

ARTICLE

THE PROFESSIONAL CULTURE OF TEACHERS: FROM ANDY HARGREAVES' THEORY TO THE REALITY EXPERIENCED AT SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT: This article draws on Hargreaves' (1998) theory of teachers' different professional cultures and aims to provide evidence related to how collaborative work is perceived in schools, by teachers and leaders, and what practices are associated with it. Simultaneously, it allows us to reflect on the predominant professional culture among teachers. The modality used was the case study, inserted in a qualitative methodology, privileging the interpretative dimension of the participants over the reality experienced/perceived. Data were collected in 2018/2019 through document analysis and interviews with six elementary school teachers who teach at a private education institution in Lisbon, Portugal. The results allow us to conclude that teachers' work generally takes on forms of collaboration at a superficial level and they are concentrated in the same department. Although collaborative practices have also been identified, the results indicate the predominance of a “balkanized culture”.

Keywords: professional culture; teachers; collaborative work; collaboration; professional development.

CULTURA PROFISSIONAL DOS PROFESSORES: DA TEORIA DE ANDY HARGREAVES À REALIDADE VIVENCIADA NA ESCOLA

RESUMO: O presente artigo tem por base a teoria de Hargreaves (1998) sobre as diferentes culturas profissionais dos professores e pretende apresentar evidências sobre a forma como o trabalho colaborativo é percebido nas escolas, bem como sobre práticas que lhe estão associadas, permitindo refletir sobre a cultura profissional predominante entre os docentes. A modalidade utilizada foi o estudo de caso, inserida numa metodologia qualitativa, privilegiando-se a dimensão interpretativa dos participantes sobre a realidade vivenciada/percebida. Os dados foram recolhidos no ano letivo de

2018/2019, por meio de análise documental e entrevista a seis professores do Ensino Fundamental que lecionam numa instituição de ensino particular em Lisboa, Portugal. Os resultados levam-nos a concluir que o trabalho entre pares se reveste de formas de colaboração a um nível superficial, e acontece maioritariamente entre docentes do mesmo departamento. Embora também tenham sido identificadas práticas de colaboração, os resultados indiciam predominar uma cultura, essencialmente, “balcanizada”.

Palavras-chave: cultura profissional; professores; trabalho colaborativo; colaboração; desenvolvimento profissional.

LA CULTURA PROFESIONAL DE LOS PROFESORES: DE LA TEORÍA DE ANDY HARGREAVES A LA REALIDAD VIVIDA EN LA ESCUELA

RESUMEN: Este artículo se basa en la teoría de Hargreaves (1998) sobre las diferentes culturas profesionales de los profesores y pretende presentar evidencias sobre cómo se percibe el trabajo colaborativo en los centros educativos, así como sobre las prácticas asociadas al mismo, permitiendo reflexionar sobre la cultura profesional predominante entre los profesores. El método utilizado fue el estudio de casos, dentro de una metodología cualitativa, privilegiando la dimensión interpretativa de los participantes sobre la realidad vivida / percibida. Los datos se recogieron en el año escolar de 2018/2019, mediante el análisis de documentos y entrevistas con seis profesores de Portugal. Los resultados nos llevan a la conclusión de que el trabajo entre iguales es una forma de colaboración a nivel superficial, y tiene lugar sobre todo entre profesores del mismo departamento. Aunque también se han identificado prácticas de colaboración, los resultados indican que predomina una cultura esencialmente "balcanizada".

Palabras clave: cultura profesional; profesores; trabajo colaborativo; colaboración; desarrollo profesional.

INTRODUCTION

Regardless of age and experience, the teacher needs to continue learning, maintaining resilience and nonconformity (NÓVOA, 2009), especially in moments of history that force paradigm shifts, such as the one we find today, motivated by numerous factors, such as the increase in migratory flows, the new generation of students, climate change, skills for the 21st century, the constraints caused by Covid-19, among others.

It is “at school and in dialogue with other teachers that the profession is learned” (NÓVOA, 2009, p. 30) which, apparently, is confirmed in the first person by teachers who identify collaborative approaches as one of the most relevant aspects of the development of their profession (OECD, 2019), but how do these collaborative approaches take on daily?

It appears that the most superficial collaboration practices, such as discussing students' learning paths with peers or sharing materials are 61% and 47%, respectively, according to the results of the most recent TALIS survey (OECD, 2020).), are commonly used by teachers. Paradoxically, we found evidence that the deepest levels of collaboration, such as moments of collaborative professional learning (21% of TALIS 2018 survey results) or the exchange of classroom observation feedback (9%) correspond to those in which teachers least engage (OECD, 2020).

Noting the relevance of this evidence for the professional development of teachers, this work has a double objective: to understand the professional culture of teachers, based on what Andy Hargreaves (1998) advocates, and to identify the perception of collaboration between peers and how it operates. The empirical study took place in a private school in Lisbon (Portugal), with six teachers from different levels of education, in the academic year 2018/2019. The perspectives of the professors were

obtained through interviews, and of the institution, through document analysis, having proceeded to the content analysis. As a way of ensuring the internal validity of the study, we resorted to data triangulation (YIN, 2005).

The article is organized into four sections: first, we present the theoretical considerations that support our investigation. In the following section, we present in detail the methodology adopted, which fits into the qualitative paradigm, taking the form of a case study. The third section follows, with the presentation and discussion of the results, considering the content analysis of the interviews and document analysis, as well as the theoretical framework. In the last section of the article, we present the conclusions, noting the teachers' global perception of collaboration, as well as the professional culture identified as being the most expressive in the context where the empirical study took place.

FORMS OF PROFESSIONAL CULTURE OF TEACHERS

According to the renowned researcher Andy Hargreaves (1998), the forms of professional culture of teachers are defined by the patterns of behavior and relationships that are established between people who belong to the same culture, in this case, teachers. These patterns are reflected in the teachers' practices, as well as in their beliefs and routines, in the interactions that are established with the educational agents that belong to a school, contributing to the sense of belonging that these professionals develop. Thus, depending on the “style of culture prevailing in the school organization, the rules, beliefs, the way of acting will or will not be assimilated by the teachers and will have repercussions” on what is the individual perspective of “being a teacher” (FIALHO; SARROEIRA, 2012, p. 5).

Hargreaves, in his work “Teachers in Changing Times: The Work and Culture of Teachers in the Postmodern Age” (1998), considers four different forms of teacher professional culture: individualism, collaboration, artificial collegiality, and balkanization. which we will now summarize.

Seen as predominant in our society, the culture of individualism appears associated with the issue of isolation of teachers. On one hand, gives them comfort, protection, and security, while, on the other hand, deprives them of receiving feedback from others. Subsequently, Hargreaves (2003) warned of the danger that individualism represents in today's societies, which can foster a culture of competition, at the level of schools and teaching, insofar as there is no sharing or reflection together. In this type of culture, attitudes of sharing, joint reflection, and mutual help are residual, which is why this climate does not contribute to the professional development of teachers (DAY, 2001, COOKSON, 2005).

Regarding collaborative cultures, Hargreaves (1998) describes working relationships between teachers as being spontaneous, voluntary, development-oriented, pervasive in time and space, and unpredictable, as the results of the collaboration are often “uncertain and difficult to predict” (HARGREAVES, 1998, p. 217), as they are controlled by the actors. Collaboration presupposes a close relationship between teachers, as “they choose spontaneously, voluntarily and informally with whom they want to work, without any interference, on a basis of sharing, trust, and mutual support” (FIALHO; SARROEIRA, 2012, p. 9). Thus, collaborative actions can take different forms: from words of support to the sharing and preparation of materials, through the design of classes and other activities, through the construction of assessment instruments, through the discussion of students' results, or in the training in context (HARGREAVES, 1998). However, based on what is defended by authors such as Day (2001), Boavida and Ponte (2002), Roldão (2007), Silva e Silva (2015), and by the OECD (2018), these forms of collaboration are considered superficial level, since its contribution to the professional development of teachers is not very effective, as we will see later in this text.

In cultures of artificial collegiality, relationships are imposed by leaders and aim at expected results, contradicting the characteristics of this type of work that converge to the professional development of teachers. Hargreaves (1998) characterizes it as being administratively regulated of a compulsory nature and oriented towards implementation, with the obligation for teachers to work together, according to external superior orders. It is a fixed practice in time/space and is predictable, producing results that can be highly expected, constituting a “safe administrative simulation of collaboration”, as they are practices “controlled, contained and invented by administrators” (HARGREAVES, 1998, pp. 219-220). When thought of by other people, this type of culture constitutes

“a prison where the management of all the details constraints”, as it “inhibits, prevents or weakens opportunities” (HARGREAVES, 2003, p. 221) for teachers to take the initiative to develop their ideas, work collaboratively or approach the group.

Balkanized cultures are characterized by “particular patterns of interaction between teachers” (HARGREAVES, 1998, p. 240) because teachers neither work in isolation nor work as a whole (at the school level), but they are organized into subgroups, with a smaller number of elements, usually according to professional identities and specificities. This is an opinion shared by Day (2001, p. 129), as “teachers identify with and show loyalty to the group and not to the school as a whole”. Specifically, according to Hargreaves (1998), this type of culture is characterized by its low permeability and high permanence, since, once the subgroups are defined, they tend to crystallize over time. Balkanized cultures transmit, to their members, a sense of personal identification, since the teachers who belong to these subgroups also constitute subcommunities, among which the feeling of belonging increases and “weakens the capacity for empathy and collaboration with others” (HARGREAVES, 1998, pp. 241). It is concluded, therefore, that these groups close in on themselves, tend to isolate themselves, and feel apart from the rest of the teaching group (COOKSON, 2005).

Given the above, we can say that both Balkanization, individualism, and artificial collegiality assume intrinsic characteristics to the way teachers work, cementing as factors that facilitate the continuity of standardized practices, based on the lack of reflection on the action. However, they are the ones that most frequently occur in educational systems as we know them today.

COLLABORATION AS A TRANSFORMING CULTURE, ITS POTENTIAL, AND BARRIERS

In front of a group of teachers who carry out an activity together, with common goals, does it mean that they are collaborating? This is a very controversial issue, which we seek to clarify throughout this text.

According to Pinho and Mesquita (2018), two strong conceptual trends stand out regarding teaching collaboration. On one hand, a current that, in seeking to delimit what is meant by collaboration, establishes clear limits from a conceptual point of view. On the other hand, the authors point to perspectives according to which teaching collaboration manifests in different ways, “not all of which lead to the same ends and translate into equal interdependence between the pairs involved” (PINHO; MESQUITA, 2018, p. . 126), although the task of distinguishing both trends is not easy due to the multidimensionality assumed by the concept.

In this study, we put the two lines into dialogue, starting by accepting the definition by Boavida and Ponte (2002, p. 3) about the fact that collaboration is effective when “the different actors work together, not in a hierarchical relationship, but on a basis of equality to help each other and achieve goals that benefit all”. Added to this conceptualization, is the perspective of Canha (2013), who understands that collaboration “is not an idea that can be decreed. It needs to be felt, valued and lived in the first person” (CANHA, 2013, pp. 64-65). This is a premise shared by other authors, such as Alarcão and Canha (2013), Formosinho and Machado (2008), Dufour (2011), Fullan and Hargreaves (2001), Perrenoud (2002) or Tinoca, Rodrigues, and Machado (2015).

From the point of view of Little (1990) and Lima (2002), teacher collegiality is distinguished based on the breadth (number of teachers who interact), frequency, and scope (different areas of professional life) of interactions, determining whether collaborative action is “strong” or “weak”, since there are no “explicit criteria that allow building an operational definition of collegiality” (LIMA, 2002, p. 51), which reveals the importance of distinguishing between the collaboration of other group dynamics in which the teachers may be involved.

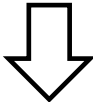

Martinho (2018) advocates that teachers who truly work collaboratively “are faced with an opportunity for solid and dynamic professional development” (MARTINHO, 2018, p. 4) which “could be a sustainable development strategy teaching professionals and enhancing their transformative learning” (TINOCA, RODRIGUES, and MACHADO, 2015, p. 112), and this opportunity can be enhanced and generalized if logistical conditions (spaces and schedules) are explicitly ensured by schools”

(MARTINHO, 2018, p. 4), which can generate controversy in schools, given the diversity of expectations: leaders versus teachers.

In our view, these foundations are essential to start building the meaning of collaboration: those who want to work collaboratively, who feel this input for themselves, for their desire to grow professionally, together with their peers, maintaining different levels of interdependence with each other, although they assume themselves as “equally committed partners” (CANHA, 2013, p. 70), seeking to solve problems that will benefit all those involved in this process, and this culture is reflected outside the walls of the school: “in students, their families and the community in general” (CANHA, 2013, p. 70), effectively contributing to the professional development of teachers.

For Roldão (2007, p. 28), the difficulties in introducing collaborative practices that promote self-efficacy are not related to the lack of motivation of teachers, but to the culture of individualism inherent in the teaching profession and the “dominant normative logic at the macro level of administration” as much as at the meso level of the school government system” (ROLDÃO, 2007, p. 29). According to the author, collaboration will only have expression when there is a break in mentalities and practices, following a horizontal and vertical logic, since “it is difficult to ask that collaborative teaching work be accepted by teachers without the institution also changing the its rules and stop allowing that the teaching work is not shared or discussed in its daily performance” (ROLDÃO, 2007, p. 29). At this level, Silva and Silva (2015, p. 90) warn of the existence of “certain personal characteristics that can influence collaboration practices, as well as interests in collaboration”, confirming the possible dichotomy between leaders and teachers, which we will not dwell on in this text.

Regarding the obstacles and potential of collaborative work, we present below, in a summary table, the most frequent characteristics that have emerged from research on this topic:

 Obstacles to collaboration	 Potential of collaboration
Discrepancy between teachers' perceptions of what they should do and what they do (CONCEIÇÃO; SOUSA, 2012)	Increasing teacher confidence and self-efficacy, as well as improving student performance (FULLAN; HARGREAVES, 2000; GODDARD; GODDARD, 2007; ROLDÃO, 2007)
Lack of time and permanence of individualized work habits (COOKSON, 2005; FORMOSINHO; MACHADO, 2008; HARGREAVES, 1998; ROLDÃO, 2007)	Decreased isolation of teachers (DUFOUR; 2011, HARGREAVES; 1998, PINHO; MESQUITA, 2018)
Perspectives and ways of acting of leaders (COOKSON, 2005; GODDARD; GODDARD, 2007)	Improved peer relationships, based on positive experiences (FULLAN; HARGREAVES, 2001; PINHO; MESQUITA, 2018)
Lengthy process of adaptation and implementation (FULLAN; HARGREAVES, 2001)	Personal and professional enrichment, by valuing each member of the group and mutual support in overcoming difficulties (BOAVIDA; PONTE, 2002; FIALHO; SARROEIRA, 2012)
Composition of groups of teachers: high number of elements (BARROSO, 1995)	Professional development and improvement of pedagogical practices (FORMOSINHO; MACHADO, 2008; HARGREAVES, 1998; PINHO, MESQUITA, 2018; ROLDÃO, 2007)

Personal and professional differences (PINHO; MESQUITA, 2018; SILVA; SILVA, 2015)	Construction and sharing of resources, namely the “time” resource (HARGREAVES, 1998)
The school structure: extension of curricula, the complexity of teaching, expectations, and obligations placed on teachers (PINHO; MESQUITA, 2018; SANCHES, 2000)	Promoting visionary leadership and less hierarchical problem solving (MESQUITA; FORMOSINHO; MACHADO, 2012)

Box 1. Summary of obstacles and potentialities placed on collaboration.

Source: Our elaboration, based on theoretical research carried out, 2020.

From the reading of Box 1, we can understand the difficulty (where we risk including a high degree of reluctance) that still exists in putting collaborative work into practice (ROLDÃO, 2007), relativizing and/or abandoning the obstacles identified; and it becomes clear that individualism, balkanization and artificial collegiality still constitute the most expressive professional cultures in schools.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This investigation is based on a qualitative approach, based on the interpretive paradigm, with the primary objective of understanding meanings constructed through the interpretation and/or description of the facts by the participants, from a humanistic perspective (BOGDAN; BIKLEN, 1994).

The reported study was carried out in a private educational institution, founded in 1941, in Lisbon (Portugal), by a religious congregation. The educational offer of the participating institution covers all basic education, from early childhood education (from 3 years old) to elementary school. At the time of the study, the school had a total of 1514 students, 128 teachers, 7 psychologists, and 95 non-teaching employees.

Regarding the teachers interviewed, who corresponds to approximately 5% of all teachers, five are female and one is male. Regarding the academic degree, all of them have a degree. In addition to this graduation, three of the professors completed their master's degrees. Of the six participating professors, four have been working at that institution for more than twenty years, which may be an indicator of the stability of the faculty.

The six elementary school teachers who participated in the research agreed with informed consent and voluntarily participated in the study, and throughout this text, they are identified under the pseudonyms of Amélia, Bruno, Célia, Dulce, Ester, and Filomena. Every two teachers teach in a teaching cycle and are specialists in different areas: Portuguese, Mathematics, and Science. In the selection of participants, our main criterion was to cover the three cycles, to obtain perspectives on the work among peers carried out by professors working at these levels. This group of teachers presents different realities, with their cultures and identities, both due to the structural aspects, which contribute to their physical separation (1st cycle teachers work in a separate building from the teachers of the other cycles), as well as due to related to the various universes of origin, belonging and socialization, which characterizes the different disciplinary groups (LIMA, 2002).

Having opted for a multi-methodological approach, we used document analysis and semi-structured interviews as data collection techniques. The document analysis was based on the reading of normative and structuring documents of the educational institution, which are available on the institution's website: the Educational Project (PE), the Internal Regulation (RI), and the Activities Plan for the Development of the Curriculum (PADC). The interview was the main data collection technique, as we considered that it would not only be a way of deepening the data analyzed in the documents but also a means of formally collecting the participants' representations about the school climate and the teaching professional culture; and collaborative work. For this purpose, the interview guide was designed according to the following thematic blocks: Representations of the workplace; Collaborative work; Teachers' professional practices. The guide included a total of 19 questions about the 3 thematic blocks mentioned, and there was a concern to give the interviewees room to add more information or to explain

their answers based on the questions. After the invitation to participate in the study, the participants were contacted via e-mail, to arrange the times and places for the interviews, having shared their informed consent and interview protocol.

The interviews took place in spaces that the interviewees were familiar with (classrooms during student break times), with an average duration of 40 minutes, and were recorded via audio. Once the transcripts of the interviews were carried out and the procedure for returning them to the interviewees followed for confirmation and/or alteration, we proceeded to read the transcripts several times: firstly, to ensure that there were no errors and, secondly, to go appropriating their content and reflecting on the themes and categories to be (re)defined.

In this process, considering the objectives of the study and the thematic blocks of the interview defined before, we stipulated the categories of analysis that we present below. Through documental analysis, we intend to identify the forms of teaching culture based on what is expected by the institution. The qualitative analysis of the data was complemented with descriptive statistical analysis, using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences software (SPSS, version 26). As a way of ensuring the internal validity of the study, we resorted to data triangulation (YIN, 2005). Ethical procedures were strictly complied with, following the Ethics Letter and Regulation of the Ethics Committee of the Instituto da Educação (IE), as a way of guaranteeing the anonymity and confidentiality of data and participants.

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Considering the main thematic axes in which this research is developed (teachers' professional cultures and collaboration habits) the results that emerged from the data analysis are presented and discussed in this section and are organized into the following categories: (a) Professional Cultures: artificial collegiality, collaboration, and balkanization; (b) Teamwork and individual work: a dichotomous relationship; (c) Collaborative work: conceptualizations of teachers and the institution; (d) The importance attributed to collaborative work; (e) The challenges posed to collaborative work.

PROFESSIONAL CULTURES: ARTIFICIAL COLLEGIALLY, COLLABORATION, AND BALKANIZATION

In all the guiding documents of the school institution under analysis, we found reference to “cooperative work” or “teamwork”, as a request from the institution. This formulation, in its original form, leads us to the possible existence of a culture of “artificial collegiality” (HARGREAVES, 1998, p. 235), since it is a dynamic imposed on teachers, assuming a mandatory nature in the relations of work that are established among the teachers. Also, it takes on an embarrassing and results-inhibiting character, as it can produce expected results, as managers take control of what they ask of teachers.

When asked about teamwork being carried out on their initiative or requested by the leaders, the interviewed teachers mentioned that it is work carried out, mostly, on their initiative, although there are some moments when collaborative work is requested by the leaders. In this sense, the analysis of the teachers' discourse reveals the existence of divergent perspectives, since, on the one hand, they assume that there is some work that “is asked to be in a group” (Teacher Célia), “when it is with other disciplinary areas, it is requested” (Teacher Ester); and, on the other hand, there is a teacher who says that teachers “are little requested for teamwork” (Professor Amélia). This dissonance of perspectives reveals the fragility in which the collaborative culture is involved, in the organization, bringing to the fore the emerging need to proceed with a reculturing of the system of beliefs and teaching relationships (HARGREAVES, 2019), which allows teachers to come together around common goals, to support change, tending to improve student learning. However, according to Hargreaves (2019), the success of this process is directly related to the effectiveness of collaborative leadership and the professional development of teachers, apparently not appearing as a current reality, in the empirical context in which the research took place.

From the teachers' point of view, all of them mention preferring to work with peers, although they recognize that they carry out a lot of individual work, and the distance between what is expected and what happens, in reality, is notorious, confirming the perspective of Nóvoa (2009), Thurler and Perrenoud (2006) and the OECD (2019, 2020), on the need to break with old habits in favor of creating new structures for the professional organization of teachers. It was noticeable that the collaborative culture is not dominant, judging by the chance evident in the examples that the professors exposed and by how the professors characterized the day-to-day work, about the lack of time and space, by the institution, to meet with their peers, despite their motivation: "it is not because there is no will, there is no time" (Teacher Dulce). This aspect confirms the result of the investigations carried out by the authors mobilized in the section referring to the theoretical framework shown in Box 1.

We can consider that collaborative work is carried out at certain times, considering the testimonies given by teachers, although this modality takes place within the working group, indicating what Hargreaves (1998) calls "Balkanized" or "fragmented" culture. by joining the perspective of Fialho and Sarroeira (2012), explained by the teachers' preference for working in a disciplinary group and the connection to the disciplinary group (FIALHO; SARROEIRA, 2012, p. 17).

Evidence suggests the need to reinforce a more robust reflection about a vision and mission effectively committed to collaborative work, which allows teachers to understand and discuss this type of professional culture, contradicting two of the "teaching feelings" evoked by Lortie (1975): "presentism" and "conservatism", which inhibit the professional development of teachers and the consequent improvement of the school, due to the isomorphic content that underlies them.

TEAMWORK AND INDIVIDUAL WORK: A DICHOTOMIC RELATIONSHIP

According to Nóvoa (2009), teamwork is one of the essential provisions for the definition of a good teacher. In this way, professional practice is organized around communities of practice, within schools.

Based on the data from the interviews, four of the six teachers mentioned that they prefer to work in teams and, in equal numbers, recognize the predominance and importance of individual work. In addition to these data, in all the statements there are references to the work that is carried out individually. In addition to this distinction, two teachers mention preferring the combination of teamwork and individual work and three teachers suggest that there is no teamwork motivated by teachers. Do we realize that there is a dichotomous connection in the professional practices of teachers: in a team or individually?

We then present a summary table (Box 2) illustrating the ambiguity identified between teamwork and individual work, where we grouped the references, according to the discourse of each teacher, about each of these ways of working. However, during the interview, it became clear that, in practice, the work often takes on individual nature.

Reading these excerpts leads us to the analogy of the structure of the school in an "egg box", by Lortie (1975, p. 14), noting that the participants see their peers as teachers who consider classrooms as a personal territory, in which professional practice is designed "around a veil of privacy and personal autonomy" (DUFOUR, 2011, p. 57). This is a personal territory where, essentially, individual practices are developed and where "the prescribed, official and centralized curriculum is the great coordinator of all teaching practice" (FORMOSINHO; MACHADO, 2008, p. 11). The isolation referred to here leads to limited knowledge of pedagogical practices among peers (LIMA, 2004), "so it is not surprising that teachers have a very small impact on each other's professional practice" (FORMOSINHO; MACHADO, 2008, p. 11).

Teamwork ¹	Individual work
<p>“<u>We work [as a team]</u>, but we could work more. Because we don't have a lot of time to gather and work as a team.” (Teacher Amelia)</p>	<p>“...as people have a different schedule, with a different life and with different tasks, <u>it is very difficult to find time to work as a team.</u>” (Teacher Amelia)</p>
<p>“Normalmente <u>prefiro trabalhar em equipas</u>, em projetos.” (Professor Bruno)</p> <p>“I usually prefer to work in teams, on projects.” (Professor Bruno)</p>	<p>“...I think that, sometimes, the teacher is very closed in his classroom... it has to do with one more characteristic, I think that, as a teacher, he works in his classroom... teachers take refuge in their classroom” (Teacher Bruno)</p>
<p>“We are from the same cycle and we have several classes in common and we enjoyed this partnership” (Teacher Célia)</p>	<p>“...they are asked to be in a group, but they do not happen in a group, but they are asked to be in a group” (Teacher Célia)</p>
<p>“Here, <u>it allows us to work much more together with other people</u>, which is not exactly collaborative work” (Teacher Dulce)</p>	<p>[Teamwork] “<u>It doesn't work... It's always very relative, that “teamwork”</u>”. As I told you: if we have doubts, if we do tests, “take my test, check it if you need to use it, I can reuse it, I have this form, which I will use, do you want to use it too?” - this, we do, but being seated, thinking together [...] we do not do that, because there is no time.” (Teacher Dulce)</p>
<p>[Strong issue] “<u>Team spirit</u>” (Teacher Ester)</p>	<p>[Teamwork] “<u>I don't think so</u>, from what I see in other departments.” (Teacher Esther)</p>
<p>“But I think that, in general, <u>we all work as a team</u> and respect each other's space.” (Teacher Philomena)</p>	

Box 2. Type of work performed and perceived by the teachers interviewed.
Source: Our elaboration, based on interviews with participants, 2020

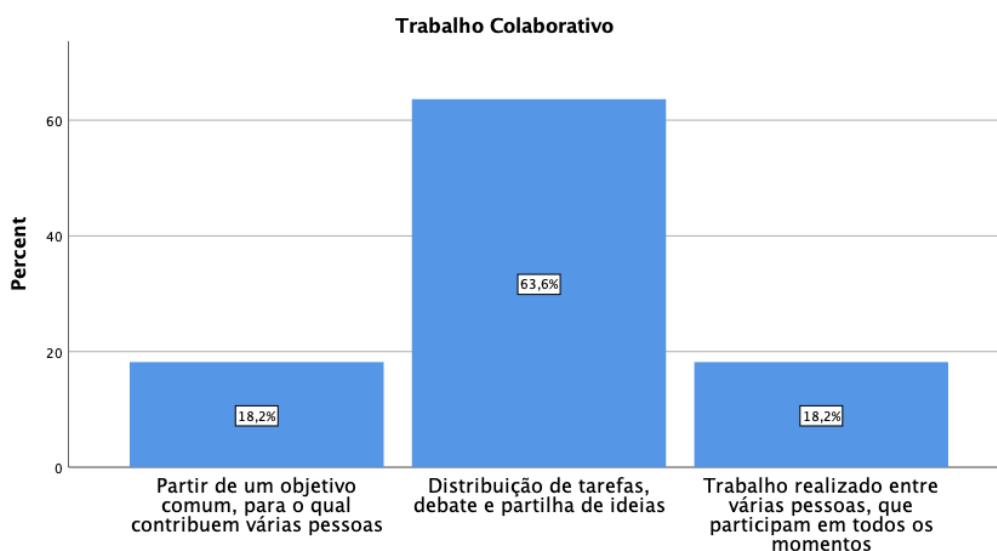
The interviews carried out with the teachers reveal this issue, as the idea of the existence of cautious collaborative work, carried out only between some teachers, in certain subjects and referring to certain moments, is perceived repeatedly, albeit implicitly (study visits, for example) or instruments (such as assessment tests or content planning). The experiences that build this vision of collaborative work seem to show “the reluctance of a large number of teachers to change practices they are familiar with” (LEITE; PINTO, 2016, p. 83).

In this way, it is possible to assume that there is a feeling and a certain culture of isolation (HARGREAVES, 1998) among these teachers, which prevents them from putting into practice what they consider to be “teamwork”, for several reasons, among them the shortage of time, which was evident in the testimonies of the teachers. According to Formosinho and Machado (2008, p. 11), “this way of working of teachers reflects a conception of curriculum as something thought outside the school to be implemented by teachers”, which is paradoxically compared with the endogenous dimension of curriculum construction, based on a perspective of “interactive professionalism” (FULLAN; HARGREAVES, 2001).

¹ The concept of “team work” was used in the study, as a synonym for collaborative work, approaching the lexicon expressed in the institution's normative documents.

COLLABORATIVE WORK: CONCEPTUALIZATION OF TEACHERS AND THE INSTITUTION

The perception that emerged in the teachers' testimonies, regarding the concept of collaborative work between peers, concerns the distribution of tasks, debate, and the sharing of ideas (63.6%), where they emphasized that collaborative work “is an idea shared and worked on in two or three” (Professor Célia), as well as “it is being able not only to listen and respect different opinions but also to know how to delegate, share and accept responsibilities” (Teacher Filomena), to the detriment of the other indicators, as illustrated in Graph 1:



Percent/Collaborative work

Starting from a common goal in which several people contribute

Task distribution, debate, and sharing of ideas

Work is carried out by several people, who participate at all times

Graph 1. Definition of collaborative work

Source: Our elaboration, with survey data, 2020.

It appears that teachers incorporate thoughtful and pertinent conceptions about collaborative work in their discourse, although they may need to be further explored, based on the perspective of some authors (ALARCÃO; CANHA, 2013; BARROSO, 1995; DUFOUR, 2011; FULLAN; HARGREAVES, 2001; LIMA, 2002). On the other hand, according to Hargreaves (1998), collaboration can take the form of “passing words and glances, praise and thanks, [...], etc.” (HARGREAVES, 1998, p. 216), passing through the sharing of materials, preparation of classes, definition of criteria and elaboration of evaluation instruments or discussion of students' academic results.

Regarding the results that emerged from the document analysis, there is no allusion to the expression “collaborative work”, but there is a reference to “teamwork”, and it appears that the institution suggests that teachers develop “cooperative work” (PE), “cooperating with the other actors in the educational process” (RI), to the extent that “when working as a team, they focus on the development of general competences of the national curriculum” (PADC), implying the existence of a more instrumental vision, on the part of the leaders, to the detriment of an organic condition of the institution. This perspective is also evident through the analysis of the interviews, and the idea that “cooperative work” is infrequent emerged, which leads us to conclude that it is not a relevant practice in the professional culture of teachers and the culture of the school, and confirms the perception that

“cooperation between professionals is more present in discourse than in practice” (THURLER; PERRENOUD, 2006, p. 357).

Paradoxically, peer collaboration is perceived by teachers and the institution as fundamental, whose main underlying idea is that it involves several people working towards the same end. In the first instance, it is characterized by teachers as the establishment of “a specific objective or work plan and that work is done in a team and by several colleagues” (Professor Amélia). As this is an incipient perspective, based on what authors such as Alarcão and Canha (2013), Canha (2013), Day (2001) or Fullan and Hargreaves (2001) advocate, we sought to deepen our analysis and found the reference to the will of teachers to share the whole process of work development, including participation in peer classes, especially with people with whom they identify, as can be read in the testimony of this teacher: “I really enjoy working with her because of that [we work well], and I think [...] we work well because of that” (Professor Célia). This corroborates Canha's (2013) theory about collaborative work taking place on their initiative and with whom people identify, and also confirms Perrenoud's (2002) perspective on the fact that teachers do not know the work of colleagues, even if they are in adjoining rooms, and underlines the concern highlighted by Lima (2001), about the stagnation caused by collaborative work between peers who know each other well and with whom they identify.

Judging by the analysis of the interviews, we realized that collaboration (according to the understanding of each teacher) is perceived as a fundamental practice: 54.5% of incidence in the recognition of the importance of collaborative work, in contrast to 14.5% of incidence in the challenges posed to collaboration between peers, which is developed both at the initiative of teachers (10.9%) and the request of leaders (9.1%) and assumes an informal nature (10.9%), from the perspective of the interviewees. This evidence suggests that professors work together, which does not mean that they work collaboratively, based on what the authors summoned in the literature review presented, as well as allowing us to confirm the absence of “collaborative professionalism”, as understood by Hargreaves (2019, p. 614): professionals from all levels of education, who work together and share knowledge, skills, and experiences, with the aim of “improving student performance and the well-being of students and staff”.

THE IMPORTANCE ATTRIBUTED TO COLLABORATIVE WORK

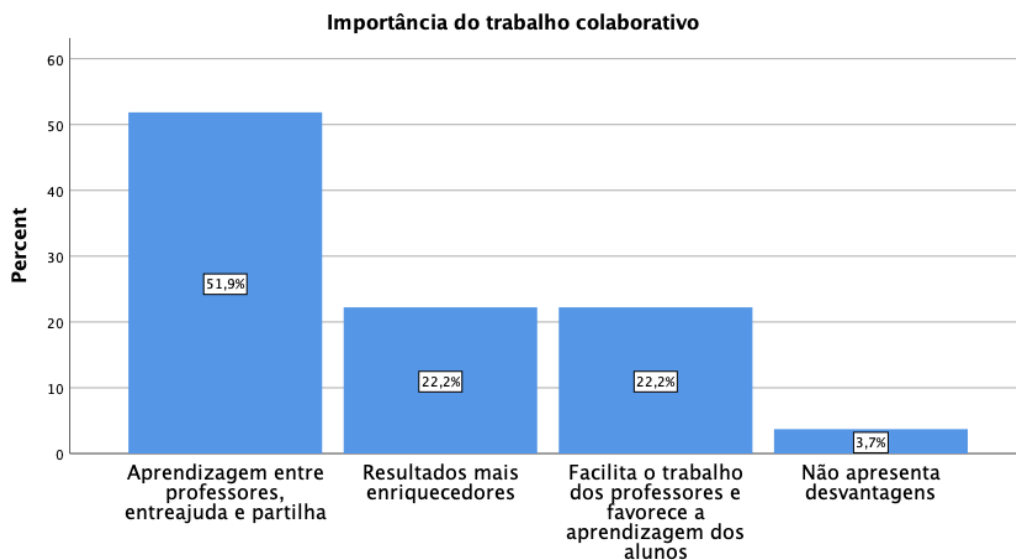
All teachers interviewed confirmed the importance of collaboration between peers, showing that it contributes to learning among teachers, mutual help and sharing (51.9%, according to Graph 2), having mentioned that they learn “a lot with each other and the work of colleagues can be very useful for us, but our work can also help the colleagues and I think this is fundamental” (Teacher Amélia), since “it makes no sense for each one to be working isolated and alone” (Teacher Célia), because “it allows the articulation of contents from various disciplinary areas and exchange of strategies” (Teacher Filomena). In addition, as another teacher says: when “I have an idea, then I want to implement it with my students and it is important to know the opinion of other people and even the experience of others” (Teacher Célia). This indicator underlies the idea of the importance of observation of classes/peer participation: “look, come see my class, I'll see your class...It is opened, an open door” (Teacher Célia), considered as “an added value” (Teacher Célia) “being someone with you who can even go and help” (Teacher Célia), recognizing that it is advantageous that there are “teachers who feel more comfortable having someone else in the classroom and even ask your help” (Teacher Bruno).

There must be willingness and availability to carry out common practices with peers, such as the one mentioned by one of the participants: “We present our classes in the classes of colleagues and vice versa” (Teacher Filomena). These data allow us to validate Perrenoud's (2002) perspective on one of the spheres of the teaching profession: the teaching process in the classroom takes place without teachers who work side by side effectively knowing each other's work, a conclusion supported by the results from the investigations carried out by several theorists, such as Day (2001), Dufour (2011), Hargreaves (2019), Lima (2002) or Little (1990). Shared teaching, which includes practices such as those enunciated by teachers, is “one of the modalities of collaborative work with the greatest potential to favor the professional development of teachers and the improvement of student learning” (LEITE;

PINTO, 2016, p. 80). However, it is not the rule nor does it cover most teachers at the school where the research was carried out.

Teachers also refer to the importance of collaboration between peers to achieve more enriching results (22.2%), being “a result that would not be possible to do alone” (Teacher Bruno), and as being “more positive because ideas are complemented and bring richer results” (Teacher Filomena), culminating in “richer, more creative, more innovative projects” (Teacher Ester). Also, they consider collaboration as a facilitating element in the work of teachers, favoring student learning (22.2%): “sometimes we are doing the same things, each one in their chapel; this work would be made easier if we shared this work more if we collaborated more with each other. I think collaborative work would facilitate student learning” (Teacher Bruno).

Collaborative work, to be carried out in the manner in which the participants perceive it, is seen as “an extraordinary advantage”, which allows “to alleviate each other's workload” (Teacher Dulce), ensuring that “it is more motivating, there is a greater involvement at work” (Teacher Ester). However, there seems to be no deep and effective reflection and commitment, which reveal greater empowerment by teachers, as a collective, in this domain. This empowerment could facilitate the professional development of teachers and improve the quality of the school since, considering that the structure is resistant to change, teachers become the main actors to facilitate or limit interaction (LAU, 2021), embodying the concept of “teacher agency”.



Percentage/ Importance of collaborative work
Learning between teachers, mutual help, and sharing
More enriching results
Facilitating the work of teachers and promoting student learning
No disadvantages

Graph 2. Importance of collaborative work
Source: Our elaboration, with survey data, 2020.

The institution’s perspective on peer collaboration converges with the teachers’ perceptions since it implies a “shared responsibility: creating opportunities for dialogue and sharing of ideas” (EP), making “the teaching/learning process more personalized” (RI), through “adequate strategies and activities” (RI) that “contribute to an effective construction of learning in the domains of knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (PADC). Given these considerations, we highlight here an important aspect of collaborative work, which is associated with the role of leaders: the constitution of democratic space,

guided by a spirit of unity between the various agents, in this case between teachers and leaders, who was not clear in the interviews conducted.

In this investigation, teachers identified more moments when they work individually than in teams, proving that professional culture can be “simultaneously one and plural” (LIMA, 2002, p. 34), due to the coexistence of several subcultures. Given the above, these teachers reveal that they are aware of the importance that collaborative work may have, not only for their personal and professional development but also for the student's success, demonstrating that they have broader perceptions about collaboration, although this notion translates, in the practice, in punctual moments, transporting us to what Lortie (1975) called “presentism”, insofar as the action of teachers focuses on short-term moments and “does not invest in the search for general principles to inform their work” (LORTIE, 1975, p. 212, our translation). This orientation is understood by the author as inhibiting school improvement, as it reinforces a culture of individualism (HARGREAVES, 2010) and does not seek to produce sustainable changes.

THE CHALLENGES IN THE COLLABORATIVE WORK

In addition to the importance of collaborative work between peers, the teachers mentioned, as a major obstacle, the lack of time to carry it out (88.9%), noting that “it takes time to get together beforehand, it takes time to plan these activities” (Teacher Bruno), “this needed us to have the time availability so that we could do these things together” (Teacher Dulce), ensuring that it was “very complicated to find time to work as a team” (Teacher Amélia) and assuming the “lack of time for teachers to be together and discuss ideas” (Teacher Filomena). We found this as one of the obstacles identified in the investigations carried out by Hargreaves (1998), Pinho and Mesquita (2018), and Roldão (2007), as presented above, in Box 1.

As the indicator referring to teachers' lack of time to work collaboratively was widely mentioned, we consider it necessary to seek a justification for this fact. Thus, we share the conclusions that point towards the existence of time to carry out collaborative work, emerging from the study carried out by Kaplan and Chan (2012, apud RODRIGUES et al., 2017), in schools in the USA. In this case, more than two-thirds of the schools that participated in the study “provided one day of early dismissal per week or biweekly to provide additional structured opportunities for collaborative work and professional development” (RODRIGUES et al., 2017, p. 32), in addition to the fact that “one-third of the schools in the study schedule 15 or more days, when teachers are not with students, for the development of improvement strategies and collaborative work” (RODRIGUES et al., 2017, p. 32).

Thus, it seems possible to infer that the institution under study does not promote collaborative work, favoring practical conditions, such as the organization of times and spaces (MARTINHO, 2018). This perception converges in the sense of Roldão's (2007) opinion, since “it is difficult to ask that collaborative teaching work be welcomed by teachers without the institution also changing its rules” (ROLDÃO, 2007, p. 29). Interestingly, this seems to be a problem that cuts across the Portuguese education system, as “there is some imbalance in the distribution of teaching time with an excessive workload (compared to other [OECD] countries)” (RODRIGUES et al., 2017, p. 7).

In the interviews with teachers, there was also a reference to the difference in goals between teachers and the lack of proactivity of some, which brings us, on the one hand, to the issue of isolation of teachers, which gives them comfort, protection and security (HARGREAVES, 1998) and, on the other hand, for the persistence of a feeling of “conservatism”, as dubbed by Lortie (1975), since teachers, especially the “less proactive” - as named by one of the interviewees - denote “a preference for doing things as they were done in the past” (LORTIE, 1975, p. 209, our translation). According to Hargreaves (2010, p. 147), this is the “most obvious obstacle to change”, so it will also be a challenge to be faced in (and by) schools, insofar as the innovations produced in schools usually happen through projects that the most proactive teachers develop (FORMOSINHO; MACHADO, 2008).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Judging by the quite positive perceptions about the workplace and the fact that there is a close relationship between the professors who participated in this investigation, we conclude that they find it easy to establish communication networks, even though this availability is not synonymous with collegiality strong interactions, one of the structuring characteristics of teacher collaboration, according to Lima (2002).

Some of the teachers who participated in the study denoted an optimistic perspective on the connections that are established between peers, stating that “the work of colleagues can be very useful for us, but our work can also help the colleagues and I think this is fundamental” (Teacher Amelia). Some examples of collaboratively thought-out activities were reported, to which the perception of a positive impact on the students is associated, which were exhausted in those moments, therefore, no cadence enhances the development of these practices. The idea presented by a teacher: “come and see my class, I will see your class...The door is opened, an open door” (Teacher Célia) is an excellent indicator of knowledge about professional development, although the identified practice is not common nor is it evident in the reports of the other participants, or is expressed in the institution's guiding documents. This is evidence that corroborates the conclusions of Little (1990) and Lima (2002), on the predominance of “a progressive rarity of more complex modes of teacher interaction” (LIMA, 2002, p. 68). This confirms the conviction that the collaborative culture is not yet rooted in this context, following the trend seen in Portugal, according to data released by the OECD (2018), referring to the type of collaborative work that Portuguese teachers perform.

The fact that there are no indicators, of the development of the teachers' activity in a “heuristic process that is simultaneously evaluative and formative” (ALARCÃO, 2001, p. 25) and, on the other hand, since teachers do not show consistency or regularity about working in collaboration with peers, even if they are motivated to do so, leads us to conclude that the institution is still far from being considered a “reflective school”, constituted by a “learning community” (ALARCÃO, 2001, 2003), which generates knowledge and motivates the professional development of the agents involved.

On the other hand, as this will of the participating teachers to learn from others is evident, as well as the motivation is shown to remove from the position of solitary professionals, we believe that personal dispositions that favor the creation of “communities of teachers that share and enrich the knowledge” emerge from their practices and resources, as they collaborate towards their professional growth”, as stated by Schleicher (2020, p. 6, our translation). Following this line of reasoning, we can find indicators of the essential principles for collaboration between teachers, advocated by Alarcão and Canha (2013) based on the Bronfenbrenian theory: (i) the affective relationship, noted by the recognition of affinity as a criterion for choosing colleagues with whom they work in collaboration, even if this is a controversial condition, concerning professional development; (ii) reciprocity, visible through the beneficial results that teachers identify for all those who work in collaboration, and through the willingness that teachers show to work with their peers; (iii) and the balance of power, evidenced by the equality of influence and roles that teachers recognize that everyone can play in collaborative work processes. However, when comparing the views of teachers with those of the institution, we concluded that there is no culture of a rooted “collaborative professionalism” (HARGREAVES, 2019), either at the level of teachers or the level of the school.

The biggest limitation identified regarding the exercise of collaborative work was the time factor, as we saw in the previous section, which leads us to conclude that how the school is organized is an obstacle to collaboration between teachers, in which the school hours do not leave free, common spaces for collaborative work. This is a preponderant and transversal factor in most of the studies carried out in the field of collaborative work, according to the literature review carried out. On the other hand, research suggests that this cannot constitute a sufficiently strong barrier to make effective collaboration impossible (HARGREAVES, 2019). In the teachers' discourse, the extension and rigidity of the curriculum also appear as factors that inhibit collaboration, in addition to the tradition of individualism in teaching work. It appears that tradition, combined with resistance to collaborative work, creates strong friction to collaborative work, either “due to resistance to the movements generated by new conceptions, or even due to the increase in work caused when adequate conditions are not provided or even due to the dichotomy expressed by government guidelines” (LEITE; PINTO, 2016, p. 83).

Asked about the way they organize to carry out collaborative work, almost all participants mentioned that this happens between colleagues from the same department or teaching cycle and two mentioned that collaboration was developed between colleagues who had an affinity with each other, as they identified in several aspects. This is a feature commonly found in collaborative work, although research suggests that it is a condition that makes change difficult, as closed people tend to think similarly (LIMA, 2001; HARGREAVES, 2019).

Therefore, we conclude that these teachers develop their practice through a “Balkanized culture” (HARGREAVES, 1998), although there are some moments of collaboration that, because they are punctual, do not constitute a way of living a/in the school. This type of culture can inhibit the evolution of a higher degree of collaboration, fostering a school as a learning community (LIMA, 2002; TINOCA, RODRIGUES, MACHADO, 2015). It appears, therefore, that the cultures of teachers are still quite complex and are too rooted in “un”conceptions: “un”updated, “un”contextualized, “un”motivated, which urgently need to be (re) thought and (re)constructed, based on the idea that “the new modes of teaching professionalism imply a reinforcement of the collective and collaborative dimensions, of teamwork” (NÓVOA, 2009, p. 31).

We also found that the professional cultures that are renewed, basing their practices on collaboration (as we understand it throughout this work) do not constitute most of the reality in Portuguese schools (ROLDÃO, 2007), and the fact that the collaborative work at the interdisciplinary level, not being accompanied and supported, “either by the direction of the school institution or by the leadership of some teachers, ends up being affected and losing its vitality” (LEITE; PINTO, 2016, p. 89), that could happen in the institution under analysis, affecting the beliefs and moments of collaboration that already exist.

Nevertheless, we share the conception of Mesquita, Formosinho, and Machado (2012), who consider collaboration between teachers “as an integral part of the change in education, as this, however small, presupposes the sum of a wide range of individual efforts, but sustained in many more collective efforts” (p. 10), in addition to being considered as one of the most impactful aspects in the professional life of teachers (OECD, 2019), leading them to demonstrate high levels of effectiveness and satisfaction, when compared to others who have not experienced a similar journey. Knowing that schools where a collaborative culture is dominant not only show high levels of trust but also quality learning (GODDARD; GODDARD, 2007, HARGREAVES, 2003; THURLER; PERRENOUD, 2006), the poor adherence of teachers to practices of collaborative work is a reality that becomes worrying, given the expected impact of collaboration on schools in the 21st century.

However, it is equally important to be aware that collaboration is not a panacea, running the risk that schools will once again have teachers closed in their classrooms and where decisions are made in a “top-down” logic, which is why it is important “that teachers collaborate, but that they collaborate well, and that school and system leaders train and train themselves for this” (HARGREAVES, 2019, p. 618, our translation). On the other hand, for interaction to be effective and collaborative professionalism to be more prominent in schools, it is necessary to reinforce and highlight the role of the teacher – “teacher agency” – at a systemic level, which “can be a support and to be a catalyst for professional development through collaboration” (LAU, 2021, p. 530, our translation).

Given the results presented, it will be important to continue studying how interactions between teachers occur in specific contexts, as a way of dealing with ingrained professional habitus and the adoption of contextualized and organizational investigative-formative approaches to stimulate collaboration between teachers, allowing them to respond and accompany the challenges and the inevitable period of change that we are witnessing at a global level, mainly motivated by the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as climate change, the increase in the flow of migrants and refugees, or the digital revolution.

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AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTIONS

Author 1 conceived the study, collected and analyzed data, wrote the text, and participated in the discussion of the results.

Author 2 contributed to the study design, data discussion, and text review.

Author 3 contributed to the critical reading and review of the text.

All authors approved the final version for publication.

DECLARATION OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest with this article.