Conditions for teacher leadership and professional development in challenging circumstances

ABSTRACT

This chapter reports on findings from a 3-year funded research project aimed at examining conditions for teacher leadership in challenging circumstances. A mixed-method research design was devised including three phases of data collection: a national survey (phase 1), focus groups with teachers and students and semi-structured interviews with principals (phase 2); and the development and evaluation of a professional development course in 5 schools (phase 3). This chapter reports on findings from the first phase of data collection through an online questionnaire administered nationwide between February and May 2012 (N= 2702). In general, ambiguity and ambivalence in teachers' views and perceptions of leadership emerged from the data namely in regard to the encouragement they get to make decisions and to be involved in projects at school as well as to exercise leadership at the department level. Implications of the findings are discussed.

Keywords: Teacher leadership, professional development, professionalism

INTRODUCTION

Teacher leadership has been seen as a key variable in school reform and improvement (Danielson, 2006). The literature has highlighted its potential in school development. It suggests a number of key ingredients for sustaining school improvement through teacher leadership, such as: clarity of focus, evidence, collaboration, trust, dialogue, planning and leadership (Durrant, 2004).

The terms *teacher leadership* and *teacher leaders* are widely used in the literature in a variety of contexts and meanings (Frost and Harris, 2003). For instance, Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001, p. 5) define teacher leaders as those who "lead within and beyond the classroom, identify with and contribute to a community of teacher learners and leaders, and influence others towards improved educational practice". Similarly, Danielson (2006, p.1) states that "Teacher Leaders don't gain their authority through an assigned role or position; rather, they earn it through their work with both their students and their colleagues". These leaders perform a "highly significant role in the work of school and in school improvement efforts" (2006, p.1).

It is within this perspective that the 3-year research funded project reported in this chapter was carried out. A number of assumptions drawn from international literature underpinned the project, namely: i) teachers are key elements in the process of change; ii) schools are learning communities in which the exercise of leadership may be enhanced; iii) schools seen as learning communities may foster teachers and students' learning and they may promote better the development of active and capable citizens and iv) reforms and change initiatives are more successful if teacher professionalism is fostered through the exercise of leadership of innovative projects and initiatives at

school. This chapter presents findings arising from the first phase of a research project which aims to examine conditions for teacher leadership in challenging circumstances.

UNPACKING TEACHER LEADERSHIP

Teacher leadership has gained increasing attention in recent years, particularly in the United States and in the UK (Stevenson, 2012). Existing literature points, however, to different perspectives and understandings (Davis and Leon, 2009; Yow, 2010; Ross, Adams, Bondy, Dana, Dodman & Swain, 2011; Alexandrou and Swaffield, 2012; Bangs & MacBeth, 2012). York-Barr and Duke (2004, p. 288) argue that teacher leadership constitutes "an umbrella term that includes a wide array of work at multiple levels in educational systems, including work with students, colleagues, and administrators and work that is focused on instructional, professional, and organisational development". And they go on to say that teacher leadership is "the process by which teachers, individually or collectively, influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of school communities to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increased student learning and achievement". Poekert (2012, p. 171) highlights the importance of this definition as it draws attention to the centrality of leadership that is built "on influence and interaction, rather than power and authority".

Also, Taylor, Yates, Meyer, and Kinsella (2011) state that teacher leadership may be associated with authority and as a result of a selection process to undertake formal roles such as leaders of curriculum areas or heads of department. But the authors also draw attention to the informal nature of teacher leadership through "the influence

that does not involve designated authority over peers, such as coaching colleagues" (2011, p. 86).

Stevenson (2012, p. 345) states that much of existing literature on teacher leadership "is rooted within mainstream discourses of education leadership and management and fails to address more fundamental questions about the nature of leadership in an educational context". And the author identifies two main problems linked to this literature: i) teacher leadership continues to be seen within a managerialist perspective located within managerial tradition and hierarchies, linked to roles and structures and remaining essentially conservative and orthodox; ii) the literature stresses the contribution of teacher leaders to educational change but, as the author argues, "seldom questions the fundamental nature of these changes" (p. 345).

In fact, in many contexts the idea of distributed leadership has been widely used and it tends to focus rather on capacity building of heads of departments and other management teams at school (Naylor, Gkolia, and Brundrett, 2006). This view reiterates the formal leadership as opposed to informal leadership which may exist regardless of a given role or responsibility at school. In other words, existing literature reports on projects which have focused upon leadership associated with specific roles and responsibilities and they include some limitations as in this case teacher leadership depends on formal role designation linked to existing structures at school (Lieberman and Miller, 2004; Lieberman and Friedrich, 2008; Crowther, 1999). In contrast to a rather limited organisation-focused approach to teacher leadership, other literature tends to emphasize the informal kind of leadership in which teachers engage in order to enhance their professionalism and to make a difference in the schools in which they operate (Frost, 2004; Frost and Durrant, 2003; Spillane, 2006). In this context, Frost (2012) argues for an approach that "does not assume leadership is automatically linked

with positions in the organisational hierarchy of the school. Instead it recognizes the potential of all teachers to exercise leadership as part of their role as a teacher" (Frost, 2012, p. 210). As such, and within the view of schools as learning communities, teachers are encouraged to exercise leadership and to engage in improvement efforts in the settings in which they work. In turn, Taylor, Goeke, Klein, Onore, and Geist (2011), recognising the ambiguity of the term, and drawing upon the notion of "relational leadership" (Danielson, 2006), suggest that teacher leadership is a "specific type of relationship that mobilises other people to improve their practice".

Leadership is, therefore, "a permeable process that is widely distributed throughout the school" (Dimmock, 2005, p. 6). Within this view, teacher leadership is focused not only on performing given roles, responsibilities and structures, but it also encompasses, in a broader sense, the ways in which teachers make a difference in their professional contexts through agency and participation in initiatives and innovative strategies in school. Thus, teacher leadership "refers to that set of skills demonstrated by teachers who continue to teach students but also have influence that extends beyond their own school and elsewhere" (Danielson, 2006, p.12). As such, "there are many informal ways in which teachers exert influence and make a positive difference in their schools" (Hanuscin, Rebello, and Sinha, 2012, p. 17).

This is also the understanding of teacher leadership underpinning the project described in this chapter. It includes therefore a wide array of strategies and initiatives fostering innovation and improvement projects in schools that are not necessarily linked to a set roles and hierarchies or administration positions at school. Within this broader perspective, teacher leadership is associated with the concept of teacher professional development in context. For instance, Alexandrou, and Swaffield (2012, p. 159) state that: "Since teacher leadership is a form of leadership, and professional development is

a form of learning, the connections between them can be explored using a model derived from research that sought to develop understanding of leadership, learning, and their interrelationship." Similarly, Poekert (2012, p. 185) draws attention to teacher leadership as "a form of job-embedded professional development" and he adds that "professional development leads to teacher leadership, which leads to further professional development for the teachers enacting leadership and their colleagues" (p.169). Similarly, Hunzicker (2012, p. 268) states that "teacher leaders are best prepared through a combination of job-embedded professional development and collaborative experiences." Issues of collaboration and strategic teacher leadership have also been identified in the literature (Frost & Roberts, 2004).

Teacher leaders: roles and activities

In his review, Poekert (2012) concludes that much of current research focuses on the role of principals in the development of teachers and on distributed leadership as well as on looking at contexts where leadership is evident or where school improvement processes are already implemented. Thus, the author suggests that because "teachers' role in defining and implementing school change initiatives is becoming more recognised and more formalised through the creation of teacher leadership roles, researchers and practitioners must do a better job of investigating and implementing teacher leadership as a professional development strategy" (Poekert, 2012, p. 186). In a similar vein, Taylor, Yates, Meyer, and Kinsella (2011, p. 86) highlight the lack of clarity about "the substantive purpose of teacher leadership roles and their relation to operational definitions of formal or informal leadership".

According to Margolis and Deuel (2009)'s study, teachers described themselves as leaders continuously research and learn, share their teaching ideas and practice with other teachers and foster collegial relationships. Hanuscin, Rebello, and Sinha (2012) also found that definitions of leadership included personal characteristics such as being accountable, collaborative, trustworthy, reflective, intrinsically motivated, and having a positive attitude, as well as particular knowledge and skills such as organisational and decision-making skills, expertise and competence, amongst others. In their study, Fairman and Mackenzie (2012) conclude that teacher leadership emerged from within a variety of circumstances such as individual and collective efforts, informal and formal actions, narrowly-focused and broader school-wide improvement efforts, isolated and collegial cultures, etc.

A recent study carried out in the USA indicates that teacher leaders' role varies a great deal including multiple leadership activities (Gordon, Jacobs, and Solis, 2013). The same authors also found that the three main dispositions associated with teacher leaders were flexibility, lifelong learning and a positive attitude and optimism about the future. Also, Frost, and Harris (2003) identify a set of factors shaping teacher leadership: i) constructions of the professional role of teachers (teachers' beliefs and expectations and societal constructions): ii) the organisational environment (organisational structures, organisational culture and social capital); iii) personal capacity (authority, knowledge – pedagogical, organisational, community, situational understanding and interpersonal skills).

As for the leadership activities, earlier empirical work has identified leading meetings, conferencing with teachers, developing curriculum, doing administrative paperwork, demonstrating teaching, classroom observations and sharing instructional materials (Gordon, Jacobs, and Solis, 2013). Research also stresses that intrinsic

rewards were the most recurring ones related to teacher leadership activities, such as making a difference beyond one's classroom, having a voice on campus and being respected (Gordon, Jacobs, and Solis, 2013).

However, some barriers for teachers to exercise their leadership have also been identified in the literature such as isolation and individualism, role ambiguity, inadequate time for collaboration, lack of incentives (York-Barr and Duke, 2004), external accountability, teachers' capacity to undertake "extra work" and the role of senior managers (Muijs and Harris, 2006) and lack of administrative support, lack of time, dealing with teachers who are resistant to change, too many duties and lack of professional development opportunities (Gordon, Jacobs, and Solis, 2013). Frost (2012, p. 211) has identified the need for effective support for teacher leadership which involves: i) a partnership between schools and external agencies; ii) mutual support through membership of a group/network; iii) building professional cultures that give sanction and support to teacher leadership; iv) opportunities for open discussion (e.g. about values, strategies, etc.); v) tools to scaffold personal reflection and planning; vi) tools to model, exemplify and illustrate action; vii) expecting and enabling teachers to identify their personal development priorities; viii) facilitating access to relevant literature; ix) guidance on leadership strategies; x) guidance on methods of evidence gathering that leads to change; xi) mobilisation of organisational/senior leadership support and orchestration; xii) the provision of a framework to help teachers document their leadership activities; xiii) opportunities for networking beyond the school; xiv) recognition and certification; and xv) opportunities to build knowledge from accounts of teacher leadership.

Other literature highlights the key role of learning in the development of teachers as leaders (Collinson, 2012). The author reports on a study of 81 exemplary

secondary school teachers across the United States and how they have become leaders whose influence and partnership extended well beyond their classrooms and schools. Collinson (2012) argues that their leadership occurs as a by-product of their learning.

In general, Poekert (2012, p. 185) stresses the contribution of recent literature on teacher leadership, namely as far as its foundational components are concerned, but he asserts that further studies are needed to explore the means by which it is developed and practiced in schools as well as its influence and impact on teaching and learning. It is within this framework that the research described in this chapter was carried out.

METHODS

This chapter reports on findings from a 3-year research project (January 2011-December 2013) funded by *Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia* (National Foundation for Science and Technology) (PTDC/CPE-CED/112164/2009) aimed at examining existing conditions for teacher leadership in challenging circumstances.

The economic and financial crisis that has been affecting several sectors in Portugal has led to increases in unemployment, salary cuts, and higher taxes. These have impacted upon teachers and the teaching profession. Along with these are also changes at a policy level amongst which are new mechanisms for teacher evaluation; new protocols for school governance; reduction in the school curriculum; introduction of national exams from the primary school upward, etc. In general, more pressure is placed on schools and teachers to increase teaching standards and student achievement. In addition changes in their workload and working conditions have been implemented. Thus, schools' and teachers' work has been affected in many ways in recent years with implications for teaching, learning and leadership.

It is within this context that the current research project was carried out. The research goals are: i) to understand the wider social, cultural and political setting and the policy environment in which teachers' work is framed, especially in terms of challenges and opportunities; ii) to analyse the professional and organisational culture and structures of the schools in which teachers work; iii) to understand the ways in which teachers construct their professionalism; iv) to develop strategies in order to enhance teacher leadership in schools.

A mixed-method research design was devised according to the goals of the project. After having conducted a literature review on teacher leadership and professionalism internationally, three different phases of data collection were developed. Table 1 presents a summary of data collection phases, methods and participants.

Table 1. Phases of Data Collection, Methods and Participants

Phases of data collection	Methods	Participants

Phase 1 February-April 2012	National survey Online Questionnaire	2702 teachers
Phase 2 November 2012-April 2013	Semi-structured interviews	11 schools (from various regions of the country) 11 headteachers
	Focus group	45 Focus group with *99 teachers * 108 students
Phase 3 May-December 2013	Professional development course currently underway in 5 schools	5 schools involved (located in northern Portugal)
	Questionnaires with open-ended questions	
	Portfolios Reflective tools Artefacts Reflective journals	5 groups of teachers

A nationwide survey was conducted through an online questionnaire (using the surveymonkey device) which was sent to the principals of elementary and secondary schools in mainland Portugal. The questionnaire was then distributed to the teachers in each school. Permission for administering the questionnaire in public schools was previously obtained from the Ministry of Education. The questionnaire included both closed and open-ended questions according to two main dimensions: i) motivation and job satisfaction (including questions about current motivation, areas in which teachers experienced the greatest increase in satisfaction and the most dissatisfaction, etc.); and ii) leadership, autonomy and school culture (factors that hinder or promote teacher leadership, opportunities and motives for engaging in professional development opportunities, etc.). In order to analyse further issues of teacher professionalism associated with the effects of policy initiatives on teachers' work and conditions for exercising leadership arising from the quantitative data, focus group were carried out

with teachers in 11 schools throughout the country. In phase two, semi-structured interviews with principals and focus group with students were also conducted in order to gather complementary information about the participants' views of school culture, leadership and teachers' work. The third phase, which is currently underway, involves 5 schools and a development project with 5 groups of teachers in total. The goal is to develop and evaluate teacher leadership strategies in order to reflect on and to promote conditions for exercising leadership in schools.

Quantitative data were analysed statistically with the use of SPSS (version 20). The process of qualitative data analysis was undertaken according to two phases: an analysis of data gathered in each school through the voices of teachers, students and the principal. A second phase was then carried out according to a comparative or horizontal analysis (cross-case analysis) (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In this phase, it was possible to look for common patterns as well as differences. Issues such as views of leadership, barriers to exercise leadership, strategies and activities used by teacher leaders, qualities and characteristics of a good leader, etc. were identified. This chapter presents data collected during phase one of the project.

Participants

In total, 2702 teachers from mainland Portugal responded to the questionnaire which was administered online: 78.5% were female. Also, 42.8% of the participants were between 40-49 years old and 28.6% were between 50-59 years old (see Table 2).

Table 2. Age of the Participants

Age	Frequency	%

20-29	29	1.7
30-39	441	25.5
40-49	740	42.8
50-59	495	28.6
Over 60	24	1.4
Total	**1729**	**100**

As far as their qualifications are concerned (see Table 3), the majority of the participants hold a *Licenciatura* degree (59. 3%) and 21. 4% hold a master's degree (21.4%).

Table 3. Academic qualifications

Academic degree	Frequency	%
Bachelor	36	2.1
Licenciatura	1027	59.3
Postgraduate Course	270	15.6
Master's Degree	370	21.4
PhD	30	1.7
Total	**1733**	**100**

The majority of the participants have between 11 and 20 years of experience (37.6%) and between 21 and 30 years (34.9%) (see Table 4).

Table 4. Years of experience

Years of experience	Frequency	%
[0-10]	264	15.4
[11-20]	639	37.6
[21-30]	594	34.9
[31-40]	204	12
[+ 41[	1	0.1
Total	**1702**	**100**

Most of the participants have between 1-10 years of experience in their present school (65.8%) (see Table 5). Also, the vast majority of the participants have a permanent post at school (83.3%).

Table 5. Years of Experience at the present school

Years of experience	Frequency	%
[0-10]	1110	65.8
[11-20]	419	24.8
[21-30]	147	8.7
[31-40]	12	0.7
Total	**1688**	**100**

In addition to teaching, 1046 (38.7) of the participants reported that they also play other roles at school: 33.9% are pedagogical coordinators, 33.3% hold middle management positions, 16.8% perform administration positions, and 12.4% hold both middle management and pedagogical coordination roles.

The majority of the participants taught in urban schools (51.1%) (see Table 6).

Table 6. Type of School

Type of school	Frequency	%
Urban	885	51.1
Suburban	469	27.1
Rural	377	21.8
Total	**1731**	**100**

The participating teachers taught in all levels of teaching (from pre-school to secondary school: 3 to 18 year-old students) (see Table 7). Most teachers taught in the 3rd cycle (41.9%) (students aged 12-15) and in the secondary education (33.2%) (students aged 16-18).

Table 7. Levels of teaching in which teachers taught*

Teaching levels	Frequency	%
1st Cycle	327	18.9
2nd Cycle	418	24.1
3rd Cycle	725	41.9
Preschool	148	8.5
Secondary	574	33.2

*Note: Some teachers listed more than one option.

FINDINGS

In this chapter data arising from the first phase of data collection are presented according to three main themes: motivation, job satisfaction and commitment, conditions for teacher leadership and motivations for undertaking in-service training and professional development opportunities.

Motivation, job satisfaction and commitment

Teachers were asked about their current levels of motivation. They reported that their current motivation is moderate (45.5%), although 27.4% admit that their motivation is high and for 17.4% of the participants is low (see Table 8).

Table 8. Teachers' Current Motivation

	Frequency	%
Very Low	155	5.9
Low	458	17.4
Moderate	1194	45.5
High	719	27.4
Very High	99	3.8
Total	2625	100

Interestingly, when asked about their job satisfaction and motivation over the last three years (during which major reforms in Education and in teaching have been put into place in schools), the majority of the participants reported that their motivation and their job satisfaction decreased (61.6% and 44.5%, respectively). However, the participants also claim that their commitment stayed the same (66.8%) and increased (23.8%) over the last three years (see Table 9). The same feeling is expressed by the participating teachers when they refer to their professional competence. They stated that their competence increased (49.4%) and stayed the same (47.8%) over the last three years. Most participants state that their confidence as teachers stayed the same (54%) and 26.8% claim that it increased over the last few years. As far as teachers' self-esteem is concerned, although 46.9% state that it stayed the same, 39.1% acknowledge that it decreased. The participants also claim that the recognition of their work stayed the same (46.9%) and decreased (37.6%) over the last three years.

Table 9. Teachers' Perceptions over the Last Three Years

	Decreased	Stayed the same	Increased
… my motivation	**61.6%** (1623)	**29.8%** (784)	**8.6%** (227)

… job satisfaction	**44.5%** (1160)	**41.7%** (1087)	**13.8%** (360)
…my commitment	**9.3%** (243)	**66.8%** (1737)	**23.8%** (620)
… my professional competence	**2.8%** (74)	**47.8%** (1245)	**49.4%** (1287)
… my confidence as a teacher	**19.2%** (497)	**54.0%** (1400)	**26.8%** (696)
… my self-esteem	**39.1%** (1015)	**43.6%** (1134)	**17.3%** (450)
… the recognition of my work	**37.6%** (969)	**46.9%** (1209)	**15.5%** (401)
… the confidence in my ability to influence student learning and achievement	**19.2%** (500)	**57.7%** (1500)	**23.1%** (601)
… my involvement in the school life	**15.6%** (405)	**48.5%** (1258)	**35.9%** (930)
… my responsibility for the success of my students	**3.8%** (99)	**60.5%** (1565)	**35.6%** (921)
… my motivation to undertake new roles related to school projects	**37.1%** (962)	**40.2%** (1042)	**22.7%** (589)
… my sense of belonging to my school	**36.7%** (951)	**45.2%** (1172)	**18.2%** (471)

Teachers were also asked about their confidence in their ability to influence student learning and achievement. Most of the participants state that it stayed the same (57.7%) over the last three years. This is also the case of their responsibility for the success of their students (60.5%) and their involvement in the school life (48.5%), although in this case 35.9% of the teachers also claim that their involvement at school increased over the last three years. Interestingly, the participants recognise that their sense of belonging to the school and their motivation to undertake new roles related to the school projects stayed the same (45.2% and 40.2%, respectively) and decreased over time (36.7% and 37.1%, respectively).

Conditions for teacher leadership in schools

Issues of school culture and working relationships in context were also included in the questionnaire. When asked about the ways in which teachers work in their schools, in general a collaborative perspective emerges. The participants agree and

strongly agree that they work collaboratively at the department level (66.4%), as well as at the subject matter level (76.8%) and at school level (60.3%). They also agree and strongly agree that they work together in planning activities at school (73.5%), they share ideas and materials (67.4%) and they reflect on their practice (67.3%). They also state that in general teachers are informed about the policies, projects and activities at school (20.5% strongly agree and 57.1% agree). However, 50.3% agree and strongly agree that over the last three years there was an increase in teacher individualism, 25.5% do not agree nor disagree and 24.1% disagree and strongly disagree (see Table 10).

Interestingly, when asked about encouragement to make decisions and involvement in school projects, although the participants tend to agree, ambiguity emerges from the data. For instance, teachers agree and strongly agree that they feel encouraged to make decisions about how to assess (47.3%), 28.9% state they do not agree nor disagree and 23,9% disagree and strongly disagree. Similarly, teachers feel they are encouraged to make decisions about how to teach (40.4% agree and strongly agree), but others do not agree nor disagree (33.2%) and disagree and strongly disagree (25.4%). In regard to the encouragement to participate in projects at school and in in-service training activities, although the majority agrees (53.1%), others do not agree nor disagree (27.4%) and disagree (19.6%), respectively. In addition, in relation to the item "In my department I am encouraged to exercise leadership", most teachers state that they do not agree nor disagree (36%).

Table 10. Teachers' Work and Working Relationships in Context

	Strongly agree	Agree	I do not agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
In my department teachers work collaboratively.	**21.2%** (391)	**45.2%** (832)	**17%** (314)	**13.2%** (243)	**3.4%** (62)
In my department teachers reflect on their practice.	**17.9%** (328)	**49.4%** (906)	**16.6%** (304)	**12.6%** (232)	**3.5%** (64)

Teachers work together in planning activities at the school level.	**21.7%** (401)	**51.8%** (957)	**14.4%** (266)	**10.1%** (186)	**2%** (36)
In general. teachers work collaboratively in my school.	**12.2%** (224)	**48.1%** (884)	**23.2%** (427)	**14%** (257)	**2.4%** (45)
In general. teachers work collaboratively in my subject group.	**31.7%** (579)	**44.8%** (819)	**12.1%** (222)	**9.1%** (166)	**2.4%** (43)
In my school teachers share ideas and materials.	**12.5%** (230)	**54.9%** (1007)	**20.4%** (375)	**10.5%** (192)	**1.7%** (31)
In my department I am encouraged to make decisions about how to assess.	**6.6%** (121)	**40.7%** (747)	**28.9%** (530)	**17.0%** (312)	**6.9%** (126)
In my department I am encouraged to make decisions how to teach.	**5.6%** (103)	**34.8%** (639)	**33.2%** (608)	**18.5%** (340)	**7.9%** (144)
In my department I am encouraged to develop projects.	**7.5%** (137)	**45.6%** (834)	**27.4%** (501)	**14%** (256)	**5.6%** (102)
In my department I am encouraged to participate in in-service training activities.	**9.3%** (169)	**44.8%** (815)	**30.6%** (557)	**10.7%** (195)	**4.7%** (85)
In general, teachers are informed about the policies, projects and activities in my school.	**20.5%** (378)	**57.1%** (1052)	**13.3%** (245)	**7.4%** (137)	**1.6%** (30)
Over the last three years there was an increase in individualism in teachers' work.	**22.8%** (415)	**27.5%** (501)	**25.5%** (464)	**20.3%** (370)	**3.8%** (69)
In my department I am encouraged to exercise leadership.	**5.8%** (106)	**20.0%** (513)	**36.0%** (661)	**20.5%** (376)	**9.8%** (179)

In regard to the dimensions of teachers' work that have changed over the past few years, teachers agree that there are now more opportunities to do collaborative work between the school and the local institutions (64% agree and strongly agree), and to develop projects with other partners (62.8% agree and strongly agree) (see Table 11). Similarly, teachers tend to agree that they participate more in formative assessment of students' learning (51.6% agree and strongly agree).

The participants disagree that they have more autonomy to make decisions at classroom level (58.7% disagree and strongly disagree). They also disagree and strongly disagree that they have time and conditions to reflect on their practice (39.6% and 16.1%, respectively). The participants also disagree that they have time during the day to discuss their practice with their colleagues (42.9% and 16.9% disagree and strongly disagree respectively).

Table 11. Characteristics of Teachers' Work

	Strongly agree	Agree	I do not agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
There are more opportunities to do collaborative work between school and local institutions.	10.3% (189)	53.7% (988)	23.7% (437)	10.5% (194)	1.8% (33)
There are more opportunities to develop projects with other partners,	11.0% (203)	51.8% (952)	21.4% (394)	13.3% (245)	2.4% (45)
Teachers participate more in formative assessment of students' learning.	6.4% (119)	45.2% (834)	28.3% (522)	17.5% (323)	2.5% (47)
In my school, teachers have time and conditions to reflect upon their practice.	2.7% (49)	19.5% (358)	22.2% (408)	39.6% (727)	16.1% (296)
Teachers have more autonomy to make decisions at classroom level.	1.9% (35)	14.2% (263)	25.2% (466)	44.4% (821)	14.3% (264)
I have time during my day to discuss my practice with my colleagues.	2% (36)	20.2% (371)	18% (330)	42.9% (787)	16.9% (310)

When asked about the most important dimensions of their work, teachers refer to collaborating with colleagues (63.4%); supporting students (58.7%); reflecting on one's own work (51.1%); planning teaching (49.1%) and continuous professional learning (45.1%) (see Table 12). The least valued dimensions are: performing administrative tasks (7.5%); involvement within the local community (14.5%); developing teamwork (18.7%), using ICT (19.7%) and participating in decision-making process (19.7%).

Table 12. Dimensions of teachers' work

	Frequency	%
Collaborating with colleagues	1140	63.4
Supporting students	1056	58.7
Reflecting on one's own work	919	51.1
Planning teaching	882	49.1
Continuous professional learning	810	45.1
Developing innovative practices	801	44.5
Monitoring student behaviour	801	44.5
Accessing educational resources	497	27.7
Communicating with parents	463	25.8
Participating in decision-making process	355	19.7
Using ICT	354	19.7
Developing team work	337	18.7
Involvement within the local community	260	14.5
Performing administrative tasks	134	7.5

The participating teachers were also asked about their involvement in projects at school. The vast majority of the participants stated that they are involved in projects at school (74.5%). Most of them are team members (55.6%), others perform coordination roles (48.2%) and occasional collaboration (23.9%) (see Table 13).

Table 13. Level of involvement in school projects at school*

	Frequency	%
Occasional collaboration	313	23.9
Team member	729	55.6

Coordination role	632	48.2

*Note: Some teachers listed more than one option

Regarding the kinds of projects in which teachers are involved (see Table 14), teachers mentioned the involvement in extra-curricular projects (44.1%), in international projects (13.7%) and in curriculum projects (13.3%). Teachers also refer to projects organised by both teachers and students (10.6%) and projects derived from the Ministry of Education (12.1%).

Table 134. Kinds of Projects Teachers Are Involved in

Kinds of projects	Frequency	%
Extra-curricular projects	496	44.1
Curriculum projects	150	13.3
International projects	154	13.7
Projects organized by both teachers and students	119	10.6
Projects devised by the Ministry of Education	136	12.1

Teacher leadership and professional development

In regard to reasons for attending in-service training and professional development activities, teachers tend to value emancipatory and pedagogical motivations such as improving practice (83.1%), increasing professional knowledge (81.1%), and developing innovative teaching strategies (60.5%). Also valued are collaborative motivations such as sharing ideas and experiences among colleagues (52.4%). However, pragmatic reasons associated with career progression were also identified (47.4%) (see Table 15). The least valued motivations related to policy

implementation such as implementing policies and initiatives from Central Administration (4.8%), developing leadership skills (6.3%) and undertaking roles or functions at school (6.8%). Reflecting on the values underlying school's role in society (13.2%) and increasing self-esteem (14.1%) were also amongst the least valued motives to undertake in-service training activities.

Table 145. Motivations to Participate in In-Service Training activities

	Frequency	**%**
To improve my practice	1462	83.1
To increase my professional knowledge	1427	81.1
To develop innovative teaching strategies	1065	60.5
To share ideas and experiences with my colleagues	922	52.4
For career progression purposes	834	47.4
To reflect on my practice	774	44
To develop pedagogical resources with my colleagues	459	26.1
To increase my professional opportunities	370	21
To develop projects in collaboration with my colleagues	286	16.3
To participate in research projects	248	14.1
To increase my self-esteem	248	14.1
To reflect on the values underlying the school role	232	13.2
To undertake roles or functions at school	119	6.8
To develop leadership skills	111	6.3
To implement policies/initiatives arising from central administration	84	4.8

These findings lend support to earlier research which point to the valorization of emancipatory and practical motivations (Author, 2007; Author, in press).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Findings from this study point to a number of issues that are worth exploring in order to understanding better teachers' views of teacher leadership and the existing conditions that might influence its development.

Firstly, the issue of teacher motivation becomes crucial as the respondents state that it decreased over the last few years. This might be explained by a number of factors amongst which are policy initiatives mainly those related to teacher evaluation, changes in school curriculum and in school governance, and the non-existence of career progression, amongst others, and, more generally, those related to the current economic crisis in Portugal which has led to salary cuts, higher taxes, and increases in workload, etc.

Interestingly, teachers also reported that their commitment, professional competence and confidence as teachers stayed the same or, in some cases, even increased. These findings might be related to issues of professionalism and their images as teachers pointing out that, despite their lack of motivation, they remain committed with their students and with their work particularly at the classroom level. These were corroborated by the teachers participating in the focus group in the phase two of the project which is beyond the scope of this chapter.

Another interesting finding is associated with the conditions for teachers to exercise leadership, and in particular to issues related to school culture. Most of the participants state that there is collaboration amongst teachers at school, at the department level and at subject matter level. Teachers also claim that they are involved in projects at school and that in general they share ideas and materials and reflect on their practice. Also, they identify "collaborating with colleagues" as the most important dimension of their work. However, and interestingly, they also agree that over the last three years there was an increase in teacher individualism. In addition, "developing

teamwork" and "participating in the decision making process" are amongst the least valued dimensions of teachers' work. Also, ambiguity emerged from the data when teachers talk about the encouragement they get to make decisions and to be involved in projects at school as well as to exercise leadership at the department level. These findings suggest the need to explore further teachers' conceptions and experiences of collaboration at school. Issues of structural and comfortable collaboration (in many cases drawn from top down initiatives) and authentic collaboration (initiated and fostered by teachers themselves at school) might explain some of the findings. Similarly, the association of leadership with designated roles and responsibilities within the structures existing at school might also explain the ambiguity and, in some way, contradictory views of the participating teachers.

In regard to the most important motives to participate in in-service activities, teachers tend to value more emancipatory and pedagogical motivations such as improving practice, increasing professional knowledge, and developing innovative teaching strategies rather than issues related to policy implementation and collaboration. In this case, motivations such as implementing policies and initiatives from Central Administration, developing leadership skills and undertaking roles or functions at school were amongst the least valued motivations.

By and large, ambiguity and ambivalence in teachers' views and perceptions of leadership emerged from the data. One might ask therefore about the effective existing conditions for a culture of leadership to be developed, which is to be related to teachers' own understandings of leadership and their professional values. These findings lend support to earlier work as stated by Fairman and Mackenzie (2012, p. 244): "Labelling the work teachers do as 'leadership' may, in fact, discourage teacher involvement in leadership activity because teachers' conception of leadership comes from a more

traditional model of formally designated roles and specific responsibilities and because of the persistence of egalitarian norms in teaching".

Indeed, existing literature highlights the dynamic and context-dependent nature of teacher leadership (Fairman and Mackenzie, 2012) and a number of conditions for teacher leadership to be successful: culture of trust and support, structures that supported teacher leadership, clear and transparent, strong leadership head and engagement in innovative forms of professional development (Muijs & Harris, 2006). Also, according to Durrant (2004, p. 27) it is important that "teachers' vision and values are articulated and then that they are involved both in setting the agenda for change and in exercising leadership to make it happen".

The findings of this study point to the need to take into account the current conditions of the teaching profession in Portugal and the complex and multifaceted factors that shape schools and teachers' work with implications for their views of teacher professionalism and leadership. However, it is also important to help teachers to deconstruct the concept of teacher leadership which they tend to associated with formal roles and responsibilities within existing school structures. It is with this purpose that the project described in this paper includes the phase 3 which entails the development and evaluation of a professional development course in 5 schools. The aim is to develop and reflect upon strategies and materials for teachers to exercise leadership in context within a perspective that combines the work of both academics and teachers in which the notions of professional learning communities and networking are of paramount importance.

Overall, this study provided empirical evidence of the complexity of teacher leadership in context and it highlighted the need to support and sustain teachers'

continuing professional development in the workplace within a view of teachers as lifelong learners and of schools as professional learning communities.

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