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Meritocracy, justice and democracy: Reflecting on the counter-current paths in state school

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REPÚBLICA PORTUGUESA

(Neo) Meritocracy

- In the last two decades the Portuguese educational system has begun to move towards more (re)meritocratic and performative logics.

- The (re)meritocratization of the educational system: can be characterized by the emergence of a "tension between the democratic school and the meritocratic school" (Afonso, 1996) or "between *More* (education for all) and *Better* School (elitist and selective school) (Torres & Palhares, 2014).

- Why (neo)meritocracy? Because we are faced with a movement of (re)meritocracy which embraces new specificities such as the pressure of the families, or if we prefer, the power of parentocracy (Brown, 1990).

The widespread meritocratic ideology

- Expansion of mechanisms of evaluation focused mainly on results

- "Narrow" definition of the *core curriculum*

- Model of management and leadership (unipersonal: the principal)

- Monitoring and control mechanisms (accountability, external evaluation, national exams, school rankings, etc.)

- The increase of the distinction rituals

- Creation of multiple mechanisms of political, pedagogical and organisational management (e.g. revitalization the classes for the best students)

Methodological design

MEGA-MACRO PLAN:

- International educational policy measures focused on the production of results

- Mapping of the distinction rituals established in state schools, in Portugal and in other international contexts

MESO PLAN:

- 4 case studies conducted in 4 schools

- Document analysis, surveys by questionnaire, focus groups and individual interviews

MICRO PLAN:

- Student's perspectives on their educational path and the promotion of academic performance by schools

- Group interviews (focus groups) and individual interviews performed on students with different social profiles and levels of performance

# Student Background: Social and cultural specificities
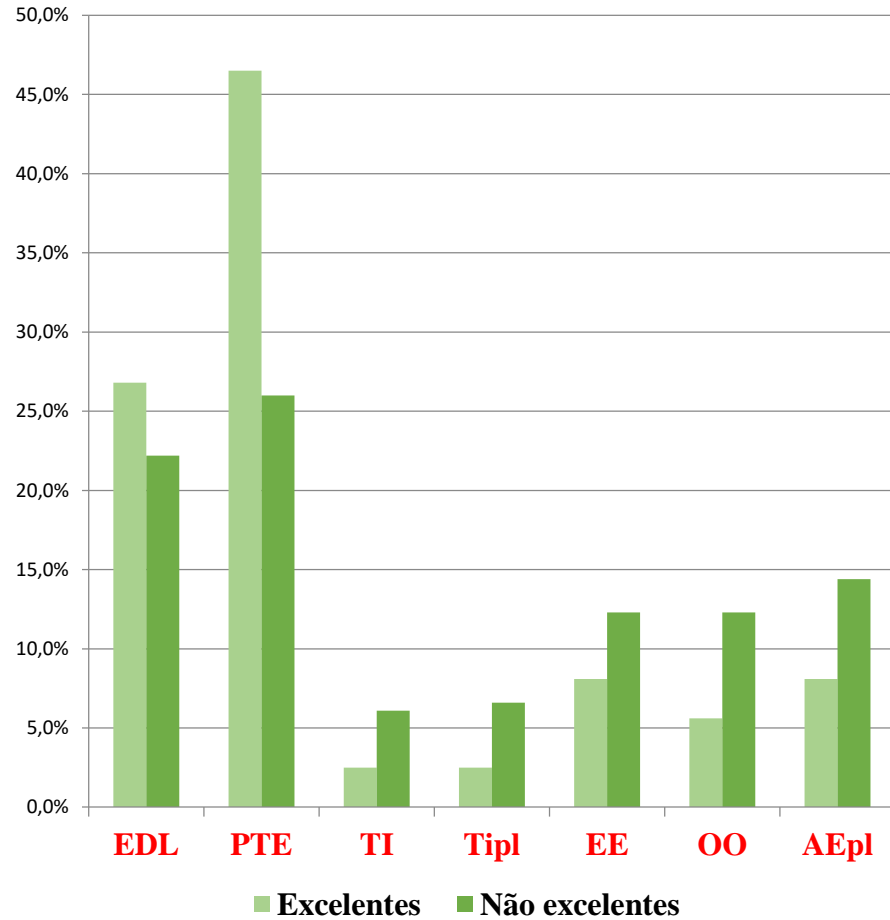
Parent's School Level %

(n=1010)

		1º ciclo	2º ciclo	3º ciclo	Ens. Sec.	Lic.	Pós-gd.
Excelente (n=199)	Mãe	2,0	9,5	13,6	19,6	43,2	12,1
	Pai	6,1	7,6	12,1	28,3	33,3	12,6
Não excelente (n= 811)	Mãe	8,9	16,3	19,7	28,0	20,5	6,5
	Pai	10,7	18,1	23,4	28,3	13,2	6,3

Fonte: Inquéritos por questionário administrados aos alunos excelentes e não-excelentes de quatro escolas (2013/2014)

Up Counter-Trend

Expect Trend

Expect Trend

Down Counter-Trend

Indicator of Family's Social Class:
EDL - entrepreneurs and executives; **PTE** - professionals and managers; **TI, TIpl** - self-employed and pluriactive self-employed; **EE** - routine employees; **OO** - industrial workers; **AEpl** - pluriactive farmers)

Student's Craft – Behavior in the Classroom
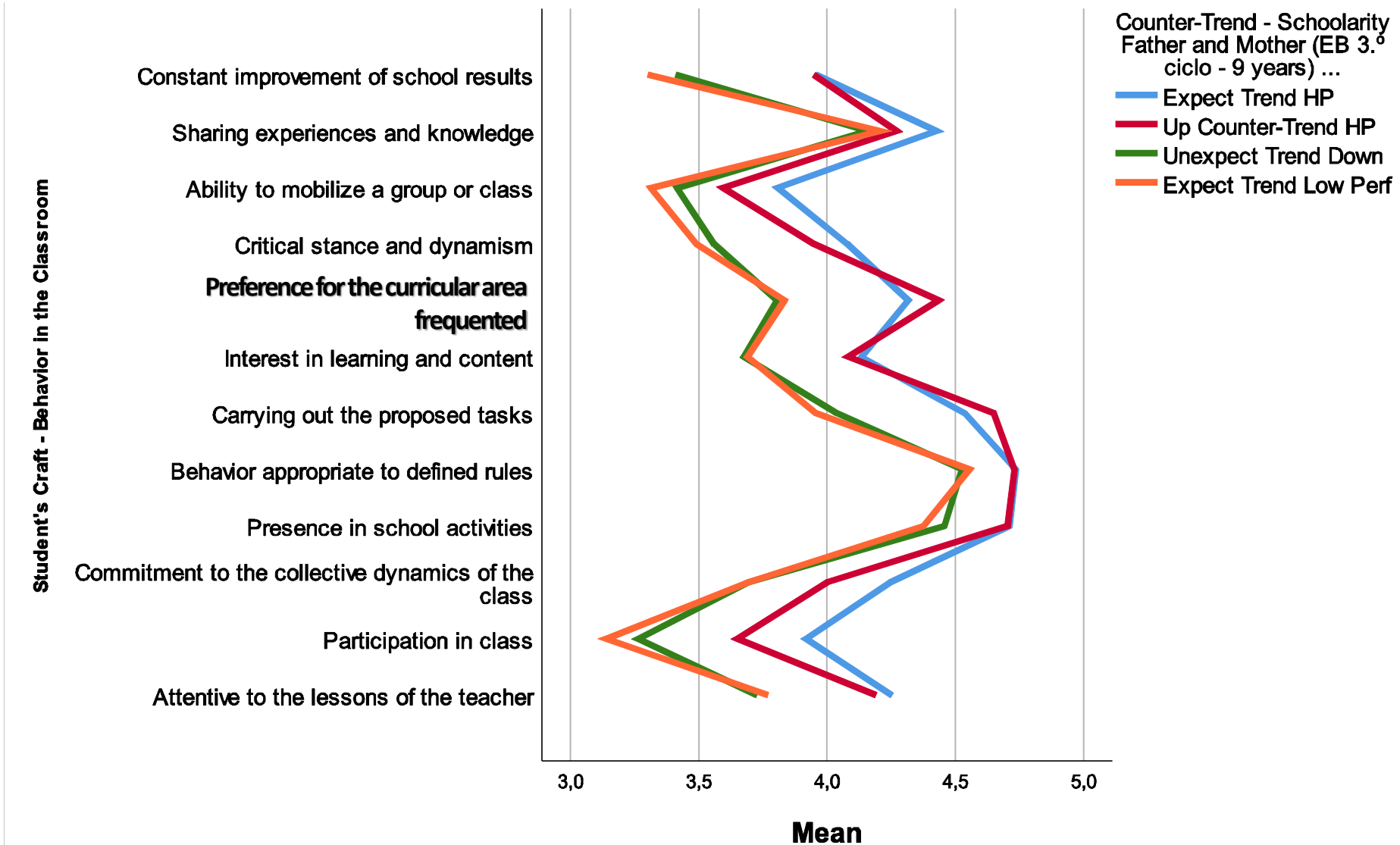
What most contributes to get good grades / to be a excellent student?
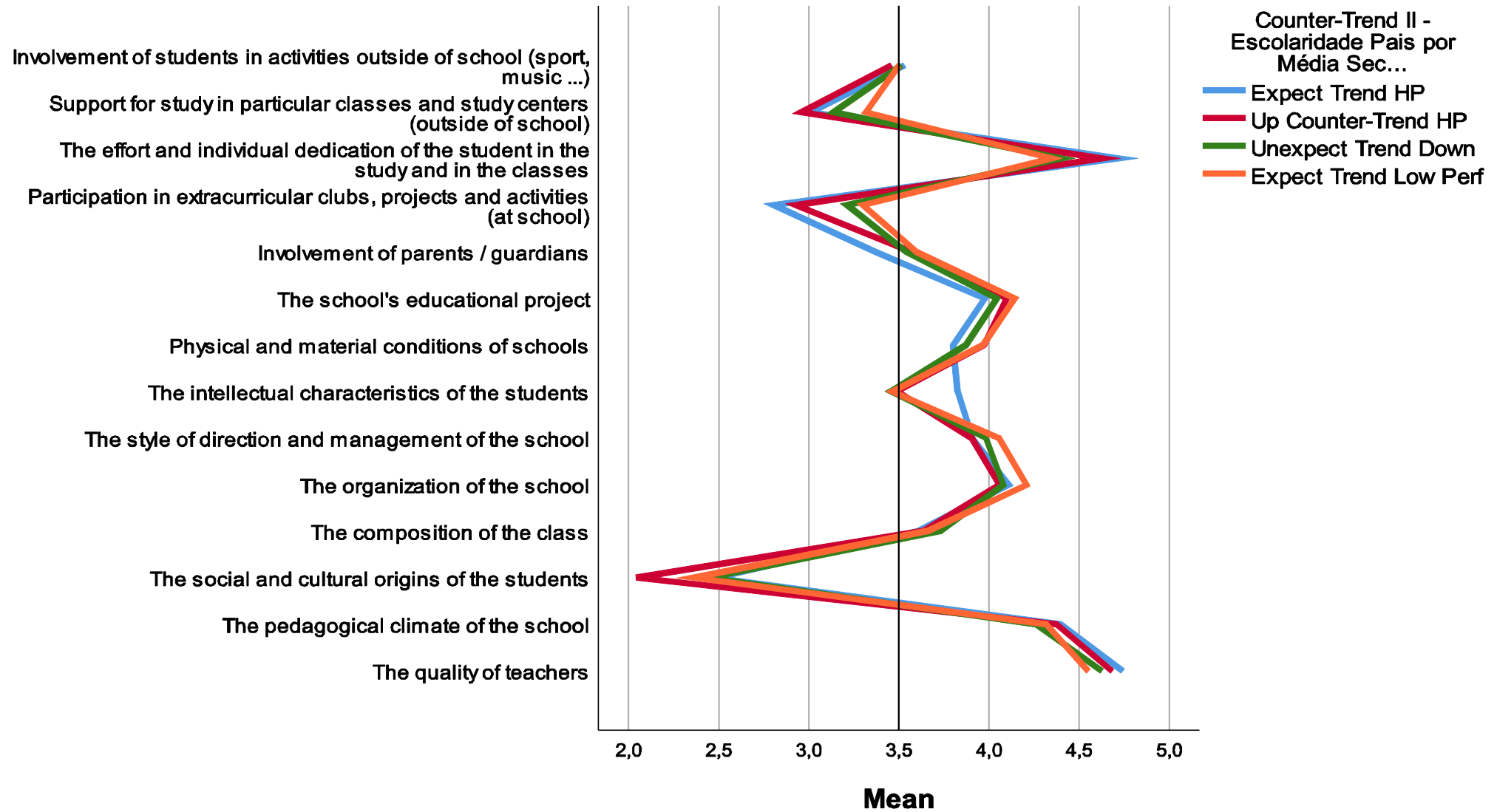
What do the students say?

Distinction ceremonies as a merit-celebrating ritual

I think they should make it [the distinction ceremonies] because it is good for students to feel their work recognized and feel that the effort during the year in the end pays off. [...] otherwise we would feel that the school also did not value our work so much and I think it's great to think of those kind of parties and so to recognize the best students. (**Diana)**

I think it is an important ceremony for all students who belong to the board of excellence because it allows the school to recognize their merit and commitment throughout the year. I think that for them it is also a motivating factor for them to continue to maintain their high levels and later have a good average for accessing the university **(Carlos**)

What do the students say?

School Justice

What do you least like about teachers?] Partiality. Partiality, yes! That is something I rarely see, but that sometimes happens, because sometimes more value less value can make a difference. (Carlos)

I am for and against [**Exams**]! I am in favor because in this country we must have something fair that can evaluate our population. I am against because I think the evaluation throughout the year turns out to be more fair for us because we are human beings, we do not have to be in our best fit every day, we do not have to be so concentrated every day or more apt to do certain exercises (**Vanessa)**

Against! I think the **exams** are worth what they are worth. In terms of learning, they are not that bad at all. They force us force memorizing and that's all. Because if we know, we know. (**Tiago**)
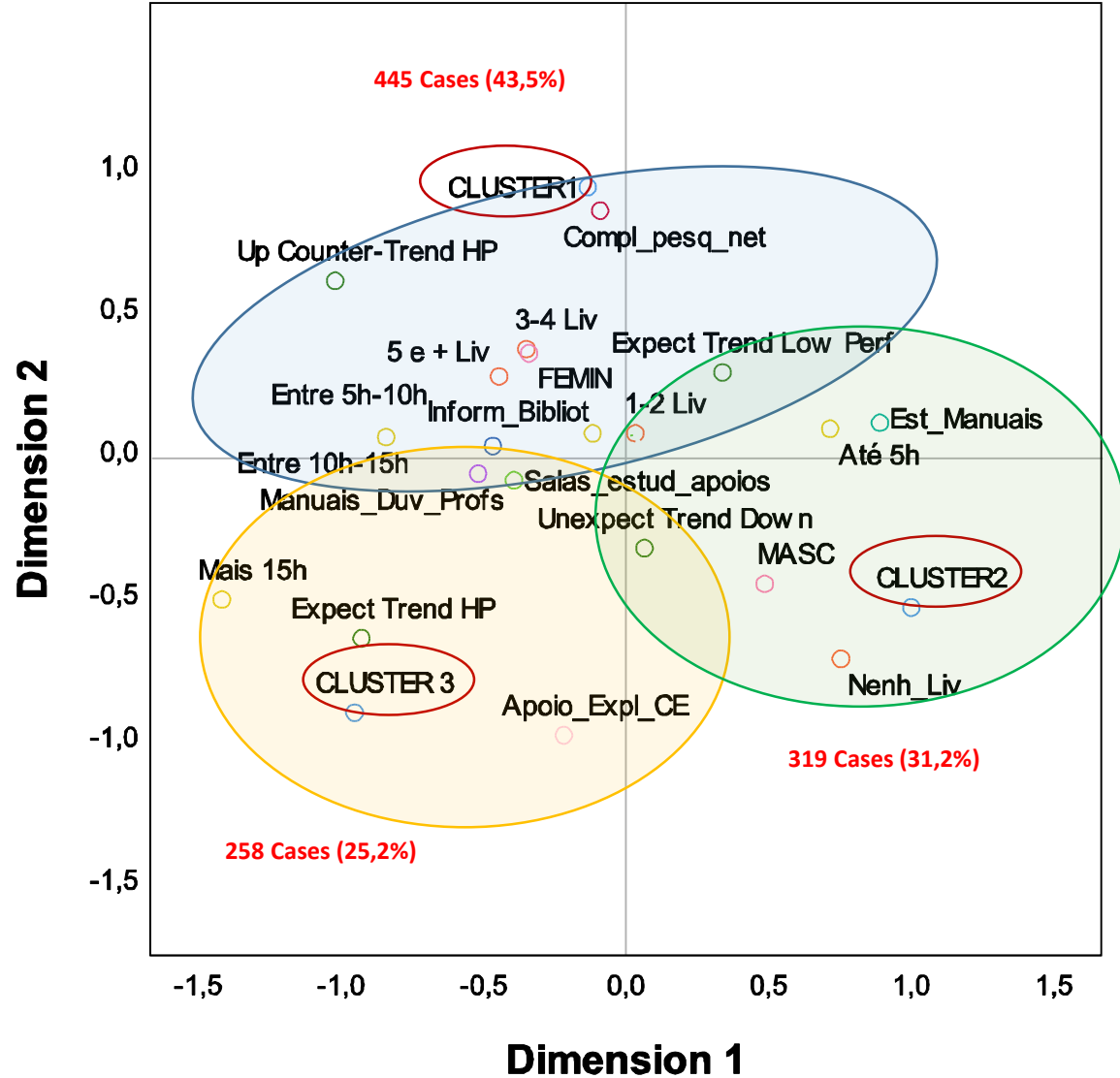
What do the students say?

Organization at core of the high student's academic performance

I am very organized in my study. I always start by doing summary because I don't like study by books. I summarize the material, I understand what is going to come out and what is most important and I study it through my notes. Then I try to look for exercises on the subject that I am studying and I do exercises to review the subject. (**Diana**)

I make choices, for example, I really like to do sports and so on Sunday morning I usually have that time for sports. If I have a party on Saturday night, then Sunday morning I'm not going to play sports anymore and I'm going to study. More or less these types of options, but as a rule maybe choose not to go to the party and stay studying, or so on. But it's like I say, we have to have an ultimate goal and we have to fight for it forever. I think it's really having the fixed ideas … (**Vanessa**)

[What most contributes to get good grades?] I think it's the method and the will power, although it is also very important, of course, organization and balance, doing other things to stay relaxed, minimally relaxed, because otherwise things start to go wrong. (**Daniela**)

Trends / Couter-Trends and Student's Academic Performance

445 Cases (43,5%)

CLUSTER1

Compl_pesq_net

Up Counter-Trend HP

3-4 Liv

5 e + Liv

Expect Trend Low Perf

Entre 5h-10h

FEMIN

Inform_Bibliot

1-2 Liv

Est_Manuais

Até 5h

Entre 10h-15h

Salas_estud_apoios

Manuais_Duv_Profs

Unexpect Trend Down

MASC

Mais 15h

CLUSTER2

Expect Trend HP

CLUSTER 3

Apoio_Expl_CE

Nenh_Liv

258 Cases (25,2%)

319 Cases (31,2%)

Dimension 1

Dimension 2

Variable Principal Normalization.

Legend:
- Cluster Number of Case
- Complement my study with internet searches
- Counter-Trend II - Parent's School by Student's average (Excel Vs NExcel)
- Leisure books readed in the last year (average)
- Average hours of study per week
- Study only by manuals
- Study with the support of a tutor / particular classes (outside the school)
- Study through the manuals and clarify the doubts with the teacher
- Attend study rooms / tutorials (inside the school)
- Search/support on libraries
- Gender of Student

Conclusive topics

- Identification of multivariate factors to reach the top

- Non linearity in the construction of excellence

- Adhesion of Portuguese schools to the meritocratic ideology

- Development of a non homogeneous performative culture

- Importance of social and cultural condition of the families in the understanding of the excellence school pathways

- Non linearity of the excellence school pathways upon transition higher education.

- The empirical data show a general trend of sacralisation of the individual merit, but also evidence how much the specificities of the organisations can (and should) drive the recognition of plurality of the forms of success (and pedagogies), and new forms of competition, more consistent with the democratic nature of the school.

FINAL QUESTION: How to articulate meritocracy and democratization of the school?

Thank you for your attention

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