dictatorship and colonial war) a number of Portuguese people settled mainly in Camden, London. In the 80s and 90s this small community grew. Portuguese immigrants were then moving to London mainly for economic reasons. The independence of the former Portuguese colonies in the late 70s caused a significant number of families to look for work in other European countries. Later on, after Portugal entered the European Union, and during the late 80s and the 90s, the fierce competition of the foreign market forced the closure of small companies and family businesses. It is estimated that 200,000 Portuguese are now living in the U.K. The results of the recent census will show with certainty how many and in what areas the Portuguese are currently living.

It appears that the families come mainly from Madeira, from the north of the mainland and from the industrial areas around Lisbon and Oporto. The Portuguese usually come to work in the catering industry, domestic services, agriculture and gardening. As these are low paid jobs, they are usually forced to work very long hours in order to be able to attain the amount of savings they had in mind in the first place. Despite being strongly committed to their families, the women work sometimes even longer hours than their partners, leaving them little time to spend with their children. In a second phase of their settlement, some families open small shops, cafes/restaurants or start small businesses. Family links are strong and relationships seem to develop mainly within the community (see Nogueira and Porteous, this volume, chapter 3). Perhaps because of this, a part of the Portuguese community does not seem too interested in integrating with the English culture; it seems also to stay divorced from the more school-educated group of Portuguese residents.

Unfortunately, information available regarding the Portuguese communities in the U.K. is scarce. Research focusing on this population residing in the U.K. is much needed. Anecdotal evidence has shown that the community's quick growth has increased the difficulties felt mainly by those who arrived recently. They are related to the language barrier, to the lack of housing, and in some areas such as Lambeth in London, to the recent emergence of cases of crime and adolescent delinquency, alcohol addiction and drug consumption. Issues of truancy, low achievement and learning difficulties, of adult education and training and of mental and physical health are priorities which need to be tackled both by English and Portuguese authorities. In order to organise any service aimed at intervening, supporting and educating this community, we need to learn a great deal more about Portuguese people's occupations, aspirations, modus vivendi and integration into the British culture.

## **10.2 The teaching of Portuguese language and culture**

### *The first years of the programme*

The first Portuguese courses for migrant children in London started in 1974/75. There were 10 courses, taught by five teachers. Each teacher had a weekly workload of twenty hours: 10 hours for teaching and 10 hours for training and preparing classes.

The teachers knew very little about the linguistic situation of these immigrant children and they had to create their own specific teaching materials and strategies.

In 1976, the Portuguese Ministry of Education set up an educational advisory service based at the Portuguese Consulate in London. Mrs Ana Santos, the first education officer, wrote in 1976 in the Inner London Education Authority magazine:

“As happens with a number of other minority groups, the school performance of most Portuguese children now settled in London appears to be below that of their British peers.”

The service was therefore set up for the purpose of helping these children to benefit from all the educational possibilities offered by British primary and secondary schools and to maintain their language and cultural identity. Ana Santos went on:

“There is at present a staff of 8 teachers and an education officer. Their job, besides teaching Portuguese, is to help establish better communications between home and school. More specifically, they can help in interpreting for parents and teachers at report meetings, home visits, educational psychologists’ tests, or in any other situation where there might be difficulties in communication.”

In April 1978, the Portuguese Ministers of Emigration and Education formally created the Portuguese Education Department in London by appointing Mrs. Ana Santos as the first co-ordinator for the service. She was well aware of the needs of the Portuguese children and worked hard to establish links with schools, initiate courses and create bilingual materials.

The Department was at that time very dependent on the Consul General and there were still very few regulations. Services had been created in other European countries (i.e. France and Germany) but there was still little legislation.

### ***The Aims of the Portuguese Education Department***

The Portuguese State hence officially created the Portuguese Education Department in 1978 with the aim of teaching Portuguese pupils and supporting the bilingual education of migrant children in the U.K.

In the 1990's, another aim of this service was to disseminate and promote the Portuguese language and culture in the U.K. This was an enormous task to embark upon and no additional supporting body was introduced.

It was also hoped that this service would persuade mainstream U.K. schools to integrate Portuguese into their curriculum. This task transpired to be extremely difficult because in the U.K. it is unusual for a head-teacher to choose to offer a foreign language other than French, German or Spanish.

## **10.3 The services provided by the Department in 2001**

### ***Portuguese mother tongue courses***

The Department provides at present 151 courses of Portuguese mother tongue and culture. Of these, 91 are at primary level, 40 at secondary level and 20 at AS and A Level (AS and A level are the equivalent of "Ensino Secundário" in Portugal). Only 12 courses are taught within the mainstream schools' timetable. The vast majority (139 courses) are taught as after school classes from 4 p.m. to 7 or 8 p.m.

Hence, most of the courses are held after school time in the evening. These classes constitute an additional effort for children and teenagers who come to our classes after attending a complete day at their schools. Inevitably, this represents a challenge for Portuguese teachers in terms of class behaviour, management and motivation.

The number of students attending Portuguese classes has been increasing year by year. 2,725 students are registered on these courses this academic year. They are between 7 and 19 years of age. Each course has a minimum of 15 pupils and a maximum of 25. Each pupil benefits from an average of three weekly hours of Portuguese teaching, divided into two sessions of one hour and 30 minutes each. As

shown in the following table, we work in 45 schools. Of these 23 are in London and 22 are in Sussex, West Sussex, Surrey, Dorset, Middlesex, Berkshire, Bristol, Northamptonshire and Jersey. Of all the 45 schools where we work only 20 provide premises without payment.

**Table 10.1: Courses provided in 2001/2002**

<b>AREA</b>	<b>COUNTY OR BOROUGH</b>	<b>Number of Courses</b>	<b>Number of Students</b>	<b>Number of Teachers</b>
<b>London</b>	Barnet	1	23	1
	Brent	9	149	2
	Camden	10	188	2
	Hammersmith & Fulham	9	152	4
	Haringey	6	112	2
	Kensington & Chelsea	17	301	6
	Lambeth	23	418	5
	Waltham Forest	6	92	1
	Westminster	32	521	6
<b>South of England</b>	Sussex	3	47	1
	West Sussex	1	16	1
	Surrey	4	68	2
	Dorset	4	37	1
	Middlesex	6	125	2
	Berkshire	4	61	1
	Bristol	2	26	1
	<b>North of England</b>	Northamptonshire	1	16
<b>Jersey</b>		13	353	5
<b>TOTAL</b>		151	2725	35 (some teachers work in more than one school)

In 10 of the courses the materials and methods used are more indicative of teaching of Portuguese as a foreign language, as the children enrolled tend to belong to a

second generation and were born in this country. In most of the courses Portuguese tends to be taught as a first language and the materials used are the same as those used in Portugal (being those generally only of a year below).

All courses are offered free of charge to Portuguese children or children of Portuguese descent. Children coming from lusophone countries (Angola, Mozambique and Brazil, for instance) are also welcome. The service is hence offered to a language community and not just to those from mainland Portugal or Madeira Island.

There is an official curriculum for teaching Portuguese abroad but it only targets years 1 to 5 at Primary school level. For the following years, the teachers plan together the contents of the syllabus to be taught in the following term. They base their decisions on the Portuguese national curriculum for the teaching of Portuguese Language. The teaching of Portuguese history and literature is also included. The GCSE, AS and A Level Portuguese syllabuses are taught when the pupils are preparing for these examinations. Pupils are evaluated three times a year: Christmas, Easter and Summer. The evaluation comprises progress in the curriculum and in behavioural and working attitudes. This assessment is communicated directly by each teacher to parents in meetings.

The OCR (Oxford and Cambridge Recognising Achievement), an English examination board, provides the GCSE, AS and A Level Portuguese language examination papers. Usually the students achieve good marks at these examinations and they are frequently, for the Portuguese students, the only outstanding result they can get. Their success in this subject can rescue self-esteem battered by years of poor results in English and in the other subjects. Most schools are eager to enrol their students for examinations in Portuguese. The good marks help schools raise their levels of performance. A few schools, however, do not facilitate this provision, and the Department sometimes has to intervene.

Frequently there are pupils at different levels and of different ages attending the same course. This appears to happen mainly outside of London in areas where the number of Portuguese families is smaller. For instance, there may be children performing at five different levels within the same class. The teacher has no choice but to

accommodate these differing abilities. Thus, to give you an example, 30 pupils attending classes in one particular area are divided into just 2 courses. One is at primary level and another is at secondary level. Additionally, there are generally in each course children recently arrived from Portugal and children born in this country, or in South America, or France. All have different levels of Portuguese and face different situations, problems and needs. The teacher, of course, has to prepare lessons carefully and thoroughly in order to ensure that all the different students are motivated and progressing with their work.

Enrolment in these courses is made by the Department or by the teachers at each school. The enrolment period is in March. The courses are advertised within the community by Portuguese Associations, by the Portuguese Chaplain at Sunday mass, by the Consulate and through two publications. The Portuguese television channel broadcasting from Portugal for the emigrant communities in Europe also helps to disseminate information about these courses.

### ***Bilingual Support in London***

The Department is at present trying to offer a total of 49 hours per week of bilingual support in London. Sixteen teachers are involved in this project.

Most of this support – a total of 32 hours per week - is given to children attending schools in Lambeth. Six primary schools receive 18 hours and three secondary schools (Stockwell Park, Bishop Thomas Grant and Lilian Baylis) receive 14 hours per week. At the moment, Lambeth is the area in London that has the largest number of Portuguese children and young people. Many Portuguese families in this area are economically, socially and educationally deprived. As a result, schools in the area are generally concerned about the performance of the Portuguese children, which appears to be below that of their peers.

Schools in other areas of London should receive a total of 17 hours per week.

This is the number of weekly hours of bilingual support offered to each school:

Lambeth			
Primary Schools		Secondary Schools	
Allen Edwards School	2h00	Lillian Baylis	3h00
Lark Hall School	3h00	Bishop Thomas Grant	4h00
Loughborough School	4h00	Stockwell Park School	7h00
Stockwell Primary School	4h00		
Wyvil Primary School	4h00		
Henry Fawcett School	2h00		
Other areas			
Primary Schools		Secondary Schools	
Our Lady's (Camden, London)	3h00	St. Thomas More (Chelsea)	4h00
Hillside School (Northwood, London)	5h30	St. Thomas More (Wood Green)	2h00
Epsom	1h00		
Corby	1h30		

The bilingual support can involve a large number of tasks, including:

- assessing the child's needs and difficulties in Portuguese;
- contacting the child's family and learning more about his/her schooling, background/story;
- passing on this information to the child's class teacher or special needs teacher;
- supporting the child inside or outside the classroom so that he/she can understand difficult points of the curriculum and undertake tasks set by the class teacher;
- informing the school about the child's country and culture of origin in order to promote a better understanding of his/her previous environment;
- trying to find, in collaboration with the child's teachers, the best strategies to address particular learning and behavioural problems;
- working as interpreters at parent-teacher meetings, educational psychologists' tests, speech therapists' and medical examinations at school;
- helping with the translation of letters, short reports or phrase books;
- suggesting activities at school that may enhance perceptions of the country of origin, promote the children's self-esteem and secure the respect of their peers.

Considering that these duties differ considerably from the teachers' main task of teaching Portuguese, it is important, in the near future, to organise specific training sessions. This training could be devised and undertaken with the co-operation of the Local Education Authorities of the boroughs where a large number of Portuguese children attend school.

In order to establish a better co-operation between English and Portuguese teachers, the Department asked the EMTAG or EMAG (Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant) co-ordinator at each school to:

- welcome and guide the Portuguese teacher and help her/him with the organisation of the supporting work;
- integrate her/him within the EMTAG/EMAG team work;
- assess the results at the end of the academic year.

The schools were chosen because there were a large number of Portuguese children attending them. We are aware, however, that many other schools that have a large number of recently arrived students should also benefit from this help.

We also need to create more bilingual materials, which are cognisant of:

- the students' age and their situation as recently arrived migrants;
- the topics of the National Curriculum that they are supposed to study;
- Portugal's history and traditions, in order to build a bridge between the two cultures and ensure that the Portuguese young students feel that their cultural identity is valued.

These materials could be created by Portuguese and English teachers working together. This task could perhaps involve co-operation with the Portuguese departments in other English speaking countries.

### ***Bilingual Support in Jersey***

The five teachers working in Jersey offer 50 hours of bilingual support per week. This support has been given for six years now. It began in 1995/96 and in 1997 a Co-operation Agreement was signed between the Portuguese Ministry of Education and

the Jersey Education Committee. The agreement establishes, in its main lines, that each teacher has a timetable of 22 hours a week. This is broken down thus:

- 12 hours teaching “Língua e Cultura Portuguesas”
- 10 hours assisting and supporting pupils within Jersey schools.

The local educational authorities that recently decided to try an experimental scheme manage the support. Each school assesses recently arrived children with the help of the Portuguese teachers and the use of diagnostic papers common to all schools in the island. Then they inform the Special Needs Department which children need more urgent support and in what subjects. According to these priorities, the Portuguese teachers' supporting hours are then allocated to different schools, “in order to allow for the pupils' maximum access to the Jersey Curriculum”. Our teachers do not teach English though; that task is left to English teachers. Each pupil receives intensive support for a minimum of one month.

#### **10.4 The Teachers and their experiences**

At the moment there is a total of 38 teachers employed by the Portuguese Ministry of Education and working in the U.K. and in Jersey. However, only 35 are teaching. The Ministry sent twenty-three of these teachers here after applying nationally for these jobs. They are members of staff at a primary or a secondary school in Portugal and were sent abroad for 4 years. It is possible however to continue to teach and reside in the U.K for longer if you apply several times. Some of the teachers have been working in London for more than 15 years. They are all fully qualified and well-paid teachers. None of them, however, received in Portugal specific and consistent preparation to teach abroad. Some of them adapt quickly and well to the requirements of the job and to the needs of the migrant children. In my view, however, the Portuguese Government needs to develop structures to ensure that the programme for teaching abroad is more efficient. Crucially, teachers need to be adequately trained. Moreover, within this training there needs to be a substantive input from the country where the teachers are based.

The other fifteen teachers are hired annually and locally. Nearly all have a degree and most of them have a teacher-training diploma. They are either replacing full-time

teachers or working part-time. Despite receiving more modest wages and having a precarious job situation, they are generally extremely dedicated and professional.

Six of the teachers have time allocated in their schedules to create teaching materials for different levels. One of the teachers has two hours per week to support distant learning, mainly helping a small number of parents to teach Portuguese to their children.

According to Portuguese law, a full-time teacher should have a workload of 22 teaching hours per week. The duties of the teachers working abroad comprise:

- Teaching Portuguese language and culture;
- Teaching young people, adults and those who would like to resume their education, Portuguese reading and writing;
- Supporting long-distance learning Portuguese students or students wanting to take the Portuguese examinations of the host country (i.e. GCSE in Portuguese);
- Supporting the integration in school of children who have recently arrived from Portugal;
- Taking action to support the dissemination and promotion of the Portuguese language and culture.

In consideration of the experiences of Portuguese teachers in the U.K, it is particularly interesting and relevant to give thought to the following accounts written by Mrs Rosa Starr and Maria Lumen Rodrigues, two of our most inspiring teachers.

### **The teaching of Portuguese pupils in Britain**

*An account by Rosa Starr*

Personally, I believe that the teacher of Portuguese pupils provides the *connection* between the two cultures: the Portuguese culture and the culture where the children now reside. For this reason, I think it is essential to establish parallels between Portugal and Great Britain whenever possible, and to constantly reinforce the advantages of being bilingual. In addition to the learning of the Mother Tongue, it is important to try and convey an understanding and appreciation of the Portuguese culture and civilisation. To this effect, it is important to instil in the pupils due respect for their

country of origin and pride in being Portuguese. However, whilst developing the pupils' connection to the Portuguese language and culture, we must not forget the community in which they are now living and we should understand the loyalty conflicts they may be experiencing.

In my experience, the Portuguese teachers in a foreign country have to be very *flexible* when planning their teaching. There are specific difficulties in this type of teaching: the timetable, the different ages and levels in each teaching group and the tiredness of the children after a whole day at their English schools. It is necessary to use a variety of methods, in accordance with the individual needs of each pupil. Once again, remaining flexible is vital.

The attainment and maintenance of *respect* for the students and their families is also imperative. It is necessary to establish good relationships with the students, their parents and carers, based on mutual respect and on the knowledge that we are all working towards a common goal. Moreover, achieving an adequate level of communication with the pupils, the parents and if possible with the English school in order to understand the specific problems of each individual is highly beneficial. Finally, respect, understanding and support should always be given by all the authorities involved in the children's education to the teachers, who do their best in difficult circumstances and who try very hard, often beyond their classroom duties, in attempting to aid the Portuguese community.

Rosa Starr's account offers a powerful insight into how the Portuguese teacher can be supportive of the development of Portuguese children and their families. Firstly, she commented on the need to take into account that these children do not live solely within one culture, but between cultures and between languages. The migration process has exposed them to a bicultural/bilingual trajectory that needs to be accounted for. She acknowledges that there is a potential for conflicts emerging from these experiences, and argues that the way forward is to help the children and their families to realise the advantages of appreciating the assets of both languages and cultural heritage. Having made clear her positioning, she then articulates the implications for the organisation of the teaching in terms of being flexible with regard to the curriculum, timetables, methods, etc. In other words, being flexible means being sensitive to the specific needs, experiences and current life conditions of the children. To conclude, Rosa used the word *respect* to describe the teacher-parent relationships and the relationships between the education authorities and the parents. Accordingly, she suggests that not only does respect involve good communication

between teachers and parents, but it also requires that the education authorities support the teacher.

**My experiences as a teacher of Portuguese children:  
A personal perspective**

*Maria Lumen Rodrigues*

I have been working with Portuguese children for several years both under the Portuguese Education Department and as a member of the Hertfordshire Language and Curriculum Development Support Team, now known as the EMAG Team. My work in schools is varied. I mainly work with primary age children, from Nursery to year 6. The work is done both in class with monolingual children, in collaboration with the class teacher, or through withdrawing them, to work on a one-to-one basis or in a small group of bilingual children. The support aims to give children confidence, extend vocabulary and encourage them to blossom. I use Portuguese to help them understand concepts and learn English language that is related to these concepts.

Children's attitudes to learning and the confidence they have in themselves are key factors in successful learning. In this way, being taught by and having access to someone who speaks their language gives them not only the confidence they need but also raises their self-esteem.

Being presented with a teacher who in my case not only speaks their mother tongue language but is also of a different skin colour is initially a shock to these children. Generally it takes a few minutes before they warm up to me. Thankfully, up to now, after a brief period of shyness, they all have begun to smile. Gradually a close relationship develops and the extensive conversations become frequent. I have wonderful experiences dealing with these children.

In Nursery the help comes in different forms within the six areas of the foundation stage. On a personal and social note, I make the children feel welcome, appreciated, secure, understood and comforted when in distress. I explain the routine and what is expected from them. I communicate with carers and parents, explain requests from staff, translate written communications from or to school, sort out problems or misunderstandings and also communicate in writing from school to home.

I assess the children's understanding and how their concepts have developed in Portuguese. I use a more complex language construction to assess children's different use of language, such as the use of the past tense. I offer children the opportunity to work in their own language, allowing them to display a wider range of skills. I explain tasks and teachers' expectations to children and I offer advice to staff on how to

enhance activities such as that which involves reading stories to the whole class.

I also assess mathematical concepts such as 'one more' and talk to them while they apply their mathematical thinking. I allow children to express their experiences in Portuguese, and compare this with their performance using English.

I use their first language to discuss activities and experiences, allowing them to put forward their ideas and points of view. I explain the meaning of the vocabulary being used, liaise with parents about past experiences and abilities shown by children; establish their range of ability, including that which involves creativity and enhance their ability by explaining, directing and deepening their understanding of concepts.

I was also privileged to work with a teacher who greatly valued the different languages that the children spoke in her classroom. She asked me to take the class and tell them stories or translate into Portuguese the story she had read. The children loved the experience and that not only raised the status of the languages but also made the Portuguese children feel very important as they were recognized as knowing two languages while most of the class could only speak English.

In one particular class, Jessica, 5 years old, had just arrived from Portugal, but was very confident. She is a good example of the benefits gained from the support we give. She is now, three years later, almost at the same level as the English children of her age. When she started school, and was told a word in English, she would tell them the same word in Portuguese and the children in her class were also learning these words.

José is now 7 years old and considers himself a big boy because now he goes to 'Portuguese school'. When I first met him, he rarely spoke. The school knew he was Portuguese because of his name, but little more than this about him. As soon as I spoke Portuguese to him, his eyes lit up and a huge smile appeared. He grew confident and he is now showing what he is capable of. If he has any problems, he tells me and we solve them together.

Natasha is another example. I was originally unaware that Natasha was Portuguese. She was a very quiet and shy girl. She worked well with her peers and didn't show any need for help until she left the Nursery. When I worked with her in Reception, I discovered that there is more to her than one might think. She could read well without understanding the meaning but was very keen to learn. She just needed help to feel able to ask a teacher when she did not know or understand something. Her actual teacher doesn't feel that she needs my help but I feel very sad when I collect the other Portuguese children in her class and see her eyes following me, begging to take her too. Although she is very shy, she found the courage to ask her teacher to let her work with me but to no avail. I still feel that she would benefit from my help even if I merely provided her

with an opportunity to air her concerns.

At the moment in one school, there are three children who just arrived from Portugal. They are very keen students but the two boys, twins, are not happy. They feel anxious and look forward to Thursdays when I come. I have to let them speak for about 10 minutes without making any interruptions. They have so much to say; things about school, what happens in the playground, what make them feel unhappy. They need someone that they can relate to, someone who will attend to their worries and concerns and someone who can clarify instructions or information about school activities.

Their mother approached me because they feel unhappy about not progressing as they did in Portugal, to the extent that they want to go back. The one-hour per week that I spend with them is not at all sufficient for their situation. The school has tried to support them through buying them a CD Rom to aid their learning of the English language but in this case they need language support more than anything. What should I do?

In general, the Portuguese children in my school perform well. This year 80% or above, achieved Level 2 in reading, writing and all of them gained Level 2 and above in mathematics. This result has improved since 1998 when all the children achieved Level 2 and above in writing and mathematics but only 66% reached this level in reading.

My involvement goes beyond the school. The parents feel that they can contact me to talk about wider issues or simply to ask for help with day-to-day problems. Sometimes I get phone calls from people I don't know asking for help because they heard that I had helped someone else, mainly to find a school for their child. In some ways I feel privileged that they rely on me and that I can do something to help the children succeed in life.

Lumen's account of her experiences as a teacher who works with Portuguese children, like Rosa's, emphasises the need to valorise the children's first language. She clearly illustrates how a teacher can use the child's first language to support their learning in the English language (see also Amy Thompson, this volume). It is striking to note the parallels between Lumen's experiences and what was reported in Abreu, Silva and Lambert's chapters. First, like that of Abreu, Silva and Lambert (Chapter 4) her description of the children's experiences is far from being one that sees language as a pure skill. She described language as a vehicle that contributes to self-esteem, confidence and social status. In her examples she included both positive experiences, where the children had achieved a positive sense of themselves, and also negative experiences of children who are unhappy because of losing the academic identity that

they had in Portugal (that is, they were not progressing as they used to in Portugal). Second, she addresses one of the key issues discussed in the Lambert, Abreu and Silva chapter, which is how to guide the English teachers in order that they can support their Portuguese students.

## **10.5 Parents**

My impression as a result of eight years of work in England (three years as a teacher and five as an education officer) is that parents value these courses immensely, but deal with them and with the teachers in an emotional way. Their expectations can sometimes be difficult to meet. There are different reasons for their concerns regarding maintaining their mother tongue language - among them the need to ensure that there can be communication with the extended family.

At one school in 1993, where I worked with Portuguese pupils, I found that there was a short period of time before the parents accepted me into their community and began to trust me and my responsibility to oversee their children's Portuguese classes. When I arrived, for the first time at a School in Hove, in September '93, a large group of parents were waiting for me. Stern faces, in a silent circle that did not feel especially friendly, looked me up and down, watching my every movement, expression and way of speaking. I was surprised, but managed to answer all their questions. Finally they decided to leave their children with me and waited in the corridor until the end of the first lesson.

By the end of September, a group of mums were happy to explain to me how to enrol in the National Health Service and how to avoid the dangers of Brighton's dark streets and parks. They also advised me to resist the temptation of spending too much on shopping, because 'life here is expensive and we are not on holiday'. I knew then that the period in which I felt as though I was on trial was over and I had been accepted. They had taken me under their protection. I was invited to family Sunday lunches and I was even offered an old Renault 9 by a couple who decided emigrate to America. The old car was in fact extremely useful, as I had to visit a large number of primary and secondary schools in West and East Sussex. As well as teaching Portuguese in

two towns in the South Coast, and as part of my weekly workload, I was attending schools to assess and support Portuguese children whom had recently arrived or had learning difficulties.

This work was undertaken in co-operation with the Bilingual Support Centres of the two areas where I was based. At the time the management of the Bilingual Support Centres had some difficulty in accepting that the work of a fully qualified foreign teacher could be offered to them and also that this teacher could be working on her own without being constantly monitored through an elaborate system of paperwork. All this was exhausting and sometimes distressing, but, as a friend of mine pointed out, it was also “a powerful learning experience”.

Thus, experience taught me that parents can be very appreciative of the work carried out by our teachers and highly supportive. However, they can also be very critical. They want to regard the teacher as a role model for their children. They need to be proud of the teacher as the person representing their culture. The teacher needs to provide a bridge for their reconciliation with the country they left behind.

## **10.6 The Portuguese Education Department**

The Department is based at the Portuguese Consulate General in Knightsbridge. Among its many facets, it acts as a resource centre. In 1997 we started to set up a library with the help of Dr. Almeida Ribeiro, former Consul General. The library now has approximately 2,000 volumes (and videos, tapes and posters) mainly on Portuguese literature and culture, on pedagogy and education and on the teaching of Portuguese. The use of the library is free, and it is used mainly by teachers and students. All of the materials that Portuguese teachers have created and continue to produce are made available at the library.

Through providing learning materials and annually organising one-day seminars on the Portuguese language, the Department also supports mature students and freelance teachers. Moreover, the Department is keen to cooperate with Local Education Authorities and all organisations concerned with the education of ethnic minority

pupils. The Department also works with schools, local libraries, cultural and linguistic organisations, theatre companies, Portuguese local associations and Portuguese banks in London in the organisation of events that can vitalise the community culturally or can play a role in education.

## **10.7 Conclusion and suggestions for future action**

This chapter has aimed to present an overview of how the Portuguese Education Department in the U.K. was initially established, and the role that it has subsequently and currently plays in assisting the education and social development of Portuguese pupils. Portuguese teachers and the classes that they run can be considered an imperative component of the Portuguese Education Department integral to the plight to address the problem of the underachievement of these pupils. Additionally, however, the accounts given by Rosa Starr and Maria Lumen Rodrigues aimed to highlight not only the crucial role that they play but also a need to acknowledge the difficulties and challenges that they frequently meet. Considering this, a number of suggestions can be proffered regarding further action that can be taken in order to address the underachievement of Portuguese pupils in U.K. schools, as follows:

1. It is very important that more research on the linguistic situation of the children who attend Portuguese classes is conducted for the purpose of creating adequate and up-to-date teaching materials.
2. The Department is in need of bilingual materials that can be used by support teachers or that can be made available in the libraries of schools.
3. With the advance of technology each department abroad should have its own website and through the Internet be able to support teachers, families and students. The creation of a website would therefore enable the Department in the U.K. to:
  - Support distance learning more efficiently;
  - Help teachers create and share materials;
  - Enhance collaboration between teachers;
  - Be a powerful tool in the promotion of the Portuguese language and culture.

But, above all, there is a need for teacher training and the provision of specific support to address the issues of growing up as a bi-lingual and bi-cultural person, clearly illustrated in Rosa's and Lumen's case studies. The sharing of experiences and good practices can be a first step in the process, but it is also obvious that the service as a whole will need to be re-structured.