



**NETWORKS,  
COMMUNITIES  
AND PARTNERSHIPS  
IN EDUCATION:  
ACTORS, GOALS AND RESULTS**  
**PROCEEDINGS OF THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL  
CONFERENCE OF THE ESCXEL PROJECT**

**Edited by:**  
Eva Gonçalves  
Susana Batista

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Eva Gonçalves  
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**Scientific Committee:**

David Justino  
Rui Santos  
José Tenedório  
Susana Batista  
Eva Gonçalves  
Rossana Estanqueiro  
Luísa Franco

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projectoescxel@gmail.com

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## First ESCXEL Project International Conference Lisbon, National Educational Council, 27<sup>th</sup>-29<sup>th</sup> November, 2014

### PROGRAMME

#### Thursday, 27<sup>th</sup> November, 2014

- 10h00 - **Opening Ceremony:** David Justino (Portugal-FCSH/NOVA); José Tenedório (Portugal-FCSH/NOVA)  
10h30-10h45 - Coffee break  
10h45-12h30 - **Plenary Conference:** David Justino (Portugal-FCSH/NOVA); Jorge Ávila de Lima (Portugal-AU)  
12h20-14h00 - Lunch  
14h00-15h30 - **Work Groups**
- **School/Family Partnerships:** Ana Diogo (Portugal-AU); Deidrea Stevens (USA-); Maria Adelina Villas-Boas (Portugal-LU) – Chair: Eva Gonçalves (Portugal-FCSH/NOVA)
  - **School / Local Community Partnerships and Strategic Planning:** Alda Matos (Portugal-E-BHBG); Fernando Serra (Portugal-LU); Teresa Pimentel (Portugal-FCSH/NOVA) – Chair: Rosana Estanqueiro (Portugal-FCSH/NOVA)
- 15h30-17h00 - **Work Groups**
- **School networks:** Luísa Moreira (Portugal-FP); Susana Batista (Portugal-FCSH/NOVA); Eva Gonçalves (Portugal-FCSH/NOVA); Rui Santos (Portugal-FCSH/NOVA); David Justino (Portugal-FCSH/NOVA); Rute Perdigão (Portugal-CNE) – Chair: Jorge Ávila de Lima (Portugal-AU)
- 17h20-18h30 - Cocktail

#### Friday, 28<sup>th</sup> November, 2014

- 9h00-10h30 - **School Network Meeting** (closed meeting): Joyce Epstein (USA-JHU); David Justino (Portugal-FCSH/NOVA); Rui Santos (Portugal-FCSH/NOVA); José Tenedório (Portugal-FCSH/NOVA)  
10h30-10h45 - Coffee break  
10h45-12h30 - **Plenary Conference:** Philippe Masson (France-LU); Joyce Epstein (USA-JHU)  
12h20-14h00 - Lunch  
14h00-15h30 - **Work Groups**
- **School/Family Partnerships:** Jiacheng Li (China-ECNU); Tao Yao (China-ECNU); Yucheng Guo (China-YES); Pedro Silva (Portugal-PIL) – Chair: Ana Diogo (Portugal-AU)
  - **School / Local Community Partnerships and Strategic Planning:** Bettina Arnoldt (Germany-GYIM); Christine Steiner (Germany-GYIM); João Sebastião (Portugal-ISCTE/IUL); Clara Cruz (Portugal-LU) – Chair: José Tenedório (Portugal-FCSH/NOVA)
- 15h30-17h00 - **Work Groups**
- **School networks:** Adelino Calado (Portugal-AEC); Paulo Portugal (Portugal-AEB); Ilídio Vicente (Portugal-AEVH); José Verdasca (Portugal-EU); Pedro Marques (England-CI) – Chair: Rui Santos (Portugal-FCSH/NOVA)
  - **School / Local Community Partnerships and Strategic Planning:** José Tenedório (Portugal-FCSH/NOVA); Rossana Estanqueiro (Portugal-FCSH/NOVA); Michael Evans (USA-MU); Kira Baker-Doyle (USA-AU); Ana Sofia Godinho (Portugal-CMO) – Chair: Pedro Silva (Portugal-PIL)
- 17h00-17h15 - Coffee break  
10h00 - **Closing Ceremony:** Maria de Lurdes Rodrigues (Portugal-ISCTE/IUL); Rui Santos (Portugal-FCSH/NOVA); José Tenedório (Portugal-FCSH/NOVA)

## **Networks, Communities and Partnerships in Education: actors, goals, and results**

For the last three decades, educational systems worldwide have known normative transformations on their organization, in a context of (de)centralization and school autonomy. The reflection about recent trends in educational policies points to a role transformation of some school and civil society actors in education, as they set their framework of constraints and possibilities.

In this context, schools have to assume certain responsibilities, namely to relate and build themselves with the surrounding community, both in identifying and sharing common goals or values and in strategically mobilizing resources to address needs or enhance opportunities offered by local contexts. Families, local community institutions and other actors interested in education are in turn called to have a more active role in education, either by informal contacts, representation in school boards or participation in specific programs and projects.

Projects involving networks and partnerships between schools and/or other educational actors are becoming more common nowadays, trying to address some particular issues such as the promotion of educational success, the reduction of school-leavers or draw attention to questions as environment or volunteering. A certain number of these emerge by the initiative of schools, university researchers, local actors or civil society organizations and work with relative autonomy.

Collaborative networks are being conceptualized as a new tool of school administration and organization based on horizontal relationships in order to achieve common goals, sometimes framed by social network analysis, namely in association to social capital concept, or as communities.

Within this context, some salient questions arise, such as: How are networks/ partnerships in education built, by whom, how do they work and for what purpose(s)? Do they constitute a regulatory instance in educational systems? Does the participation in networks and partnerships have positive effect on learning and results? Does it contribute to transform educational practices? What kind of networks worldwide perform for better schooling? What is the role of strategic planning in education?

This Conference aimed to share experiences and scientific studies of networks and partnerships in education, appealing to the participation of professionals and researchers in the field. Presenters were encouraged to submit papers that offer reflection on practical experiences, new research or theoretical contributions, in the three following areas:

- 1) School/Families partnerships;
- 2) School Networks;
- 3) School/Local Community Partnerships and Strategic Planning

With this publication, it is our aim to disseminate interesting ideas that could stimulate the debate in this area of Education, articulating research and professional expertise.

All papers included in this e-book were presented during the Conference, and were subjected to a process of peer-review before being published in these Proceedings (with the exception of papers by Susana Batista, Eva Gonçalves and Rui Santos and by Joyce Epstein).

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# SCHOOL/FAMILIES PARTNERSHIPS

## PARTNERSHIP (IN SCHOOL-FAMILY RELATIONS): AN OMNIBUS CONCEPT?

Pedro Silva<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

This paper seeks to be a contribution to the discussion on the use of the concept of *partnership* in the context of school-family relationships. Since I reflect on the concept of partnership within this context, I begin by delimitating this field of analysis, pointing out some works I consider to be significant, as well as presenting my own thinking on this area of knowledge. This includes taking into account literature that presents results based on empirical research, including my own. Only then do I reflect on the concept of partnership, trying to enlarge the discussion on this topic.

**Keywords:** school-family relations; partnership

### 1. Introduction

This paper tries to contribute to the discussion on the use of the concept of *partnership* in the context of school-family relationships.

Partnership is currently a common word in different social scientific areas and in several fields: education, health, law, business, the media, etc. And while it is being used in the ideological discourse in all these fields, it is also being used in scientific production, including the sociological analysis of school-family relationships. However, the overuse of the term<sup>2</sup> might have the consequence of rendering it useless or inoperative because it can be extended to cover very different realities. For similar reasons, Durkheim, around a century ago, alerted us to the importance of defining concepts.

Since I will reflect on the concept of partnership within the context of home-school relations, I shall begin by delimitating this field of analysis, pointing out some contributions I consider to be significant, as well as adding my own thinking on this field of knowledge.

### 2. Schools, Families, and Social Inequalities

Below I try to give an account of some of the contributions that have been made on school-family relationships, with particular emphasis on the sociological perspective.

The expansion of education systems initiated at the level of primary education in the nineteenth century in many countries and continued throughout the twentieth century in post-primary education caused a significant heterogeneity of the student population in public schools. Bourdieu and Passeron, in their classic *Les Héritiers* (1964), showed how, contrary to the dominant discourse at the time, the school institution played an important role on the reproduction of social and cultural inequalities. They demonstrated how the probabilities of gaining access to higher education was about 20 times lower if one belonged to the group of agricultural workers as opposed to professional white collars. This work, then pioneer, led to similar studies in many other countries. The result pointed to a similar structural situation, with some national variation.

Despite the fact that this relationship between the schooling process and social inequalities is central to sociology, this has not inspired many studies on the Portuguese context, as noted by Sebastião (2009), which, in part, could be explained by the late institutionalization of sociology in Portugal attributable to historical reasons (Pinto, 2004). However, there are studies on the connection between the issue of social inequalities and the relationship between families, schools, and communities. Recently, some of these contributions have been reviewed (cf., for example, Diogo & Silva, 2010; Silva, 2013). Lareau (1989) is perhaps the one that found the best formula-synthesis to characterize the differentiated interaction between schools and families in terms of *quantity* and *quality*, according to social class and gender.

<sup>1</sup> Polytechnic Institute of Leiria, Portugal. Email: pedrosilva.ipl@gmail.com

<sup>2</sup> A simple word search on Google brings us to about 403 million records.

Long before her, in 1932, Waller (1965) rather than focusing specifically on the issue of inequality addressed the rapport between two key actors - parents and teachers - in this relationship, characterizing it as falling into a “natural enmity”. Much later, Lightfoot (1978) would “explain” these “worlds apart” by the existing structural discontinuity between them (where children are subject to a special treatment at home, while sons or daughters and singular individuals, and to a general treatment at school, as members of a social category, the students). Lightfoot would, however, go further than Waller in realizing that, in addition to the fact that the school-family relationship could reproduce social inequalities, this could happen through the production of social discrimination from within itself or even within the classroom. According to her, for some teachers:

Children become shadows of their parents’ social position, miniature versions of doctors, garbage collectors, secretaries, accountants. These teachers cannot look at the child without seeing the parents. Neither can they describe the child and his myriad dimensions as an individual person. (Lightfoot, 1978, p. 9).

In fact, multiple authors have alerted us to the asymmetrical relationships between schools and families. Thus, Sharp and Green (1975) denounce how the school institution has the power to define who the “good parents” are - usually those from the middle class that are able to meet the school requirements; Donzelot (1979), through an analysis inspired by the thoughts of Michel Foucault, highlights the effect of “the police of families”; Perrenoud (2001), in turn, in a remarkable text originally published in 1987, identifies “what the school does to families”. Authors such as Clark (1983), Stein (1988), Toomey (1989a, b), Montandon (2001) and Diogo (2008), without forgetting the influence of social class, end up granting, however, more influence to the role played by families in the education of their children, referring to concepts such as life-style (Clark, 1983), parents-as-educators (Stein, 1988), family environment (Toomey, 1989b), family paradigm (Montandon, 2001) or family investment in school (Diogo, 2008).

Moreover, authors like Connell *et al.* (1982), Lareau (1989), David (1993), Vincent (1996), Henry (1996) or Silva (2003), among others, stress the importance of social class, gender and ethnicity in the process of interaction between families and schools. These last works<sup>3</sup> have the additional particularity of having been conducted through an ethnographic method. They show, in general, diverse forms of relationship between schools, children and families of different social groups (class and ethnicity), making us aware of how, by the way they operate, schools advantage the advantaged and disadvantage the disadvantaged (citing Bourdieu).

This set of concerns - i.e. the importance of family practices and/or the influence of structural factors such as class, gender and ethnicity - has also been pursued by other authors, either in individual works (Ballion, 1982; Beattie, 1985; Benavente, Costa, Machado & Neves, 1987; Davies, 1989; Ball, 1993; Gewirtz, Ball & Bowe, 1995; Diogo, 1998, 2008; Crozier, 2000; Carvalho, 2001; van Zanten, 2002, 2005, 2007; Vieira da Fonseca, 2003; Lahire, 2004; Sá, 2004; Almeida & Vieira, 2006; Epstein, 2011; Batista, 2012; Gonçalves, 2012), or in collective volumes (Dubet, 1997; Nogueira, Romanelli & Zago, 2000; Lima, 2002; Stoer & Silva, 2005; Silva, 2007; Romanelli, Nogueira & Zago, 2013), involving a wide range of experts.

I would also like to highlight some recent concerns, as is the case, for example, of a) the volume edited by Stoer and Silva (2005)<sup>4</sup>, which focuses on the analysis of the relationship between processes of social change and what they have termed as the “reconfiguration of the school-family relationship”; b) the socially differentiated access and uses of ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) at home, at school and in the relationship between both (Silva & Diogo, 2014; Silva, Diogo, Coelho, Fernandes & Viana, 2015); or c) the link between the issues of home-school relations and socio-cultural mediation (Silva, 2014).

3 With the partial exception of David, which corresponds to the problematization of the school-family relationship based on the analysis of the contributions of numerous authors and researches, including some ethnographies and her own research.

4 It also includes the contributions of Cortesão, Davies, Pereira, Rocha, Stanley, Vieira and Wyness.

### 3. On the relationship between schools and families: a personal view

Taking into account the previously presented contributions, I will briefly outline some of my own thoughts on the relationship between schools and families (and, to some extent, communities) and its articulation with the issue of social inequalities.

I have faced the school-family relationship as a relation between cultures, i.e., between the school culture and local culture (or local cultures, depending on the context).

The school culture - conveyed, valued and, at the same time, socially legitimized by the academic institution - has been characterized in various ways. A minimal definition of it is based generally on three elements: written, urban and middle class. The fact that it is written points to the use, in school, of the dominant sociolinguistic code, what Bernstein calls the elaborate code. This means that social groups that do not use this type of code at home are objectively in a disadvantaged position.

Many of these groups do not come from urban areas (but from rural, fishing or other areas), although this question has become less important, because, on the one hand, we live in an increasingly urbanized world (for the first time in the history of humanity, the planet's population lives mostly in urban areas), and, on the other, the distinction between urban and rural has gained progressively new contours. What turns out to be relevant is the social class to which one belongs, assuming, with Bourdieu, Bernstein and others that the dominant sociolinguistic code of each one takes on different characteristics. Belonging to the middle class, including what is called the "new" middle class by Bernstein and others - the one that displays a complete schooling trajectory, i.e. a higher education diploma<sup>5</sup> - is what turns out to be decisive. This is the group that "displays" the appropriate cultural capital, which corresponds to the "legitimate culture", to use the terms of Bourdieu.

Putting it in very simple terms<sup>6</sup>, this view as a relation among cultures implies that some groups will be in a relation of continuity towards the school culture while others will display a cultural discontinuity. When the cultural distance between a student, a family or a social group and the school is too big at the onset of the school experience there can be a symbolic violence, an acculturation or a potential cultural shock, to use the known terms of Bourdieu (Bourdieu and Passeron 1964, 1970). In some cases there will be, as stated, a context of cultural continuity, while in others there will be (more or less) discontinuity between schools, children, families, and communities.

Another way to address this issue is to view the relationship among cultures as a power one. In other words, there is a social hierarchization of cultures in any society at a particular historical moment. As noted by Silva (1995), the anthropological equivalence of cultures goes with their sociological inequality.

In so theorizing the school-family relationship (and school-family-community) it is possible to realize that, before the school institution, families are only formally equal. In fact, as I usually say, citing Orwell, before the school some families are more equal than others. Based again on Bourdieu: the school discriminates by treating families as if they were all equal. This means that the school-family relationship can become, inadvertently or not, a means of social and cultural reproduction, which might be the biggest trap of this relationship.

I have also considered the school-family relationship as being characterized by a double dyad, with two strands, school and home, and two dimensions of agency, individual and collective.

As for the strands, it turns out that much of the research and specialized literature, but also the legislation and the political discourse, tend to focus on the school strand. The home becomes the "poor relative" of the relationship. And yet, we know that what happens inside its walls can be as significant or even more significant for the children's schooling process than what happens inside the school walls (as it is also important what happens with the wanderings of children with their peer groups, for example, on the street or in the neighbourhood). Highlighting what happens at home - regarding the children's schooling process - seems to be so important because often it is not visible from the school, which might become a source of misunderstanding. Surely not by chance, it seems that the sociology of education, with strong roots in school education, is the one that has less focused on the home strand. On the contrary, sociologies of the family and childhood seem to be those who have less neglected this strand.

<sup>5</sup> A necessary condition although less and less a sufficient one for social reproduction

<sup>6</sup> Therefore, there is always the risk of becoming too simplistic. As I said, on this paper I focus on typical situations. Presented this way, my concept of culture might seem static and essentialist while I see it as dynamic and as an on-going process, especially as cultures coexist together with other cultures.

As for the dimensions of agency, the distinction I propose points to the advocacy of direct and particular interests by the individual dimension, and the advocacy of indirect and general interests, by the collective agency. A classic example is the role played by parents. So, when they act either at home (asking how school was or supporting homework, for example) and at school (participating in meetings with the teacher or class director or at the school level) on behalf of their child, they are taking an individual dimension of agency. When, however, they are leaders of a parents' association or they are parental representatives in a school body, they are playing this role directly on behalf of the school parents' group and, indirectly, on behalf of all the students, and not only for their own children's sake. As several experts have stressed, in this case a political dimension in the broad sense of the term should be assumed. I have followed the conceptual distinction proposed, among others, by Beattie (1985) between involvement (individual dimension) and participation (collective dimension), which, as we shall see, seems obscured by the concept of partnership.

Simultaneously, several experts (for example, Dale, 1994) have noticed that the predominance of individual activities (advocacy of private interests) over collective action (advocacy of common interests) contributes to the fact that the relationship between families and schools tends to become a conservative form of interaction, which in their opinion helps to explain why also right-wing governments stress this relation.

This distinction of forms of agency has the advantage of pointing to the need for its explanation in the research, since this does not always happen and, furthermore, some concepts - such as partnership - might contribute to hide diverse logics of action. And let us not forget that a leader or parent representative (exercising a form of collective action) is always first and foremost a parent (acting also, in principle, at an individual dimension of agency). This duality of roles in the same individual - also typical of what I call parent-teachers, the parent representatives who happens to be teachers (Silva, 2007) - a duality that can be conflicting, is not always taken into account.

#### 4. On the Concept of Partnership

In this section, I try to bridge the context of school-family relationship and the use of the concept of partnership (and other similar concepts).

Terms such as relationship, partnership, and collaboration, among others, are often presented in a synonymously or interchangeably way. Any one of them is polysemous and may have different connotations and therefore there is always a partial overlap of their meaning.

I understand *relationship* as a broader and less connotative term, as any relation can lead to opposite ends, such as tension and conflict, on the one hand, and collaboration and partnership, on the other. This is essentially a descriptive term.

Partnership, however, is an increasingly used term. So inflated is its (ab)use, together with some absence of critical perspective, that several authors have been stressing its devaluation, its lack of operability at least since the 1990s. Golby (1993, p. 67), for example, comments that "partnership has been largely an honorific term", Raab (1993, p. 149) states that it "has had a strongly rhetorical flavour", and Hegarty (1993, p. 117) considers that "the ideology of partnership, which has become endemic in considerations of home-school relations, is subjected to scrutiny and found wanting". Bastiani (1993, p. 113), after realizing that "partnership' is one of the most dominant and widely used images of our times, not only in education but also elsewhere" so that "partnership inevitably means different things to different people" (ibid.), is uncertain whether this concept constitutes therefore a "moving target". Also Stoer and Rodrigues (2000) warn:

In general, the actors/partners have not present in their discourse a conceptual development of partnership, identifying it as a condition, a mechanism, an intention, given the new demands of interventive practices. They often use the word, but it is a word whose content is exhausted in its repeated and rhetorical use. In this sense, the partnership is, explicitly, something that one does (dispensing with what one thinks), which pertains to the field of action, to the unfolding of things and to the natural evolution of power (p.185).

I would add that these two authors also promote an interesting reflection on the two most common translations into Portuguese of the term *partnership* - *parceria* and *parceria* - showing they are not necessarily synonymous and may correspond to different social processes and purposes (Rodrigues & Stoer, 1998; Stoer & Rodrigues, 2000).

In general, however, the term *partnership* appears to be closer to a contractual situation - whether written or not - and to the point of view of the actors themselves and not just the researchers. It implies a minimum consensus on the purposes, but also on the means to achieve them. While some assume egalitarianism, it also seems to be able to function on the acceptance of a relation of asymmetrical power, but where everyone naturally expects to gain something. This seems, for example, to be the understanding of Epstein with regard to this issue when she states "partnership implies a formal alliance and contractual agreement to work toward shared goals and to share the profits or benefits of mutual investments" (Epstein, 1992, p. 1).

On the other hand, the etymology of the word *partner*, reminds us Zay (1996), contains the idea of opponent, for it derives from the Latin *pars, partitio* - division, separation - which forces the different groups to reach an agreement so that everyone can draw benefits:

The opposition element is thus both a constitutive element of the word partner as of the association which usually we refer to. The use of the word partnership is developed in a context that is both of crisis, social struggles, in which one has to negotiate between the two sides (that is, since the beginning, they do not agree, but they can not bypass it) and of an ideology that has confidence in a presumed consensus that will overcome conflict (p. 156).

A quick overview of some definitions of the term on online dictionaries in English and in Portuguese seems to point to some different connotations, despite what they have in common.

#### **Collins dictionary:**

- \_ Partnership or a partnership is a relationship in which two or more people, organizations, or countries work together as partners.
  - \_ The state or condition of being a partner
- <http://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/partnership?showCookiePolicy=true>

#### **Merriam-Webster dictionary:**

- \_ The state of being a partner; participation
  - \_ A relationship resembling a legal partnership and usually involving close cooperation between parties having specified and joint rights and responsibilities.
- <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/partners>

#### **Priberam Dictionary ("Parceria"):**

- \_ Collaborative relationship between two or more people to achieve a common goal.
- <http://www.priberam.pt/dlpo/parceria>

We also obtained the following results for the term *Partner*:

#### **Infopédia Dictionary ("Parceiro"):**

1. That is paired with another
  2. Which shows no difference from each other; similar; pair
- <http://www.infopedia.pt/dicionarios/lingua-portuguesa/parceiro>

#### **Priberam Dictionary ("Parceiro"):**

(Latin *partiaris*, -a, -um, which is a part)

1. Which has few differences from each other.
2. A person or entity that established a partnership with someone else to achieve the same goal.
3. The person with whom we are playing or dancing.

4. [Regionalism] Reciprocal treatment of those who were stewards in a festival or brotherhood in the same year.
5. [Regionalism] Reciprocal treatment of the parents of the couple.

<http://www.priberam.pt/dlpo/parceiro>

Therefore, the definitions of *partnership* seem to point, on the one hand, to an intentional collaborative relationship and, on the other, to a basis of relative equality, which is more pronounced in the Portuguese definitions (“few differences from each other”; “reciprocal treatment”). This latter observation may suggest some slightly different connotation in these two languages. On the other hand, the etymology of the word, pointing to “which is a part”, seems to match Zay’s analysis, which accounts for the existence of different interests (“parts”) in a partnership relation.

As we have seen, partnership is thus a term undergoing an inflation process, sometimes mixing several possible meanings with the intentions of the researcher and/or of the individuals directly involved in the process. Bastiani (1993) underlines this once more:

‘Partnership’ is a term widely used throughout the education service, to cover a range of situations and circumstances. Its use, or overuse, is more often than not uncritical, implying that it is highly desirable, unproblematic and easily attainable. A few moments’ thought, by contrast, reveals a set of interpretations that are hard to grasp, intellectually challenging and, above all, extremely difficult to realize in practice. Indeed, it might be more appropriate to talk about *working towards partnership*, as being a worthwhile direction, rather than something which is commonplace (p. 104).

Bastiani, after this warning and reviewing several definitions of the concept, gives us his own perspective of it. According to him (1993, p. 105), the term partnership includes four main aspects:

- \_ Sharing power, responsibility and ownership, not necessarily on an equal basis;
- \_ A degree of mutuality, through the ability of listening to others, engaging in dialogue, and making mutual concessions;
- \_ Sharing purposes and goals, based on common aspects, but also recognizing important differences in terms of skills;
- \_ A commitment to joint action, where parents, students, and professionals work together to solve the problems.

This definition is somewhat more elaborate and encompasses basic aspects already outlined above, in particular the commitment to working together, and the recognition of specific skills by each protagonist and thus admitting the possibility of an uneven relation.

The concept of partnership can also have other interpretations. Bogdanowicz (1994), for example, in a report on the participation of parents in the then twelve countries of the European Union distinguishes between *participatory management* (*gestion participative*) and *partnership*:

For **participatory management** we understand an implication that invites to developing modes of regulation of an organization. The actors are not participating in the production process. The user, the customer, the employee are involved in the creation of the organization itself. (...)

On the other hand, **partnership** is an implication mode of users or clients that invites to participating in the organization’s own production process. It is not accompanied by an interest in management. Patients or clients produce just the same way as the professionals ( p.2)<sup>7</sup>.

For this researcher, the concept of partnership is not defined solely by the type of (contractual) relationship but, above all, by its content - acting at the level of the educational process itself.

Concepts have a genesis and a history (which sometimes are difficult to identify as we well know). Zay, for example, notes that the term *school in partnership* “succeeds” *openness to school* and *educational community*.

<sup>7</sup> For Bogdanowicz the first situation implies, for example, that parents would have representatives in school bodies while the second one would imply the possibility for them to have a saying in every aspect of the organization, including participating in classes.

With a particularity: 2/3 of the literature in French, English, and Spanish reviewed by her refer to partnerships between schools and industry and only 1/3 to partnerships with the community. Thus, asks the author, will partnership be about strengthening of the school connection with economy instead of its connection with the social and cultural?

The question of the viability of the partnership may arise when the asymmetry of power among the groups is too large. Citing Orwell once more, we return to the question that some parents are more equal than others (and, it might be added, teachers are even more equal). Bastiani (1993) stresses it:

Focusing upon the everyday lived experience of poor and powerless families in inner cities, of ethnic minority families, of single parents and of others, supporters of 'advocacy', for example, argue that more radical and drastic measures and even structural changes are needed before partnership could ever begin to be considered as a possibility - if at all (p. 114).

Hegarty (1993), for example, goes so far as to reject the term partnership by considering it inappropriate. According to him "there are in fact substantial difficulties with the notion of parents as partners" (p. 117). He summarizes these difficulties in three points: 1) the term is too ambiguous; 2) the concept has lost centrality due to the multiplication of the type of services offered in our society; 3) the striking difference between the roles of teachers and parents. This last point leads him to conclude that "There can and should be an equality of regard between parents and teachers, but that does not constitute partnership nor does it necessitate subscribing to a pseudo-egalitarian rhetoric of partnership" (pp. 118-119).

So far, I have tried to share different (critical) views on the concept of partnership. Yet, it should be made clear that I am quite in favour of closer relations between schools and families (and communities), which will be the more fruitful the more they work on a cooperative or even partnership basis, as, for example, Henderson, Mapp, Johnson & Davies (2007) and Epstein (2011) have showed.

My point is that there is the danger that an inflated and uncritical use of the term might turn it into a sort of a magic word, where, with a wand stroke à la Harry Potter, one would be sent to a presumed enchanted world. In many papers and discourses the word *partnership* appears without any reflection, as something that could be taken for granted, sometimes as something closer to the order of desire than of reality. This is why I preferably use the term *relationship* in the analysis of the interactive and complex processes among schools, families and communities. The reasons are set out above: it is a more denotative than connotative term, a more comprehensive one, and covers a wider range of possible situations: collaboration, cooperation, partnership, but also discontinuities, asymmetry of power, tension, conflict.

This does not mean, however, that there is something wrong with the word *partnership*; only with its misuse, which unfortunately seems to be relatively frequent.

Partnership also becomes a regular concept in action-research projects, where it is envisioned from the start as an important means to achieve a goal. I myself have participated in such projects. In these cases I think that there is some overlap between the roles of researcher and citizen, which asks for a careful approach or epistemological surveillance.

From this point of view, it is essential that more works are produced by experts in this field, as this allows the combination of scientific knowledge with the search for good practices that can lead to the establishment of partnerships that will result in benefits for all the stakeholders. Two important and relatively recent works that correspond to this twofold aim have already been mentioned above: Henderson, Mapp, Johnson & Davies (2007) and Epstein (2011).

## 5. Conclusion

In this paper I have tried to reflect on the concept of partnership in the context of school-family relationships. Using the term partnership interchangeably can prove to be - in research, I insist - inaccurate and create conceptual confusion. It might pertain more to the order of desire than reality. On the other hand, we have seen that the concept of partnership is (as any other) polysemous and can encompass multiple aspects, such as the

joint efforts among equals (or almost), but also the interaction among social actors with a clear differentiated influence on the balance of power. In this latter case, it seems to imply the possibility of acceptance of this situation as well as the fact that cooperation towards a common purpose benefits all.

Being a mere researcher, I have tried to show why I usually prefer to use the term *relationship*. I see it as a more comprehensive and descriptive term. *Partnership* represents only a particular type of relationship. This however should not prevent us from using it when it describes more accurately a given social process or is even critically used as a means to achieve a goal.

In short, the concept of partnership is complex and should be used carefully in social research. This however does not invalidate the attempt to implement partnership processes given the fact that research has shown that a closer relationship between schools and families is usually translated into gains for all those who are involved, starting with children.

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## FROM SCHOOL-FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS TO SCHOOL SEGREGATION: A MATTER OF SOCIAL INEQUALITIES

Ana Matias Diogo<sup>8</sup>

### Abstract

In the last three or four decades the relationship between school and family, namely the development of school-family partnerships, has been recurrently and consensually identified as fundamental to improve education and to combat difficulties in the schooling process, such as school failure and dropout, which affect disadvantaged social groups more deeply.

One question we might ask is to what extent this type of intervention can counteract the pattern of inequalities that mark the relationship of the different social groups with the school in the context of the new constraints and possibilities that affect the family's relationship with the school.

We will reflect on these issues through a literature review, highlighting empirical results from research on the relationship of families with schools, focusing particularly on the Portuguese case. We shall start by revising the notion of school-family partnership and determining its boundaries, directing our attention to what is happening outside these partnerships and tackling the problem of social segregation in school populations.

**Keywords:** school-family relationship; partnerships; school segregation; social inequalities

### 1. Introduction

In the last three or four decades the relationship between school and family has been recurrently and consensually identified as fundamental to improve education and to combat difficulties in the schooling process, such as school failure and dropout, which affect disadvantaged social groups more deeply and are particularly prevalent in the Portuguese case.

The growing appreciation of the role that parents can play in the education system has been spreading worldwide, although we need to consider national characteristics that reflect the profound changes that have been occurring in many spheres, particularly as regards the type of state intervention, with the demand for a new model of regulation of the education system (Barroso, 2005; Magalhães, 2001; Whitty, 1996). In this context, and on the one hand, several measures have been implemented, such as the creation of new structures for school management and administration, territorially based positive discrimination policies, and the increase in public and private educational offers in order to transfer competencies to schools and local actors, but also to the market; and on the other hand, measures targeted at the evaluation of results, which have counterbalanced previous measures, essentially attributing the role of evaluator to the State (Magalhães, 2001).

Significant changes are at stake here since new constraints and options in the way families relate to schools have arisen (van Zanten, 2005). Thus, appeals have been made for parents to play a more active role. However, this participation conveys different meanings and introduces very different and even contradictory logics of school-family relationships (Sá, 2004; Silva, 2003; Whitty, 1996).

Among the calls for parental participation, the development of school-family partnerships has been seen as particularly promising in a wide body of literature that speaks to the empirical support of their impact (Epstein *et al.*, 1997; Hendersen, Karen, Jonhson & Davies, 2013). Generically these partnerships aim to bring together family and school (or community and school) and are mostly intended to be implemented in local contexts where the weight of social groups with low income and culturally unfamiliar with the school is higher.

One question we might ask is to what extent can this type of intervention counteract the pattern of inequalities that mark the relationship of the different social groups with the school in the context of the new constraints and possibilities that affect the family's relationship with the school?

<sup>8</sup> University of the Azores, Portugal. Email: adiogo@uac.pt

We will reflect on these issues by conducting a literature review, highlighting empirical results from research on the relationship of families with schools, focusing particularly on the Portuguese reality. We shall start by revising the notion of school-family partnership and determining its boundaries, directing our attention to what is happening outside these partnerships and tackling the problem of social segregation within school populations.

## 2. School-Family Partnerships: Between Promises and Limitations

The call for the development of partnerships in the field of education emerged when new populations - unfamiliar with the school culture - entered the school environment and triggered the need to find answers to the problems posed by these new groups (Zay, 1996).

The definition of partnership conveys the kindness of the intention contained therein to the extent that it is anchored in the idea of the triumph of consensus over conflict. We remind, with Zay (1996), that the term derives from the Latin *pars, partition* that means division, separation, i.e., the very concept of partnership contains in itself the idea of an opposition. The notion of partnership will precisely enforce itself, as noted by Zay, "in a context that is both of crisis and social struggles, in which social partners have to negotiate (i.e., these partners initially are not in agreement but cannot avoid each other), and in which an ideology that has confidence in a presumed consensus that can override the conflict shall prevail." (Zay, 1996, p. 156).

However, many limitations have been identified in the development of these partnerships (cf. Sá, 2004; Silva, 2003). Several authors have drawn attention to the asymmetry of power and to the parents' model implicit in these partnerships.

In the Portuguese language, partnership is translated either by "parceria" or by "partenariado", but as observed by Silva (2003, p. 89): "Whatever the term used, the idea to be noted is that it covers basically a contractual relationship (whatever the concrete form of this contract) between two or more groups, in which all seek advantages, even if the relationship is asymmetrical in terms of power." With this definition in mind, when referring to the issue of asymmetry of power, the author also points out one of the major limitations of these partnerships. In this sense, Silva (2003) speaks of the school-mirror effect in school-family partnerships, because "it's the school that takes the first step, it's the school that presents ('imposes') purposes, it's the school that gives the means, it's the school that stays, in the end, equal to itself" (Silva, 2003, p. 89). Under an "ideological cover of egalitarianism", these initiatives reveal a form of school-centrism (Silva, 2003, p. 89).

Similarly, Sá (2004) draws attention to the pseudo-egalitarian rhetoric of partnerships, in which the "difference of perspectives and power that involves the 'partners'" (p. 149) is hidden and underlines a model of the "ideal/responsible parent" as a collaborator subordinated to the rules set by the school, particularly penalizing disadvantaged social groups.

Likewise, Davies (2005) points out that a concept of parental participation limited to the individual involvement of parents has prevailed and recognizes the failure of the implementation of school-family-community partnerships, even in a country such as the US. As a supporter of such initiatives, Davies (2005, p. 32) confesses that he is uncomfortable with the few progresses that have been made, given the efforts undertaken. The author asks: "why after years of discussion, books, conferences, state and federal laws to encourage parental participation, it still exists in so little amount in American schools?" And he compares these little progress with the large differences between the school experience of middle-class children and that of children of the underprivileged classes.

Thus, Davies recognizes that the school problem is broader, not confined to the participation of parents, because what is at stake here is the distribution of social opportunities that affect lower class young people and their families as regards their access to housing, health, employment, education and multiple key services for a dignified life, which in turn have a negative impact on their social and academic success.

Beyond the criticism directed at the nature and practice of partnerships mentioned above, and considering the relevance of situating the problem of school-family relationships in the context of inequality of social opportunities, we want to highlight particularly that the incentives for the development of these partnerships targeted at socially disadvantaged contexts can be seen as a relatively endogenous effort, i.e., circumscribed to these contexts and groups.

We do not mean that every effort carried out in the scope of school-family partnerships in a perspective of positive discrimination of the disadvantaged populations is vain and without effects. Also, we do not intend to assume that the only valid efforts are those made outside the school via the implementation of policies that can counteract social inequality themselves.

On the contrary, we intend to emphasize the limitations of these partnerships aimed at socially disadvantaged contexts if we ignore that such groups and contexts are part of a more complex network of relationships, i.e., it is important to take into account the overall distribution of educational opportunities within the different social groups and how they affect each other. We should also consider that this issue might become even more prominent given the more recent changes that have been affecting education systems in general.

The analysis of van Zanten (2005) points in this direction, highlighting that parents, seen in the sociology of education as the main agents accountable for the reproduction of social inequalities at school, currently have new conditions and opportunities to develop their action, as a result of the most recent economic, cultural and educational changes. Recalling that education is a positional good, as Collins (1997), van Zanten (2005) underlines that these new constraints and opportunities for parental action translate, more than ever, into a game in which “what a group wins, the other loses” (van Zanten, 2005, p. 156).

### 3. Outside Partnerships: The Social Segregation of School Populations

In the context of the changes that call for a stronger parental participation in the education systems, simultaneously there have been increasing trends towards giving more leeway to parents regarding the choice of school and encouraging competition between schools. In fact, among the criticisms made to the school-family partnerships, we find precisely the accusation that these incentives have coincided with the pressure for schools to compete with each other within a market logic (Sá, 2004) that began to be observed in countries such as the UK and the US with the advancement of “neoliberal policies” since the 1980s (Barroso, 2005).

The possibility to choose the school has become widespread, with its introduction in many countries or its reinforcement where it already existed. On the other hand, in countries where the choice of school is not permitted by law, private education has allowed parents important options (van Zanten, 2005).

In Portugal, the Government defined as one of its strategic objectives in education the progressive development of school choice by parents (Presidência do Conselho de Ministros, 2011), approving legislation that enables parents to have some flexibility in the choice of public schools (Circular No. 5048-B/2013) and showing intentions to extend the free choice to private education (Carriço, 2013).

In fact, in 2009, Afonso noted that in Portugal, despite the “mitigated educational neoliberalism” that has prevailed in recent decades, as well as the economic and financial crisis that began in 2008, which produced a cutback on the market and middle class consumption capacity, “the presence of market ideology (and its materialization) is still easily demonstrated in the different spheres of social life” including competition between schools (Afonso, 2009, p. 22).

In any case, even when free choice is not allowed, families with more resources still find a way to employ strategies that manage to bypass the regulations that would place their children in the school of their residential area (Ballion, 1986; Duru-Bellat & Mingat, 1997; Duru-Bellat, Jarousse & Solaux, 1997; Payet, 1997; Meuret, Broccholichi, & Duru-Bellat, 2001). Besides a number of middle class families (the wealthiest ones) who opt for private education, another set (the most culturally aware) actively looks for a good school within the public system (Heran, 1996). Parents seek thereby to make advantageous choices when it comes to enrolling their children in school.

Indeed, there is a significant body of research in the field of sociology, especially of Anglo-Saxon origin, showing that the different social groups do not exercise the choice of school in the same way (Ball, Davies, Miriam & Reay, 2002; Ballion, 1986; Bowe, Gewirtz & Ball, 1994; Coleman, Schiller & Schneider, 1993; Gewirtz, Ball, & Bowe, 1995; Meuret *et al.*, 2001; Nogueira, 1998; Rambla, 1998; Vieira, 2003). According to these studies the employment of choice strategies is more characteristic of the higher classes to the extent that they seek a “good school” (looking at indicators of academic quality and school environment), while lower class choices rely mainly on physical proximity. Moreover, Burgess, Briggs, McConnel, and Slater’s (2006) econometric

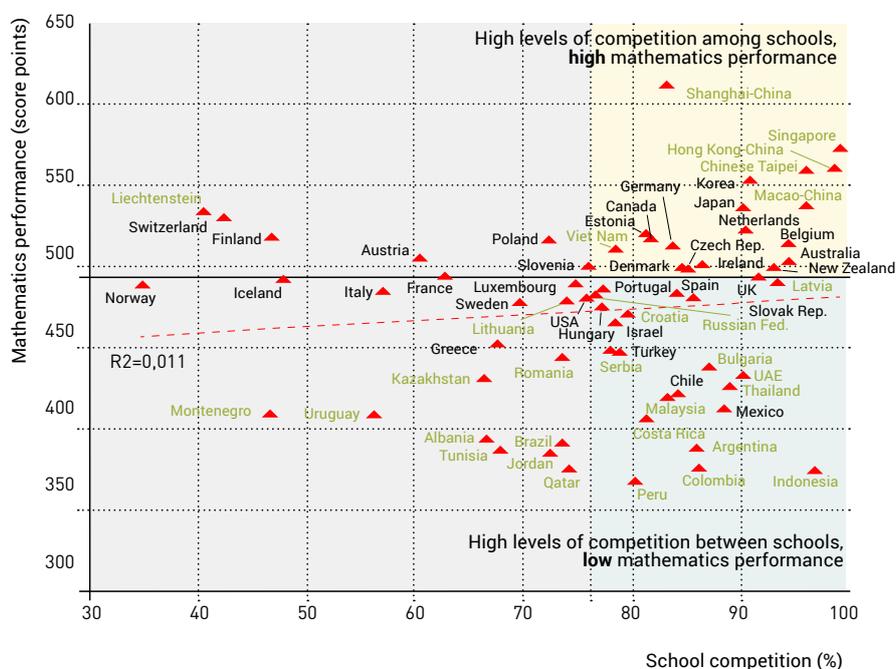
study on school choice in England analyses students who attended their local schools, and shows that, even controlling for location, poor students are less likely to go to good schools than non-poor students. The disadvantage of the lower classes results not only from their inactivity (deciding not to choose) and the lack of economic, cultural, and social resources that would enable them to make these choices, but also from the effect of the strategies developed by the higher classes which avoid the disadvantaged groups in their residential and school choices (van Zanten, 2005).

Associated with this unequal choice of school, research has also revealed growing social segregation between schools (Barthon & Oberti, 2000; Gewirtz *et al.*, 1995; Merle, 2014; Meuret *et al.*, 2001; van Zanten, 2005; 2013). The greater the parents' opportunity to choose the school their children will attend, the more schools tend to distinguish themselves, not only by their social composition, but also as unequal contexts of learning and socialization (Merle, 2014). The choice of school favours the coexistence of contexts that provide their students with important variations in their results, in their schooling experience, and in their aspirations, contributing to social reproduction (Duru-Bellat, 2007; Merle, 2014). Schools with a disadvantaged social composition tend towards laxer discipline, lower intensity of school work, lower level of requirements from the teachers, lower teachers' expectations for the students, and more teachers with less experience - all this combined results in worse conditions to develop an effective work (Duru-Bellat, 2007).

Thus, opportunities for choice and competition between schools, which have been seen by their supporters as profitable to the enhancement of education systems, have not actually helped to improve the learning environment and to make schools more effective. According to the PISA results for 2012 (OECD, 2014), taking into consideration OECD education systems, those with more competition between schools do not show better results (Figure 1).

Figure 1. School competition and mathematics performance

Source: OECD, 2014 (PISA 2012).



Besides the inexistence of improvement in the results, competition between schools can aggravate social inequalities. Countries with more competition between schools tend to have less social inclusion, i.e., there is greater segregation of the student population (Figure 2), which derives from the fact that parents from different social groups will make choices differently (OECD, 2014). Furthermore, education systems with greater competition between schools show a greater impact of the socioeconomic status of students in their PISA results (OECD, 2013) (Figure 3).

Figure 2. School competition and social inclusion

Source: OECD, 2013 (PISA 2012).

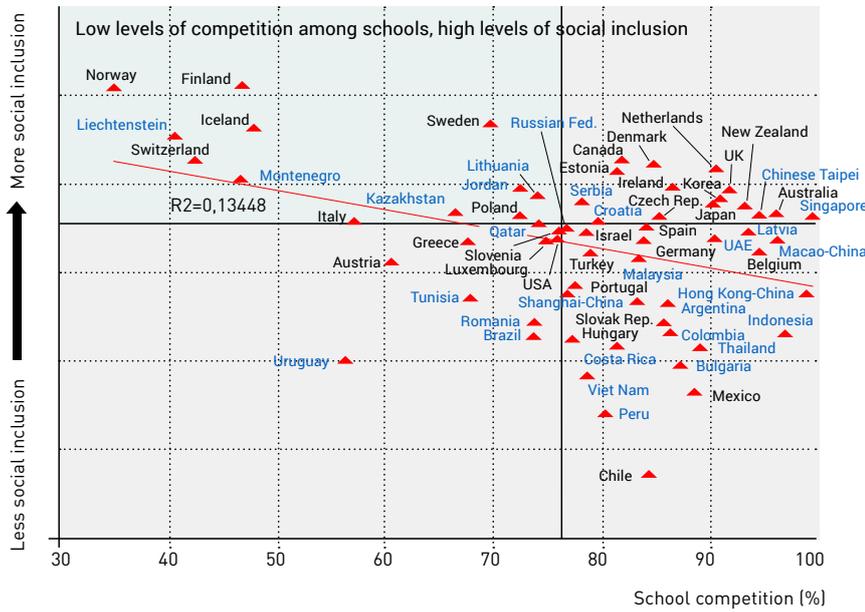
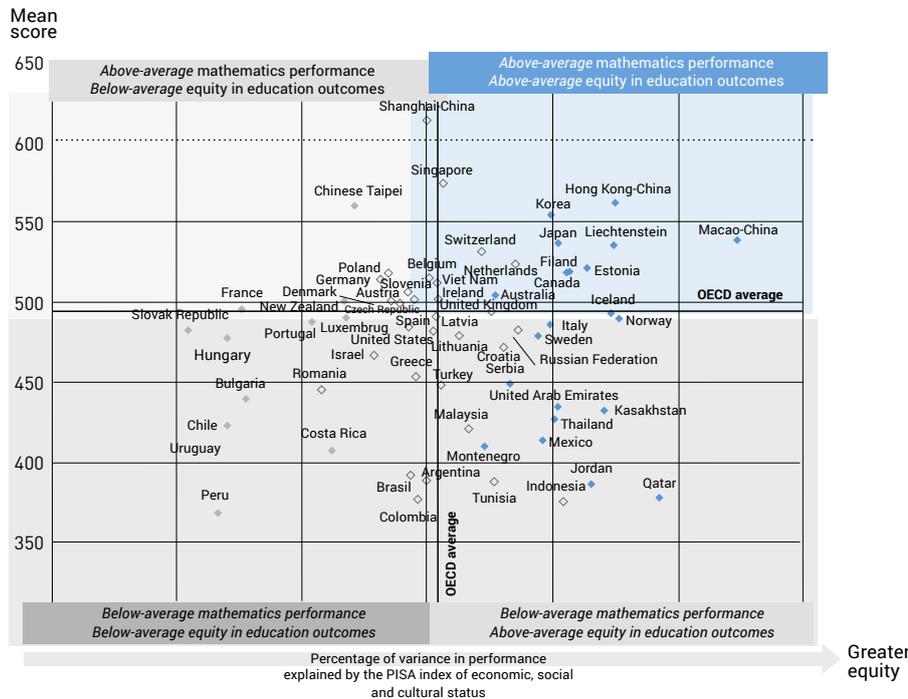


Figure 3 – Student performance and equity

Source: OECD, 2013 (PISA 2012).



- ◆ Strength of the relationship between performance and socio-economic status is above the OECD average
- ◇ Strength of the relationship between performance and socio-economic status is not statistically significantly different from the OECD average
- ◆ Strength of the relationship between performance and socio-economic status is below the OECD average

With regard to Portugal, as we can see in Figure 1, the country is located on the right lower quadrant, i.e., among those with the lowest results in mathematics and those with the highest levels of competition between

institutions (although it is close to OECD average on both counts). And this in turn is associated with high social segregation between schools (Figure 2). Portugal is also among OECD countries with the lowest levels of equity, i.e., where the socio-economic status of students weighs more in their results (Figure 3).

In a research we developed in the Azores (Diogo, 2013), a region with unfavourable schooling indicators in the Portuguese context, we found that the school attended - and namely its social composition - has an impact on the expectations of pupils of getting a higher education degree. The study was based on a survey carried out with 744 pupils at the end of basic education (9th grade of schooling) from eight public schools selected in the region. As can be seen in model 2 (Table 1), belonging to a school with a favoured social composition increases the odds of having expectations of furthering their studies in higher education if everything else is held constant. This means that low social status pupils that attend schools with a more favoured social composition tend to have higher educational expectations. In contrast, pupils with the same academic and social profile, when placed in schools with a disadvantaged social composition, will have lower educational expectations. Although these results do not allow us to draw conclusions on the effect of the degree of segregation in schools, they suggest that schools provide - through their social composition - contexts that stimulate unequally their students' schooling experience, which is in line with research evidence that has been gathered in the past few decades (Coleman, 1996, cit. in Cherkaoui, 1979; Duru-Bellat & Mingat, 1988; Thrupp, 1999). Therefore, concentrating students from working classes in schools with large numbers of classmates from the same social background implies that the school itself will reinforce the limitations of this social group.

Table 1. Expectations of obtaining a higher education degree, depending on individual variables<sup>9</sup>

N=680	Model 1		Model 2	
	$\beta$	Wald	$\beta$	Wald
Age	-0.602***	28.349	-0.607***	28.387
Portuguese Language classification	0.492**	7.910	0.485**	7.292
Mathematics classification	0.642***	19.589	0.713***	22.758
Gender	-0.929***	19.383	-0.935***	18.729
Parents' education	0.324**	11.295		n.s.
Working class (reference)	-	-	-	-
Upper-middle class	1.274***	12.493	1.107**	8.993
Middle class	0.477*	4.159		n.s.
Favoured social composition of school			0.033***	9.938
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup> (% Variance)	47.8		50.4	

\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

#### 4. In conclusion

The data presented suggest that the solution for schooling problems - especially those that affect the most disadvantaged social groups - is not favoured by territorial segregation achieved through the concentration of students in homogeneous school contexts. Indeed, the evidence points to the negative effects of social segregation in school populations. Given the knowledge available, as Duru-Bellat (2007) notes, we seem to have two alternatives in terms of educational policies: either working on the effects of segregation, or seeking to avoid these effects altogether by reducing segregation.

<sup>9</sup> See Appendix 1 for a description and frequencies of the variables used in the regression models and for a presentation of the social composition of schools.

When trying to solve the schooling problems experienced by disadvantaged groups with the development of initiatives such as school-family partnerships focused only on these populations - territorially concentrated - we are choosing the first alternative. This could mean that the problem is restricted to these populations, ignoring the societal contexts that have led to its creation in the first place particularly the relationship between different social groups. School-family partnerships will have a limited scope, if everything else remains unchanged, i.e., if we ignore the relationship between different social groups, mainly the strategies that each group employs as regards school contexts and other social groups. This implies considering the second alternative regarding educational policies, i.e., seeking to reduce social segregation in school contexts, achieving greater homogeneity in the quality of educational supply.

We do not mean that every effort in the scope of school-family partnerships is useless and that this kind of effort cannot be linked to the second alternative. As suggested also by Duru-Bellat (2007), positive discrimination measures in disadvantaged contexts are important because besides allowing students and families to compensate for their social disadvantage, these measures can promote the equalization of schools, improving the learning environment and the attractiveness of some schools, i.e., seeking to act on the social segregation of schools.

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## Appendix 1

**Table 2. Description of variables used in the logistic regression models**

Variable	Description
Age	Between 14 and 20 years.
Gender	Dummy variable that opposes boy (1) to girl (0).
Portuguese Language classification	Level achieved at the end of the second period (ranging from 1 to 5).
Mathematics classification	Level achieved at the end of the second period (ranging from 1 to 5).
Parents' education	The highest level of education between the two parents, ranging from 0 (no schooling) to 5 (higher education).
Social class	Categorical variable with three categories, upper-middle class (including entrepreneurs, executives, managers, intellectual and scientific professionals, and intermediate technical professionals); middle class (including small business owners, clerical staff, and service employees), and working class (including manual labourers, independent workers of the primary sector, primary sector workers, unskilled employees in the service sector), decomposed into two dummy variables, in which the reference variable (0) is the working class.
Favoured social composition of school	Percentage of pupils from upper-middle class per school, according to the data collected in the first phase of this research, through the inventory of the composition of all 9th grade classes in the Azores. Ranges between 2% and 49%.

**Table 3. Variables used in the logistic regression models: percentages**

Variable	Frequencies
Age	14 years (31%); 15 (40%); 16 (18%); ≥17 (11%)
Gender	boys (43%); girls (57%)
Portuguese Language classification	Level 1 (0%); 2 (21%); 3 (54%); 4 (19%); 5 (5%)
Mathematics classification	Level 1 (0%); 2 (27%); 3 (45%); 4 (21%); 5 (7%)
Parents' education	No education (3%); 4th grade (22%); 6th (28%); 9th (15%); upper secondary education (18%); higher education (14%)
Social class	Working class (48%); middle class (30%); upper-middle class (22%)

**Table 4. Social composition of schools**

	Percentage of pupils from upper-middle class (favoured social composition of the school)	Percentage of pupils from working class
School 1	2%	74%
School 2	7%	56%
School 3	8%	66%
School 4	10%	66%
School 5	11%	46%
School 6	18%	50%
School 7	33%	48%
School 8	49%	17%

## CREATING A NATIONAL NETWORK ON SCHOOL, FAMILY AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS: MULTI-LEVEL GOALS, CHALLENGES, AND SUCCESSES

Joyce Epstein<sup>10</sup>

### Abstract

The National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) at Johns Hopkins University is a research-based network that guides schools, districts, states, and organizations to improve family and community engagement for student success in school. This article traces a thirty-year history from initial basic research to network formation and on-going scale-up patterns in NNPS. It describes different types of education networks and the interests of their developers and members. School and district programs and education networks follow a sequence in development from start up, to scale up, to sustain and renew—each stage posing critical challenges. As NNPS followed this sequence, several lessons were learned including the need to attend to frequent changes in leaders in education; the need to balance required structures and processes with options for customized designs; the need to encourage commitment to action to improve family and community engagement, not just interest in the topic; and the need for annual evaluations of program quality and progress. The history and lessons learned by NNPS may be useful to others who are developing networks for school improvement.

**Keywords:** network on school, family, and community partnerships, scaling up programs of family engagement; university-educator partnerships

The National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) at Johns Hopkins University is a research-based network that guides schools, districts, states, and organizations to improve family and community engagement for student success in school. This article traces a thirty-year history from initial basic research to network formation and on-going scale-up patterns in NNPS. The lessons learned may be useful to others who are developing networks for school improvement.

### 1. Types of Networks

Education networks take different forms, set specific goals, and engage different members. There are three main network structures with many variations.

*Horizontal networks* are developed by and for like-role professionals by teachers, superintendents, ministers of education, and others. In horizontal networks, participants may take turns leading meetings, discussing challenges, and sharing best practices. They may create work groups and special projects to explore how to improve a leadership or a specific classroom practice. For example, a network by and for math teachers may explore instructional innovations that assist remedial students in need of extra help in learning fractions. Horizontal networks usually are not concerned about theoretical models, research methods, or long-term studies. Some horizontal networks have been nicknamed “idea bazaars” because participants mainly want to make professional contacts, learn from each other, and gather ideas for their own practice. Instead of trying to solve all school challenges alone, like-role professionals work together to improve their schools, professional practice, and student success.

*Vertical networks* are organized and directed by a leader who also provides or oversees services to members. Vertical (or top-down) networks may focus on practice, research, or connections of research with practice. For example, a Superintendent’s Network of a set of low-performing schools may be under the direction of a district leader who organizes and delivers extra services to improve school management and student learning. A university leader may create a network to help educators understand and use data for data-based decision-making. Classes or workshops may be conducted to increase educators’ understanding and use of data (e.g., test scores, demographics, attendance rates, graduation rates) to improve teaching and learning. A researcher may form a vertical translational network to study the fidelity of implementation of a program and its results.

<sup>10</sup> Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships – Johns Hopkins University. Email: jepstein@jhu.edu.

Members of this network may be guided to follow prescribed steps to conduct a specific intervention and to measure the results for students, teachers, and/or others.

*Side-by-side networks* combine characteristics of horizontal and vertical networks with a shared leadership structure for multi-directional learning (Epstein, 2011). Researchers and educators across policy levels (e.g., districts and schools) aim to learn from each other about an area of school improvement, despite unlike roles in diverse communities. Some side-by-side networks are called Continuous Progress Learning Communities, which conduct multiple short cycles of design, data collection, and analyses of results to continually improve school programs (Bryk, Gomez, & Grunow, 2011). Some side-by-side networks of researchers and educators collaborate to conduct formal research studies with clear research questions.

In side-by-side networks, educators are not expected to implement only prescribed procedures. Rather, local conditions and constraints may require customized programming that, in turn, informs and raises questions for research. When researchers and educators work side-by-side they set in motion a model for learning that links research to improved practice *and* to new research, e.g., research à practice à research à practice...and so on.

## 2. Interests of Network Developers and Members

Those who develop networks and those who join networks have some different and some similar interests. Researchers who develop networks want to know if results of prior studies can be translated and applied to improve education policy, classroom practice, and results for students. Some may want to know if a particular intervention tested in early research can be brought to scale with faithful implementation of all components (vertical networking) or adjusted implementation for local conditions (side-by-side networking). Scale-up questions ask if a growing *number* of sites can implement a tested practice and, over time, improve the *quality* education with expected, positive results for students.

Horizontal, vertical, and side-by-side networks may be local (in one school, community, or district), regional, national, or international. Members of networks seek to increase knowledge, improve practice, and build leadership skills to improve their own work, school climate, and results for their own students. They may focus on improving education for targeted groups (e.g., minority male students, secondary grades) or all students.

The different network organizations can be valid and useful in different ways for helping educators improve programs and practices for student success in school (Coburn & Stein, 2010). In the long term, most education networks - horizontal, vertical, and side by side - aim to improve student achievement, attendance, attitudes, behavior, talents, experiences, and/or plans for the future. Many networks have an overarching goal to close achievement gaps between groups of students.

## 3. National Network of Partnership Schools: A Side-by-Side Network

Hundreds of my and colleagues' studies confirm that students do better in school if their parents and others in the community are interested and involved in education. The published studies indicate that, regardless of family demographics, parents' formal education, language spoken at home, family structure, and other background variables, family involvement helps students improve achievement, attendance, promotion to the next grade, and rates of graduation from high school (Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007). However, presently, only some schools organize effective partnership programs and only some students' families are engaged in their children's education at all grade levels.

Although most states, districts, and schools have official policies on parental involvement or mission statements to improve school, family, and community partnerships, only some schools enact the policy with strong, sustainable, and equitable practices. The known inequities in family and community engagement are linked to many students' failure to reach their full potential in school, and to the persistent achievement gaps between groups of students.

### **A Staring Point: Building a Research Base.**

Starting in 1981, my colleagues and I began programmatic research on family engagement such that the results of one study would prompt research questions for the next study. Early basic research was conducted at the elementary school level, then in middle schools, and then in high schools. The studies suggested that goal-linked partnership activities (e.g., family engagement with students in reading) were more likely than general or unspecified involvement activities to affect student learning (e.g., students' reading skills and attitudes). We also worked with district and state leaders to understand their roles in guiding schools in new directions on family and community engagement.

In 1987, we began a series of field tests. This required translating research results into useful, practical tools, templates, and training workshops for educators and parents. We worked collaboratively with a large urban school district that agreed to "scale up" from one area (i.e., cluster of schools) to all areas and about 190 schools. We learned that a district-level facilitator (i.e., a teacher-level professional) could guide up to 30 schools' Action Teams for Partnerships. In this phase of field studies, district leaders and school-based teams received systematic training, on-going guidance, and tools to plan and implement goal-linked partnership programs at all school levels. With support from their area facilitators and leaders, school-based ATPs implemented the structures and processes shown in research to increase the engagement of more and different parents in ways that supported student success in schools. Then, we tested similar strategies in other rural and suburban districts and state departments of education in diverse locations.

Translating research results for use in practice is a critical element in the development of research-based education networks. Researchers who want to work closely with educators must be "multilingual" (Epstein, 1996). They must speak the languages of research and practice to turn beta coefficients into useful workshops, tools, and materials that fit educators' needs. They must publish articles in peer-reviewed research journals and in practitioners' publications. These factors make it possible for researchers who establish education networks to *learn from* practitioners about implementation challenges that pose questions for new research. These connections improve practice and extend a knowledge base.

### **Next Step: Establishing a Network.**

In 1996, after 15 years of basic research, theory development, and exploratory field tests, my colleagues and I agreed that, although more and better research needed to continue, we had enough useful information and had designed and tested enough research-based tools, templates, and training workshops to establish a network on school, family, and community partnerships. An article in *Phi Delta Kappan* (1995) summarized the results of many studies and offered this opportunity:

I am establishing a national network of *Partnership 2000 Schools* ...[for]... state, district, and other leaders who are responsible for helping their elementary, middle, and high schools implement programs of school, family, and community partnerships by the year 2000 (p. 711).

The network was called *Partnership 2000* because we thought that this would be a short project. About 250 schools, 30 districts, and 8 state departments of education replied that they were ready to use research-based approaches to improve policies, programs, and practices of family and community engagement. By 1999, it was clear that the network had to change its name to *National Network of Partnerships Schools (NNPS)* because more schools, districts, states, and organizations wanted to use research to improve their partnership programs.

We discussed ways for researchers and educators to work side by side to improve school, family, and community partnerships for student success in school. The researchers and staff at Johns Hopkins University would serve as the *home base* for providing training, books and materials, evaluations, and on-going support and services to help educators build their capacities to lead partnership programs at the school, district, and state levels. In turn, members of the network collaborated with researchers to extend knowledge with annual data on program development and results in diverse communities.

From the outset, we knew that for the network to succeed and for districts and schools to strengthen and sustain their programs, it was imperative to "grow" local leaders who could apply research-based structures and

processes for goal-linked partnership programs in their own schools, districts, and states. These leaders also had to be nimble thinkers who could customize their programs to meet local needs and interests of students and families. These features dictated that NNPS would be a *side-by-side* network.

We created a useful handbook (Epstein, et al., 2009), now in its 3<sup>rd</sup> edition that explains the theory of *overlapping spheres of influence*, a research-based framework of *six types of involvement* (*parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community*), a new approach to interactive homework, guidelines for district and state leaders, useful inventories and templates, and a CD with presentations and activities for professional development workshops. These resources were developed to enable members of NNPS and others to start and scale up research-based partnership programs in their locations.

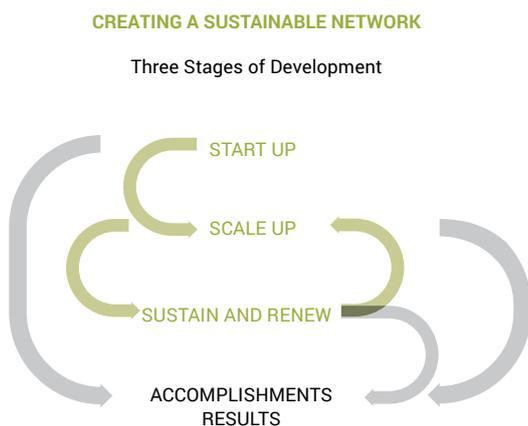
Over the years, over 5000 schools, 450 districts, 200 organizations, and 20 state departments of education joined NNPS for at least one year. Members receive books, posters, materials, and on-going communications from NNPS Facilitators. They have access to a comprehensive website and many opportunities to gain and share ideas for successful practices. Active members must evaluate their programs every year and submit data to NNPS for on-going research and development. Countless others use our publications, surveys, and website for research, policies, and practices without establishing formal connections to the network.

At this writing, NNPS is starting its 20<sup>th</sup> school year. With a staff of researchers and field experts, NNPS is working with about 600 schools, 60 districts, 30 organizations, and several states in the U. S. and few organizations in other nations. A rigorous research agenda continues based on annual data collected from every active member for a multi-level, multi-cohort longitudinal data base with which to explore topics of program development and results.

#### 4. Stages of Program Development

Schools, districts, organizations, and states in NNPS invariably go through three stages of program development: *Start Up*, *Scale Up*, and *Sustain and Renew*, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Creating a Sustainable Network



At *Start Up*, schools in NNPS form an Action Team for Partnerships (ATP), obtain training in a One-Day Workshop for ATPs, and write a goal-linked Action Plan for Partnerships. In the first year, the ATP works with others at the school to implement planned activities that engage parents and community partners in productive ways. After evaluating initial accomplishments, school-based ATPs begin to *Scale Up* the quality of activities to engage more and different families and to strengthen the coherence of goal-linked engagement activities to focus clearly on student learning and behavior. Each year's evaluation of progress helps a school's ATP *Sustain and Renew* its commitment to developing effective programs of family and community engagement and

to updating the next One-Year Action Plan for Partnerships. School ATPs may celebrate accomplishments at each stage of development and, based on annual evaluations, continually improve plans, outreach to all families, and results for students. The “looped” sequence in Figure 1 indicates that even excellent programs can continue to improve.

At *Start Up*, districts, states, and organizations begin by identifying a leader for partnerships who, alone or with colleagues, develops knowledge and skills to be the local expert on partnership program development. For example, a district-level Leader for Partnerships may begin with an initial cluster of school ATPs. As the leader learns the role of Facilitator, s/he can guide more schools’ ATPs each year. *Scale Up* requires two foci: (1) scaling up the *number* of schools until all schools in a district accept responsibility for conducting well-organized goal-linked partnership programs and (2) scaling up the *quality* of plans and practices in experienced schools to engage all students’ families—not just a few—in students’ education. Leaders for Partnerships in districts, states, and organizations continue to increase their own knowledge and improve the quality of their own and school-based partnership programs.

In NNPS, we see that district, organization, and state leaders who retain their positions are able to scale up their expertise and the number and quality of school-based partnership programs from year to year. Some district leaders grow from facilitating their first cohort of school ATPs to creating their own local networks of all schools in the district. The ATPs in an active local network of partnership schools learn from the district facilitator and from each other. At the same time, the district leader learns from the challenges and successes of the schools.

NNPS also followed the three-step sequence of development. At *Start Up*, we set goals for the network, planned outreach, and developed an array of benefits and services for members. We set a feasible schedule for communicating with member sites, providing professional development workshops, and updating manuals and materials to increase members’ knowledge, skills, leadership, and program quality. For example, NNPS set a schedule for at least 20 contact points per school year with its members, including E-briefs; semi-annual newsletters; periodic E-Alerts; annual book of *Promising Partnership Practices*; calls for best practices and award applications; annual evaluations of program progress; reports on annual data; and so on. Incentives are offered to encourage members to develop their plans and practices. These include certificates for good work, plaques and prizes for award winners, lotteries for conference registrations, and incentives for on-time and efficient evaluations.

At *Scale Up*, NNPS focused on both increasing the number of active members and identifying, studying, and addressing challenges that were limiting the quality and sustainability of members’ programs. For example, NNPS redirected its recruitment of members to district and organization leaders and their schools, rather than focusing on single schools that join on their own but without official district or organizational support and on-going guidance. New studies of district leadership revealed that schools with official, on-going support had higher quality partnership programs and more outreach to families than did schools working alone (Epstein, Galindo, & Sheldon, 2011).

To *Sustain and Renew* its leadership, NNPS has worked each year to remain relevant and motivated with a productive and available staff, and ongoing inquiries and projects. For example, by the year 2000, most schools, districts, and states were clearly goal-oriented, with district strategic plans and school improvement plans that set goals and standards for student learning. As educators worked with students to reach specific levels of proficiency, it was necessary for partnership programs to engage families and community partners in ways helped more students attain those learning goals. We redirected NNPS professional development workshops and forms from focusing on the framework of six types of involvement to applying the six types to engage families in supporting specific academic and behavioral learning goals at each grade level. To sustain an education network, it must have stable, knowledgeable staff, support from on-going grants, or become self-supporting through membership fees and contractual options for valued services. These are difficult requirements for the long term.

## 5. Lessons Learned

Every year since its start, NNPS has learned important lessons to improve its work as an education network. The following are a few learnings that may be of interest to networks that are under construction.

### Lesson 1: Leaders Change.

The one constant in education is *change*. Programs and priorities change in schools, districts, states, and organizations. Leaders change every year as people move to new positions, are promoted, or retire. Parents on school-based ATPs may graduate with their children to the next school level. New parents and young children enter school every year as new kindergarten students or as new residents in a school's enrollment area. Changing leaders and newly adopted priorities may affect the progress and sustainability of school, district, and state partnership programs. Change remains a frustrating reality that affects all school improvement programs, including networks.

Some changes are bad, but some changes are good for improving or expanding programs of partnership. It is disruptive, for example, when a strong principal who supports partnerships leaves a school or an expert Leader for Partnerships leaves a district. Sometimes, these changes halt progress and sever network connections. Our studies indicate, however, that if a school has a well-organized ATP, a new principal may simply join the team and continue to improve family and community connections. Field reports indicate that if a departing district leader prepares a new leader to take over, progress will continue on partnership program development at a steady pace.

Some changes can be good, overall, as when principals, superintendents, district leaders, active parents, and teachers move to new positions that increase their influence and leadership for partnerships. For example, a successful chairperson of a school's ATP may become a district Leader for Partnerships to help all schools make progress on family and community engagement. A supportive Assistant Superintendent from one district may become the Superintendent in another district and bring NNPS along to the new location, thereby helping to scale up research-based approaches to partnerships in more schools.

Nevertheless, many times changing leaders for partnerships is troublesome. It is not a case of *if* leaders will change, but *when*. To meet this challenge, NNPS has developed workshops and materials to help member sites prepare for the inevitable transitions of leaders at the district level and on school-based ATPs.

### Lesson 2: Every School is Different.

Every district, school, organization, and state is different from the next and wants to be unique. Educators do not like "canned" programs that leave no room for creative design. Still, a research-based network expects certain structures and processes to be understood and implemented with fidelity by network members. NNPS learned to balance the required elements or "basics" in partnership program development with options for members to customize or tailor practices to meet local needs, school goals, and student and family interests. In NNPS, only structures and processes that have been confirmed in more than one study or repeatedly proven in field tests as contributing to program improvements are *required*. For example, early studies showed that it was ineffective to have one person "in charge of parents" at the school (e.g., a liaison or parent leader). Rather, an Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) was needed with all partners in education as team members (e.g., teachers, administrators, parents, community partners, and students at the high school level). The team is a required structure that "speaks partnership" in planning and implementing activities to engage all families at school and at home in their children's education. However, schools in NNPS may customize the number of team members and roles. For example, some elementary and middle schools in NNPS have added students to their ATPs, which is required at the high school level. Some have a minimum number of team members (i.e., 2-3 teachers, 2-3 parents, an administrator), whereas some add other school staff, more parents, and community partners.

All members of NNPS learn the formal underlying theory of *overlapping spheres of influence* (Epstein, 1987) and are prepared to implement and evaluate how well they establish the required research-based structures and processes of a well-planned program (Epstein, et al., 2009). Then, each school has flexible options to select specific academic and behavioral goals from their own school improvement plans and to select, adapt, or de-

sign involvement activities that fit the needs and interests of their families and other partners. This purposeful mix of requirements and flexibility corrects the rigidity in some intervention models.

For example, an *Open House Night* may be planned to provide information to and establish contact with students' parents to strengthen Type 2-Communicating activities, but also must be customized for preschool or high school programs, and for populations of parents who speak languages other than English at home. A *Family Reading Night* may be organized to guide parents to conduct Type 4-Learning at Home activities in reading, but may be designed creatively and tailored by grade level and focus on different literary genres. In NNPS, the diverse practices are collected and shared each year in NNPS publications and recognition programs (i.e., annual books of *Promising Partnership Practices* and the *Partnership Awards Program*) to spotlight good leadership, good plans, and good practices that occur across the country. This has resulted in an inventory of over 1200 goal-linked partnership practices that have worked in the field to engage families in their children's education at school and at home. These variations provide ideas for effective practice that others in the network may adopt or adapt.

### **Lesson 3: Skill vs. Will—the Need for Commitment to Action.**

When we started NNPS, some schools, districts, and state departments of education joined the network, but had little interest in taking action. We learned that a commitment to action and continuous improvement cannot be taken for granted. Only some joiners of networks become active and capable leaders for school improvement. At first, there was no fee to join NNPS. All costs were assumed by the researchers' grants to learn more about processes for scaling up proven practice. Some members were curious or in vulnerable professional positions. They could not or would not change old ways to apply research-based approaches to improve family and community engagement. By charging a small fee for services, NNPS reduced the number of joiners, but increased the number of active partners.

### **Lesson 4: Evaluations are Essential for Progress.**

When NNPS started, annual evaluations of progress were voluntary and free of cost. Educators know that "what gets measured gets done," but some who joined NNPS did not want to evaluate their programs. Even a short survey takes time, which educators guard as a precious resource. Further, those who avoided taking action did not want to report their lack of progress.

Early on, we learned that educators needed help in evaluating the quality and progress of their partnership programs. Historically, there were few formal assessments of how well schools and districts organized leadership and plans for family engagement. We needed to explain the importance of evaluating partnership programs to recognize accomplishments each year, even if limited, and to improve the next year's plans and practices. Now, data are collected every year from every member-site in NNPS to create a multi-cohort longitudinal data base to study whether and which program components help schools and districts improve their plans and outreach to engage all families in their children's education at school and at home. The annual data also serve the research team by identifying challenges that educators face each year and that require new studies, new tools, or new workshops for practitioners.

The annual evaluation is linked to the renewal of NNPS benefits and services for the next school year and requires a small fee. This formalizes the role of NNPS in helping members evaluate their programs and documents the intentionality of members to continue to improve their programs. NNPS collects, processes, analyzes, and reports data back to members in an annual report. As an added benefit, NNPS provides customized reports on their own schools' data to districts or organizations with at least 8 schools that are members of the network, evaluate their progress, and aim to continue to improve their programs. Members are cut if they will not evaluate progress each year as the single required communication with the NNPS home base.

## 6. Summary

In reflecting on lessons learned, we identified seven cross-cutting principles to improve research and practice on partnerships. These principles point to the need to:

- (1) broaden terminology from *parental involvement* to *school, family, and community partnerships* to recognize the shared responsibilities of educators, parents, and others for children's learning and development;
- (2) understand the multidimensional nature of involvement with the framework of six types of involvement;
- (3) view the structure of partnerships as a component of school and classroom organization - a responsibility of the school to engage all families as partners in their children's education across the grades;
- (4) recognize multilevel leadership and side-by-side networking at the school, district, and state levels so that educators learn from each other about effective partnership practices;
- (5) focus involvement on student outcomes so that families and community partners spend time on productive activities that contribute to students' academic and behavioral success;
- (6) acknowledge the importance of increasing the equity of involvement of all parents to promote a real school community and more successful students; and
- (7) continue to advance knowledge and improve practice with more rigorous research. (See the full discussion of these principles in Epstein and Sheldon, 2006.)

These principles affect eight essential elements that are the focus of NNPS professional development workshops and frame the measures in the annual evaluations of program progress (Epstein, et al., 2009). We want to know whether and how well district leaders and school-based ATPs are strengthening *leadership, teamwork, written plans, implementation of plans, evaluations, collegial support, funding, and networking*.

### One More Lesson Learned.

It is harder to sustain and maintain an education network than it is to start one. There are on-going challenges in scaling up research-based programs of family and community engagement for student success in school. It is still a "new" idea to change the focus of school, family and community partnerships from serving parents (e.g., parent training, parent education) to engaging parents and community partners to increase student success. It is still a "new" idea to change from thinking that family engagement is accidental, random, or external to schools to understanding that a partnership program is a required component of good school organization - just as a good reading and math program is required in all schools (Epstein, et al., 2009; Weiss, Lopez, & Rosenberg, 2010).

The National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) at Johns Hopkins University (Baltimore, Maryland, USA), entering its 20th year as a network, has a clear sense of its mission to provide professional development that enables educators to plan, implement, evaluate, and continually improve their programs and practices of school, family, and community partnerships for student success in school. NNPS works with state, district, and organization leaders to promote and facilitate school-based Action Teams for Partnerships (ATPs). Side-by-side with practitioners, researchers at NNPS aim to understand the structures and processes needed to engage families and community partners in ways that (a) improve school climate and (b) contribute to students' academic learning in specific subjects and positive school behaviors through high school graduation and plans for the future. NNPS recognizes that all partners—researchers, educators, policy leaders, parents, community members, and students—have important roles to play in working together for student success.

Although progress has been made in bringing to light new theoretical concepts, structures, and processes of partnerships, there still is more to do to scale up good partnership programs as part of school organization and district leadership in the U.S. and beyond. Education networks face difficult challenges at all stages of development - start up, scale up, and, sustain and renew. Yet, they hold great promise for solving persistent problems in schools that cannot be solved one school at a time. Networks can, if well organized, accelerate the implementation of new, tested, effective, and more equitable programs for student learning and success in school. Perhaps the lessons learned by NNPS will encourage other focused education networks on family and community engagement and on other goals for school improvement.

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# DOES PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT CONTRIBUTE TO TEACHER DEVELOPMENT? BASED ON THE EXPERIMENT OF PARENTS-TEACHER SYNERGIC LESSON STUDY AT A MIGRANT SCHOOL IN SHANGHAI

Jiacheng Li<sup>11</sup>, Yan Li<sup>12</sup>, Tao Yao<sup>13</sup>, Guo Yucheng<sup>14</sup>

## Abstract

Establishing the relationship between parental involvement and teacher's professional development in the area of school-family collaboration is very challenging. In the Chinese education context, teacher development is always important and parental involvement is a controversial area; however, the two areas have a very weak relationship. The purpose of this paper is to find the influence of parental involvement on comprehensive teacher development processes. This survey is based on the practices of the Parents-Teacher Synergic Lesson Study in an elementary school case study. This school is for the children of migrant workers living in Shanghai, thus most of the parents have a very low SES. The authors distributed questionnaires, performed onsite observations, and conducted interviews with teachers. The authors found that the school's interest can make a difference, as parents from disadvantaged situations have high expectations of the teacher's professional development, and experimental teachers have self-awareness of the parents' involvement during the Parents-Teacher Synergic Lesson Study. The paper discusses the link between teacher's professional development and parental involvement, and concludes that parental involvement can contribute to developing the teachers' educational perspectives, the understanding of relationships between teachers and parents, and the skills of educating the students in a disadvantaged situation.

**Keywords:** teacher's professional development; parents-teacher synergic lesson study; parental involvement; migrant children; Chinese education.

## 1. Introduction

In the context of the Chinese education reform, especially with the creation and further development of a learning society, the concept of school-family collaboration is becoming a consensus among policy makers, scholars, and educators (Ministry of Education, 2012; Huang & Ma, 2011). School-family collaboration is defined as a model in which schools and families work as partners, where children's learning can be encouraged and enhanced. Partnerships can improve the relationship between school and family, as well as provide families with support and services (Epstein, 1995; Catsambis, 2001; Huang & Ma, 2011). In fact, these partnerships with families have tended to be initiated by schools when there is a need for help or when they feel parents do not know exactly how their children are being taught (Cairney, Ruge, Buchanan, Lowe & Munsie, 1995).

Some scholars have argued that parents' involvement in school was limited to giving and receiving information (Hanafin & Lynch 2002). Even in Hong Kong, researchers found three types of leadership and school-family relationships, named *bureaucratic*, *utilitarian*, and *communitarian*, and parental involvement was mainly confined to non-teaching and non-administrative tasks (Ho & Kwong, 2013).

But now, more and more schools are welcoming parents to become involved in various activities at different levels, including management and organization (Mousoulides, 2013). This is very similar in Mainland China. In a case-study elementary school, parents can participate in teaching, curriculum evaluation, and other activities (Li, Wang & Chen, 2013). These constantly update the educators' understanding, values, beliefs, and practices. Parental expectations have been found to play a critical role in their children's academic success (Yamamoto & Holloway, 2010). It is well known that Chinese parents have high expectation of their children's education (Tucker, 2011; OECD, 2012), and they are very much willing to work with educators for their children's development. The first author had conducted a survey of 3,372 migrant parents in Shanghai and concluded that it is

11 East China Normal University, Shanghai, China. Email: jcli@dem.ecnu.edu.cn

12 East China Normal University, Shanghai, China. Email: 798879608@qq.com

13 Yumiao Elementary School, Shanghai, China. Email: 752243903@qq.com

14 Yumiao Elementary School, Shanghai, China. Email: 370243144@qq.com

the parents who always care for the children, have a high expectation of their children, and prefer highly qualified teachers (Li, Wang, Chen, Yin & Chen, 2015).

To provide highly qualified teachers and continue the in-service learning, first-class professional development is important (Yuan, 2005; Ye, 2006, 2011). The pre-service and in-service professional development are both regarded as the keys to educational improvement (Darling-Hammond, 2013), and more researchers have devoted themselves to this research area (Darling-Hammond, 1994; Song & Wei, 2005; Ye, 2006).

In the Chinese context, teacher development has many specific aspects, which are undoubtedly very complex and diversified. Chinese educators and scholars have achieved quite a lot in terms of basic education that aims to transform education from examination-oriented to quality-oriented (OECD, 2010; Tucker, 2011; Zhang & Ng, 2011; Tan, 2012). Since the end of the 20th century, Chinese teacher training has witnessed a change from being quantity-oriented to being more quality-oriented (Rao, 2013). In this process, the teacher's professional development has become of greater importance.

Among the activities targeted at teacher's professional development, teaching-related research is always regarded as one of the most important areas, especially the *Lesson Study*. It is generally referred to as teaching study and is commonly conducted by organizations that specialize in teaching. *Jiaoyanzu* (translated as *teaching-research group*) and *beikezu* (*lesson preparation group*) are such organizations and consist of the same subject teachers (Tan, 2012:186). The OECD points out that at the grassroots level, subject-based "teaching-study groups" engage in study and improvement of teaching on a daily basis (OECD, 2011: 88). Chinese *jiaoyanzu* and *beikezu* have a very close relationship with the Chinese school's institutional context (Li, 2014). The purpose of the lesson study is to improve teaching through joint efforts. The typical lesson study always includes the lesson plan, the onsite observation of the teaching, the reflection by the teacher, the dialogues among all participants, and the new plan for the second-round teaching. It has been rooted in Chinese education since the 1950s, and it is very valuable for both novice and expert teachers, as it can help them transform their knowledge into various ways and contribute to effectively improve teaching (Chen, 2011).

In the context of globalization, the Chinese lesson study has become familiar to Western educators and scholars. Taking Shanghai as an example, the UK government is learning from it regarding the teaching of mathematics (GOV.UK, 2014), and the Tennessee State of the USA is copying Shanghai's principals' instruction leadership too, especially the *jiaoyanzu* model (Brasher, 2013).

However, in this area, parents have very limited access. Some parents do have the chance to visit the teachers' classroom, but only once or twice every semester, in which they merely listen and watch, and are in no way involved in the lesson study with the teachers. One of the reasons for this is that teachers are regarded as the teaching experts, and parents just amateurs (Knipprath, 2004). Experiments should be conducted by researchers to make the change happen with the aim of developing teachers, parents, and students.

## 2. Research questions and process

This paper puts forward three research questions:

1. Is it possible to invite parents into the teachers' lesson study?
2. If it is possible to invite parents to be more involved, what is the understanding and feedback of the parents after being further involved in the lesson study?
3. How do teachers evaluate the parents' involvement?

To answer these questions, the researchers took three steps.

The first is to clarify the relationship between parental involvement and teacher's professional development, and review the relevant literature, as well as do some reflective thinking on the current situation. Learning is built on the relationships that unfold through collegial support networks and in communication with facilitators who provide a context in which the learning can occur (Murray, 2000). We believe that parents have the po-

tential to engage with education, especially in the context of life-long learning, and both teachers and parents should be learners in terms of the school-family collaboration.

The second step was conducting the experiment from November 2013 to June 2015. The authors conducted their research at Y Elementary School, which was established for the children of migrant parents in Shanghai, and was chosen as the school for the case study with the rationale that the research in this type of school can be a benchmark for other schools.

The experiment is named *Parents-Teacher Synergic Lesson Study*. It is a lesson study, but conducted with the collaboration of parents and teachers. The word “synergic” means that the lesson study is a joint effort, and as such it differs from the traditional one in which parents are not involved together with the teachers in the development of the lesson plan. The *Parents-Teacher Synergic Lesson Study* contains a series of activities parents can be involved in and interact with children and teachers, including the preparation, involvement in the teaching and learning, the dialogues among teachers and parents, the evaluation of the teaching and lesson study, and the suggestion for the next round of lesson studies. At the beginning of the experiments, the lesson study was designed and chaired by the teachers. With the scaling up of the experiment and the establishment of class-based parent committees, one parent from a given class was invited to chair the process with the teacher each time.

The authentic experiment had three stages (see Table 1). The first round took place in two class experiments from November 2013 to January 2014; the second was the scaling up from March 2014 to June 2014; and the third was the consolidation phase from September 2014 to June 2015. This paper mainly reflects the results of the first and second rounds.

The framework for the parents-teacher synergic lesson study was gradually revised with the experiment by professors from East China Normal University and educators from the case-study school. It begins with the invitation letter to the parents, followed by the tips reminding parents to pay attention to the differences between the upcoming classroom teaching-and-learning and previous classroom learning, and to be models for their children by engaging in learning and teaching. The onsite activity is organized by teachers who are supported by school leaders. Inside the classroom, parents can interact with the children and their teacher, and the teacher always designs a session to invite the parents to involve in the teaching activities. After the onsite observation, parents are invited to offer their critical remarks to the teachers formally, which always lasts for about two hours. The questions, comments, and feedback are focused on the teacher’s teaching and the students’ learning, and sometimes on the parents’ education at home.

The third step is to collect and analyze the data, and draw some conclusions. In May 2014, the authors collected and analyzed the data from the survey, which allowed them to provide answers to their research questions. Subsequently, more planning was done to continue this line of research.

Table 1. Framework for the parents-teacher synergic lesson study

First round		Second round	Third round
<b>Activities of the first experimental class (On November 27th, 2013)</b>	Activities of the second experimental class (On December 5th, 2013)	The school generalization (from March, 2014 to June, 2014)	Consolidation phase (from September, 2014 to June, 2015)
<b>School/teacher invites the parents to be involved with the lesson study</b>	School/teacher invites the parents to be involved with the lesson study	School/teacher invites the parents to be involved with the lesson study	School/teacher consolidates research results
	Parents participate in the flag-raising ceremony	Parents participate in the flag-raising ceremony	
	Parents participate in group dance with children	Parents participate in group dance with children	Experimental teachers write academic papers
<b>Parents observe the teaching and learning in the classroom</b>	Parents observe the teaching and learning in the classroom under the guidance of the tips from the school	Parents observe the teaching and learning in the classroom under the guidance of the tips from the school	
		Parents volunteer to participate in and organize the activities	Teachers participate in writing "parent-school partnership instruction manual"
<b>Parents participate in classroom learning</b>	Parents participate in classroom learning	Parents participate in classroom learning	
<b>Parents communicate with children for at least three minutes after the class</b>	Parents communicate with children for at least three minutes after the class	Parents communicate with children for at least three minutes after the class	
<b>Parents discuss the lesson with teachers</b>	Parents discuss the lesson with teachers	Parents discuss the lesson with teachers	
		Parents and school leaders co-host an activity	
<b>Parents complete questionnaires</b>	Parents complete questionnaires	Parents complete questionnaires	
	Teachers host the activity of parent-child homework show	Teachers host the activity of parent-child homework show	
<b>Teachers communicate with parents after the lesson study</b>	Teachers communicate with parents after the lesson study	Teachers communicate with parents after the lesson study	

### 3. Methodology

Before the experiment, the first author and the Principal of Y Elementary School were partners in other projects and therefore had an established working relationship. As such, it was not difficult to obtain the school leaders' support, thus allowing for cooperative collaboration with the teachers. The authors organized a pre-survey for parents and students at Y Elementary School between March 11, 2013 and June 22, 2013. One of the outcomes of the pre-surveys was gaining a certain understanding of sample parents' basic information on SES through the parent questionnaires, such as their educational background (see Table 2).

Table 2. Educational background of parents (Number of fathers=372, number of mothers=361)

Options	Frequency		Percentage (%)	
	Mother	Father	Mother	Father
No schooling	23	4	6.4	1.1
Elementary School	115	86	31.9	23.1
Junior High School	195	223	54	59.9
Senior High School	24	47	6.6	12.6
Associate Degree	3	9	0.8	2.4
Bachelor	1	2	0.3	0.5
Master	0	1	0	0.3

Based on the experiment, the authors divided the parent questionnaire into four parts: the experience and assessment of the whole process of the lesson study, the evaluation of teaching and teacher's skills, the evaluation of other parents' behavior and involvement during the lesson study, and their self-assessment of their own behavior and involvement.

For the scaling up school wide from March 2014 to May 2014, three classes from Grade 5 and four classes from Grade 1 hosted the lesson studies in March; four classes from Grade 2 in April; and five classes from Grade 3 and 4 classes from Grade 4 hosted the lesson studies in May. From May 5, 2014 to May 30, 2014, the authors distributed 240 parent questionnaires to seven classes (including the five classes from Grade 3 and the two classes from Grade 4, and another two classes from Grade 4 missed the survey because of the busy schedule of the classroom teachers) during the parents-teacher synergic lesson studies with the help of teachers (see Table 3), and collected in the next morning by the teachers. All of the 240 parent questionnaires were valid. The questionnaire's objective items were statistically analyzed.

Table 3. Number of parent questionnaires

Class/Grade	1/3	2/3	3/3	4/3	5/3	1/4	2/4
Number	37	33	37	32	34	25	42

In the process of the lesson study, the authors conducted on-site observations from the beginning until the end, and recorded the whole process on video. Thus, the authors have a better understanding and experience of the parents' participation, the interaction between parents and teachers, as well as teachers' performance and skills.

In addition, the authors interviewed the first two experimental teachers, the Vice Principal, and the Director of moral education in January 2014, and the school Principal and the other eighteen experimental teachers in May 2014. There were fourteen female teachers (referred to as FT1, FT2...FT14) and six male teachers (referred to as MT1, MT2...MT6) among the twenty teachers interviewed. The interviews with the teachers were semi-structured, and the questions focused on the interviewees' experiences of partnerships with parents and their own perceptions. The interviews were recorded on voice recorders, transcribed into narrative form, classified, and analyzed.

## 4. Theoretical Framework

### 4.1 Teacher's Professional Development

In the context of the school reform, teacher's professional development is an important aspect (Tan, 2013) as it includes teacher's educational values, cultural background, creative mindset, content knowledge, and pedagogical skills (Ye, 2006). Teachers' reflection (Melville & Fazio, 2008), action research, and teachers' training are effective ways to promote the teacher's professional development (Jourdan, 2015). In recent years, there has been more emphasis on the importance of the independent development of teachers, the synchronization of teachers' development, and the school reform (Ye, 2011).

In China, lesson study is an important method for in-service teachers' development, and it has a significant impact on improving teaching skills, educational methods and self-awareness (Zhang & Ng, 2011; OECD, 2011; Tan, 2012). Lesson study is generally open to all elementary and secondary school teachers, regardless of their years of experience, teaching levels, or subjects (Chen, 2011). Sharing wisdom among teachers during the lesson study is greatly valued by teachers.

However, the development of teachers is not only related to teachers themselves, but also concerns students and schools (Huang et al., 2011). Therefore, it is extremely important to integrate human development and

school development in this educational context, such as school-family collaboration (Huang et al., 2011; Li, Wang & Chen, 2013). Research on school-family collaboration has emphasized the training of teachers, but has ignored the promotion or development of teachers. There is little research that demonstrates school-family collaboration as an effective way to improve the teachers' professional development, as the research that has been published only consists of philosophic thinking without investigation or case studies (Ding, 2012).

In the context of lifelong education, people never become full-grown, and life is an endless process of improvement and learning (International Commission on the Development of Education, 1972). It is clear that the basis for lifelong education must be established in the school and one of the most important factors is the teacher. So teachers' pre-service education and in-service training that adapts to the need of the teachers' development are in accordance with the concept of lifelong education. But as John Dewey pointed out it is impossible to transform schools to meet the needs of human development without cooperation between schools and non-school partners (Dewey, 1963). It is necessary to include the power of parents as an important resource for the teacher's development (Baum & Swick, 2008) in order to expand and deepen the research on parental involvement (Ramirez, 2003).

#### **4.2 School-Family Collaboration**

Parents and teachers are the most important people for a student's development; research findings support the idea that there is a positive relationship between parental involvement and educational success, especially in the elementary school years (Catsambis, 2001). Therefore, parents and schools should work jointly for the development of children (Epstein, 2009). In Western countries, education has always attached great importance to parents' involvement. They have established organizations, such as the Parent Teacher Association (PTA), and parents are widely involved in important areas such as school management or teaching (Olmstead, 2013). Western scholars and international organizations have developed some models in this area, such as Epstein's (1995) framework. Though parents desire to be a part of their children's education (Ramirez, 2003), there are different levels of parental involvement, such as multiple family structures and family resources (Myers & Myers, 2015).

Ever since the 1990s, school-family collaboration has been attracting more attention in Mainland China. Given that this is a new area of research in China, the theory and practice is still quite weak and mainly focuses on discussing the challenges or introducing Western theories, practices, and policies. Schools in China have recently begun to form parent committees, and parents are trying to participate in teaching, moral education, and management with the guidance of teachers. Chinese researchers are attempting to find and develop a Chinese framework or model for school-family collaboration with the aim of integrating the development of parents, teachers, and students (Li, Wang & Chen, 2013; Li & Li, 2015).

#### **4.3 Migrant Parents' Involvement in Education**

Because of the Chinese household registration system, the challenge of educating migrant children is quite complex. Based on the national survey carried out in 2010, there are 9.99 million migrant children aged six to eleven, and 4.73 million migrant children aged twelve to fourteen (Research Group of China Women's Federation, 2013). In the context of pursuing improved social justice, the Chinese government has given more attention to the education and development of the children of migrant workers in the past decade as this topic was mentioned in the national government-working-report from 2005 to 2014. Researchers analyzed education problems, made recommendations, and explored ways to improve the conditions for the children of migrant workers (Lv & Zhang, 2001; Xiang, 2005).

An additional complication for migrant workers is their often limited educational background, which makes it less likely for them to be involved in their children's schooling (Li, et al., 2015). School-family collaboration has rarely appeared in schools for the children of migrant workers, thus this research project is crucial to investigate how to better involve migrant parents.

Utilizing the concept of lifelong learning, the authors believe that migrant parents have the right to participate in their children's education, with the intent that this might encourage them to further their own learning and self-development. A person's educational attainment tends to correlate with their socio-economic status and also their life expectancy (Leicester, 2006), therefore it is an essential aspect for their children's development.

The authors have also based their research on related research achievements in China, especially the New Basic Education (NBE) theories. The NBE has been conducted by professors, principals, and teachers since 1994. The authors of this project have paid special attention to its theory of how people achieve development, with a special emphasis on how human development operates in an ecological system and by man's own practice (Wang & Ye, 2003; Bu & Li, 2013). This has led the authors to regard the school-family collaboration as a complex system focused more on human development in order to allow for more interaction among the participants in the experiment.

## 5. Findings

### 5.1 Parental involvement in the professional activities through the educators' open-door policy

Before the experiment, the principal was concerned with the parents' limited time, the perceived lack of motivation, and was worried that parents would not be confident enough to participate in such a scholarly activity. Much to the surprise of the principal, the invitation teachers sent the parents was a critical factor in their interest to participate (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). During the interview, the vice-principal said:

In fact, the school is afraid of hosting parents' meetings, because the teachers don't have that kind of experience, and they are nervous or even afraid of meeting the parents. In addition, concerning the parents' situation, the parents usually have few chances to communicate with teachers. The school-family collaboration is obviously inadequate, and will result in more and more problems.

For the duration of the experiment, the attendance of the parents was higher than the educators had initially anticipated. In the first experimental class that was participated in the study, there were thirty-five parents in a class of forty-eight students. In the second experimental class of forty-six students, there were forty-two parents. When the authors distributed the questionnaires to two hundred and forty parents, all of them responded to the survey. This made the authors and educators realize that migrant parents were willing to participate. The authors found that it was the first time that 65.5% of the migrant parents were taking part in such a professional activity (see Table 4). Considering that the sample parents were from Grade 3 or Grade 4, some parents had previously participated in class observations and discussions, which positively correlated with the number of years their children had previously attended school. The authors did not investigate the actual causes at that time because of limited time and resources. By the time of the on-site observation, the authors found most parents were excited to step into the meeting room, though at first they were quite nervous to talk. Actually, just before the synergic lesson study, the teacher communicated with every parent and encouraged them to actively engage. During the discussion, the originally-involved parents played an important role in stimulating more parents to be involved in the activity. It was also a great challenge for the teachers' leadership, too, as the educators had to carefully design the questions, stimulate potential comments, pay attention to key points, and try their best to involve all the parents. Based on the encouragement from educators and role-model learning, parents improved their involvement in the discussion with the research.

**Table 4.** How many times have you taken part in observation and discussion in the classroom including this time? (N=238)

	Frequency	Percentage
Once	156	65.5
Twice	44	18.5
Three times	27	11.3
More than three times	11	4.6

The experiment proved that the school's initiative opened the doors to reform. Even parents from very disadvantaged situations were keen to take part in all kinds of activities including teaching, volunteer activities, and organizing a parents' committee. The school's respect, understanding, and trust did make a difference. Undoubtedly, the principal, teachers, and professors should collaborate together for the most beneficial situation for all involved.

## 5.2 The parents' expectation is important for the teacher's professional development

The data shows that almost all the parents regarded the activity as valuable (see Table 5), and 98% of the parents were satisfied with the attentiveness of the teachers' listening to them (see Table 6). Additionally, 66.3% of the migrant parents believed that their statements could promote the teacher development (see Table 7). In addition, there were only thirty-four parents who were more satisfied with the teachers' skills of promoting the interaction among students and letting the students learn by collaboration, and thirty-seven parents were more satisfied with the teacher's skills of capturing and generating resources and encouraging the interaction between teachers and students (see Table 8). Though the questionnaire has the limitation of not directly collecting the parents' negative appraisals, this objectively shows the imbalance of teacher's skills and indicates the direction of the teachers' efforts: teachers should renew their teaching capacities, transforming teaching and learning in an interactive and evolutionary process (Wu, 2002). Taking into account the Chinese New Curriculum Reform, teachers should devote more effort to these areas (Compendium of Curriculum Reform of Basic Education, 2001).

Table 5. Is parental participation in the lesson study valuable? (N=238)

	Frequency	Percentage
Very valuable	116	48.7
Partly valuable	119	50
A little value	3	1.3
No value	0	0

Table 6. Are you satisfied with the fact that the teachers listened to you during the process? (N=237)

	Frequency	Percentage
Very satisfied	99	41.8
Partly satisfied	134	56.5
Dissatisfied	2	0.8
Very dissatisfied	2	0.8

Table 7. Do you think your comments or suggestions may facilitate the teacher's professional development? (N=240)

	Frequency	Percentage
Definitely	159	63.3
Unclear	75	31.3
Certainly not	6	2.5

Table 8. Which teacher's skills satisfy you the most? (N=240)

	Frequency	Case Percentage
Teaching according to students' learning background and condition	117	48.80%
Motivating students	139	57.90%
Using appropriate teaching methods and tools	120	50.00%
Focusing equally on every student	105	43.80%
Caring for and respecting students, and ensuring a good relationship between teachers and students	96	40.00%
Obtaining and generating resources, and encouraging the interaction between teachers and students	37	15.40%
Promoting the interaction among students and letting the students learn through cooperation	34	14.20%

Finally, parents did have expectations concerning teacher development. From the following statements put forward by two parents during the discussion, the authors believe that the statements are helpful for the children's development and can enable the teacher to understand children's needs through the eyes of their parents:

- \_ I think the teacher should use appropriate teaching methods according to the state of the children in the classroom. Teachers should not consider only the teaching schedule and ignore the children's learning state (said by one female parent).
- \_ In the classroom, some children are introverted. In this diversified society, interpersonal communication skills are becoming more and more important, which requires children to improve the ability to express themselves orally. I hope teachers can guide the children's character through teaching, and make children be active (stated by one male parent).

To some extent the parents' views on education are relevant for the teachers. The authors also think some parents have professional views on education, therefore it is possible to make dialogue happen between family education and schooling.

### 5.3 Teachers welcome the parents' involvement based on the new experiences and awareness

What have teachers learned from parental involvement? How to evaluate the experiment? Teachers themselves have the final say on these issues. By interviewing the teachers, the authors found the teachers gained professional development, as the teachers have modified their impressions on the students. The teachers are also more willing to pay attention to an inclusive classroom and the children's well-round development, and adopt cooperative learning methods to teaching and learning. The following three quotes represent their achievements:

- \_ For parents, the child is the centre of their attention, which is understandable. However, as a teacher, I need to reflect on my teaching behavior – whether I have focused on every student in the classroom or not. (FT1).
- \_ We were only concerned with good discipline or children's scores. But it is not enough. We should care for the children's holistic development (FT2).

- \_ Group cooperative learning is a meaningful way to help students develop initiative and make learning more effective. At the same time, it can provide every student with an equal opportunity to participate and experience success (MT1).
- \_ Teachers also understood the importance of using the appropriate teaching methods:
- \_ We should teach according to the children's age and characteristics, and promote students' growth. We can thus contribute to accumulate teaching experience; on the other hand, by interacting I learned how to promote harmonious relationships between parents and teachers (FT3).
- \_ Attracting the students' interest in learning is very important. Instructional design and methods should inspire the students, so that they can participate in teaching and learning more deeply. I will pay more attention to this point when teaching in the future (FT4).

The teacher's attitude towards parents is an important factor influencing school-family collaboration. During the lesson study, teachers also changed the way they used to view parents:

- \_ 70% of the parents participated in the activity, I feel very delighted. Parents dialogued with children in English smoothly, and it was beyond my expectation. In subsequent activities, parents evaluated my teaching. They tried their best to collaborate with me, and the parent who chaired the discussion did very well (FT6).
- \_ Through the interaction between parents and teacher, parents can understand the new teaching methods. At the same time, they can give me meaningful comments and suggestions from the parents' point of view. We can improve teaching methods, and avoid the subjective phenomenon in teaching (MT5).

As teachers are made aware of the new perspectives that parents have it is possible that the relationship between teachers and parents becomes more harmonious. This was obvious in two teachers' comments:

- \_ Activities make parents contact me more frequently, and the relationship has become closer. Communication with parents makes me understand children better. Parents trust teachers more (FT8).
- \_ Most parents don't turn the teacher away like before. More often, they like to use a text message or a phone call to communicate with teachers. They are more willing to coordinate with the teacher, and more concerned about their children (FT10).

In addition, the teachers' skills have also improved:

- \_ Preparing the resources, finding information, preparing teaching methods, creating PowerPoints... although I am busy, I have gained experience in organizing such activities and developed more organizational skills. In the flag-raising activity and group dancing, parents and children interacted and collaborated with each other. We enjoyed the happiness. This makes me realize the importance of fostering collaborative capabilities (FT12).
- \_ Before the activity, I carefully read the text, wrote lesson plans, and looked up the meaning of the words in the text. I discussed with the students the possibility of their parents' attendance for the first time, and encouraged children to persuade their parents to attend. Two days before the lesson study, I sent an invitation letter to all the parents, and asked for their response. All of these, including introspection after activities, improved my development (FT15).

Through the teachers' statements, there is evidence that the teachers appreciated the parents' involvement. The authors agree that the teachers' professional development in the parental collaboration is just at an initial stage, as the development is a long and complex process, but teachers now are more aware.

## 6. Discussion

This paper began with the premise that teachers should develop along with parents and children in a learning society, as the interaction between teacher and parent can be a new way to improve the teachers' professional development. The goal of this study was to find the available evidence concerning the association between parental involvement and teachers' professional development.

Based on the research, the paper finds that both parents and teachers agree that it is a positive experience, and the paper argues that through the parental involvement in the lesson study, teachers can understand parents better; the relationship between teachers and parents has become more harmonious, and the parents' involvement motivates teachers, but also the parents, who can become life-long learners.

If parents were included in the educational reform or teachers' development in the schooling sector through school-family collaboration it would be possible for them to maintain the capacity for individual learning and an economic advantage in an increasingly competitive global economy, while at the same time maintaining social order, stability, and cohesion in the community (Chapman & Aspin, 2011). Thus, the authors think there is a series of research questions underlying the current research, which may guide the Chinese education reform. First, do parents have valuable views on education? This is not a negation of the teachers' expertise, but it is trying to rethink the parents' expertise on education. In fact, parents can provide important suggestions on teachers' teaching. Although they have no special training or experience of schooling, they do have experience of home education and valuable perspectives on schooling that are not traditionally considered or included by schools. To some extent, parents are more concerned with the growth of their children, but they were pupils themselves before. The authors encourage the rethinking of the meaning of "professional" in the life-long education system and learning society, and argue that the teachers should respect the parent's skills, tacit knowledge, values, and mindsets.

Second, what is the overall significance of parents' participation to teachers' development? This will further the vision of professional development, and go into the realm of interaction among people. It is possible to develop teacher's personality and social ability, and broaden their educational horizon through parents' involvement.

Third, how to help parents develop together with the teachers? During parents' participation in the Parents-Teacher Synergic Lesson Study, they discussed with the teacher and attained some educational guidance from teachers and other parents, and to some extent this has led to higher expectations on teachers and students, and more interest in deeply participating in their children's schooling. Hence the question is: How to make this happen in more schools?

As a pilot experiment, this study inevitably is affected by the researchers' positions, values, mindsets, and research skills. The research methods still have limitations, and the findings need to be further tested in different school contexts. Longitudinal research is especially needed to demonstrate the value of the parents-teacher synergic lesson study to the teachers' professional development. With the confidence of the value of school-family collaboration, the authors call for more endeavors of educators and researchers, and appreciate more international collaboration

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# SCHOOL NETWORKS

## ACTION AND STRUCTURE IN SCHOOL NETWORKS

Jorge Ávila de Lima<sup>15</sup>

### Abstract

Networks constitute a critical dimension of human life in contemporary societies. These entities have recently attracted the interest of a growing number of scholars from many distinct academic fields. In education, networks are increasingly being promoted as a solution for some of the most persistent and difficult-to-solve problems that educators face. Practitioners and policy makers have developed increasingly elaborate rationales for justifying the importance of teachers' and schools' involvement in networking processes. This paper critically reviews the literature and research that has been conducted on networks in education and elsewhere, with a particular focus on school networks. The critical appraisal that is performed in the paper emphasizes that, despite their clear potential for educational improvement and change, current thinking about school networks is fraught with myth and simplistic assumptions, including the idea that these networks are naturally educational communities. The paper makes a case for the need to conduct more in-depth research on these phenomena, focusing both on action issues and key structural features of school networks.

**Keywords:** school networks; network structure; actor agency; community

### 1. Introduction

All of us have experience of networks, even though we may not realize this. Even the most solitary of human beings has connections to at least a few others, be they individuals or institutions. Either in work or at school, in the family or with friends, in face-to-face interaction or over the Internet, networks are a fact of our lives – we are born, breathe, live and die within them.

Some scholars even hold that humankind has entered a new stage of its evolution, that of the networked society (Barney, 2004; Castells, 2000; Prigogine, 2000), “a society in which the formal, vertically integrated organization that has dominated the 20th century is replaced or at least complemented by (...) networks of three and more organizations” (Raab & Kenis, 2009, p. 198).

The pervasiveness and importance of networks in human life have attracted the interest of a growing number of scholars from many distinct academic fields, to the point that some have declared the coming of “the next scientific revolution: the new science of networks” (Barabási, 2003, p. 8). But scientific interest in organizational networks is not exactly new. The newness lies rather in the scale of current research efforts, in the variety of theoretical and methodological approaches and in the diversity of knowledge fields that are currently involved in the study of networks.

Importantly, interest in interorganizational networks is not growing only among researchers; government leaders are also looking at these formations as ways of addressing complex public challenges that confront contemporary societies. Over the past fifteen to twenty years, we have seen a rapid increase in the use of inter-organizational networks as a management strategy in the public sector (Milward, Kenis, & Raab, 2006), bringing together the government with nonprofit and for-profit organizations in various policy domains, such as health care, crime prevention programs, human services, transportation and education, among many others (Agranoff, 2008).

In education, networks are receiving increasing research and practical attention and being promoted as the solution to some of the most persistent and difficult-to-solve problems that educators have faced for many years. Educational practitioners and policymakers have developed increasingly elaborate rationales for justifying the importance of the involvement of teachers and schools in network processes. Collaborative networks of schools, in particular, are regarded as embodying what Justino and Batista (2013) have described as a new, voluntary mode of regulation in the educational sector.

<sup>15</sup> University of the Azores, Portugal. Email: jlima@uac.pt.

Yet, despite our embeddedness in networks and the growing amount of research and practical work that has been conducted on them, nationally and internationally, we still know surprisingly little about these social formations. This is as true for networks in social and biological life in general as it is for networks in education, in particular. And it is even truer for networks of schools, which are a relatively recent organizational form in the educational field. The research community needs to conduct more in-depth investigations of these phenomena, by combining attention to action issues with a focus on key structural features of networks.

My main purpose in this paper is to point out several conceptual issues and practical problems that network researchers and network practitioners in education need to keep in mind when thinking about, doing research on and involving themselves in these kinds of entities.

I have organized the paper into seven sections. After the introduction, I present a broad overview of two main perspectives on networks that can be identified in the literature. The next two sections discuss each of the perspectives in more detail. The following section examines school networks in the light of the structure *versus* agency dichotomy. I then present and discuss two important oversimplifications that are commonly held about school networks. The final section offers some concluding remarks.

## 2. Two main perspectives on networks

There are two main perspectives that cut across the literature on networks (Lima, 2013): one is developed mainly by academics who have no direct involvement in actual planned networks; the other is predominantly adopted by people who have an interest in investing in networks or who are practically involved in them. I call the first perspective the analytical/structural approach, and the second perspective the utilitarian/instrumental approach. The former prevails in fields such as sociology and social psychology and, more recently, in physics, and the latter perspective is adopted mostly by private and public management and policy researchers, as well as by practitioners from many distinct fields, including education. The main features of the two perspectives are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Two main perspectives on networks

	<i>Analytical/structural</i>	<i>Utilitarian/Instrumental</i>
Predominant focus	Structure	Agency
Concept of network	Broad	Narrow
Nature of structure	Emergent	Fabricated
Predominant fields of study	Sociology, Social Psychology, Physics	Private and Public Management, Policy Studies, Education

Let's look closely at how each of these perspectives approaches networks.

### 2.1. The analytical/structural perspective

For scholars working within the analytical perspective, network theory and analysis is attractive because it appears to offer "a rigorous, quantitative method to study individuals and organizations in relationships with one another" (Galaskiewicz, 2007, p. 2). This perspective is distinctive for having devoted considerable thought to developing "a networked *way of thinking* about the world" (Watts, 2003, p. 16).

In this perspective, there is a preferential focus on network structure rather than on actor agency. In other words, analysts are more interested in the way ties between actors are structured and give rise to specific structural forms than in how actors experience and manipulate these ties and their network. The focus is on structurally understanding the network, rather than on using it.

Secondly, the perspective adopts a broad, flexible concept of structure. Structural analysts tend to see networks everywhere, even in places where practitioners and lay people see none. To use Barabási's (2003) words, "networks are present everywhere. All we need is an eye for them" (p. 7). For analytically minded scholars, a network is a network, regardless of whether you call it as such or not.

Thirdly, and importantly, in the analytical perspective, structure is conceived as emergent. Structures are regarded as resulting from interactions between actors, whether these actors actually intended to build those structures or not – intentionally or not, any kind of relatively regular interaction between three or more actors is seen as giving rise to a network.

## 2.2. The utilitarian/instrumental approach

The utilitarian approach has a quite different nature: it seeks primarily not to understand networks as objects of scientific inquiry, but, above all, to create and manage them. Utilitarian's' preferential focus is on agency. They conceive networks predominantly as instruments of action. This gives way to a narrower definition of the network concept. A network is understood simply as a specific, formally constituted organizational arrangement intentionally designed to achieve a particular set of outcomes.

Utilitarians are interested mostly in building ideal network structures that are most effective in producing particular desired outcomes. Here, similarly to the analytic perspective, there is a valuation of network structure, but with an important qualification: structure matters to utilitarians only insofar as a reflection on structure helps them improve the utilitarian function of the network; every other question about structure, however academically or theoretically interesting, is ignored or left in brackets.

Until now, in the literature on networks in education, there have been far fewer formal analytical assessments of networks than utilitarian approaches to them.

I will now turn to the major contributions that each perspective has made to our knowledge of networks. This will be followed by a discussion of how both perspectives can be brought together theoretically, in such a way that helps us achieve a more satisfactory, complete conceptualization of school networks.

## 3. The analytical/ structural point of view

For analysts of networks, "network" is a too generic word. In their view, the key issue is exactly what *form* (or *structure*) a network takes – the assumption being that not all networks are the same and that different network forms, or structures, have different implications for actors and systems and potentially produce different outcomes.

Sewell (1992) referred to structure as "one of the most important and most elusive terms in the vocabulary of current social science" (p. 1). For scholars working in the context of the analytical approach, network structure has a precise, unambiguous meaning. A widely agreed-upon definition states that "network structure consists of the nodes that comprise the network; the ties that connect the nodes; and the patterns, structures and nature of the relationships that result from these connections" (Popp et al., 2014, p. 12).

The idea of giving epistemological primacy to actors' ties over their individual characteristics is a foundational premise of the analytical field. In order to dispute an approach to social interaction that rests on the primacy of the acting social agent, structurally minded network researchers have sought to establish what they view as the central principles of the network approach. Among these principles is the notion that actor behavior must be interpreted "in terms of structural constraints on activity, rather than in terms of inner forces within units (e.g., 'socialization to norms') that impel behavior in a voluntaristic, sometimes teleological, push toward a desired goal" (Wellman, 1988, p. 20).

Within the analytical approach, relevant network structure issues can be classified into two broad categories: whole-system structural properties and ones related to individual members' structural locations in the network (Lima, 2010; for applications, see Lima, 2008). Whole-system structural properties refer to configurational characteristics of a network as a whole, while information about actors' structural locations enables researchers to

understand how actors' positions within the network help understand their behaviors, perceptions, attitudes, opportunities and constraints.

Working within this tradition, I have argued elsewhere that there are three main aspects of whole-system network structure that analysts may focus on when studying networks: density, centralization and connectedness/fragmentation (Lima, 2010).

### **DENSITY**

Density has a precise technical meaning in social network research. It is computed as the proportion of the actual number of ties in a network in relation to the maximum number of ties that are possible in that network (Scott, 1991; Wasserman & Faust, 1994). Density can be viewed as a measure of network cohesion, which is useful both for understanding the relational profile of a network and also for comparing different networks of approximately the same size. In denser networks, behavioral norms are usually "clearer, more firmly held and easier to enforce" (Granovetter, 2005, p. 34).

### **CENTRALIZATION**

Network centralization indicates the tendency of a single member of a network to be significantly more central than all other actors in the network (Freeman, 1979). High centralization values indicate that one or a few actors are highly central in the network and the rest much less so, while low centralization values mean that actors' levels of interaction in the network do not differ significantly. This network structural property is an excellent indicator of power, popularity and influence patterns in intra- and inter-organizational networks (Brass & Burkhardt, 1992), a much-neglected theme in educational research.

### **CONNECTEDNESS**

Connectedness alludes to the extent to which the different regions of a network form an inter-related whole. Sometimes connectedness is low and the network is "partitioned into sub-sets of actors where internal cohesion is much greater than their members' links to the wider network" (Lima, 2010, p. 7). Extreme levels of fragmentation can lead to the breaking up of the network into totally disconnected segments.

Contrary to what most people who use the network term believe, many networks are highly fragmented. Even the Internet – the supposedly most highly connected network on the face of the planet – is fragmented into several continents and islands (Lawrence & Giles, 1998, 1999), so much that even powerful search engines like Google aren't able to capture significant portions of information in it (Barabási, 2003). This simple example suggests that we should view networks as ranging among several possible levels of connectedness, rather than as systems consistently characterized by a high degree of inter-relatedness.

## **3.1. The contribution of social network analysis**

Social network analysis offers a set of concepts and analytical tools that can be used to study the structure of whole networks and the connections between actors or specific groups of actors (Borgatti, Everett & Johnson, 2013). These tools enable analysts to determine and quantify density, centralization and connectedness levels, to compute information on actors' structural network locations, to better understand communication lines, to identify the key players in the network, to map information flows and to spot possible threats to connectivity (Cross & Thomas, 2009; Provan, Veazie, Staten, & Teufel-Shone, 2005). Software programs such as UCINET, Pajek, Netdraw, SIENA and Visone perform computations and generate sociograms that reveal "the relationships, the actors in the relationships, and the nature of the relationships" and allow the researcher to derive diagnostic results from this information (Kapucu & Demiroz, 2011, p. 555).

Social network analysis programs can depict the connections among actors within a network along a single dimension or on multiple dimensions of activity. These programs also allow us to visualize how a network progresses over time.

In short, the contributions of the analytical/structural approach to networks are relevant and far-reaching. It has helped us to better understand networks, but also to keep in mind that structure is not just some elegant abstract quality that academics love to speculate about: in real-life networks, *structure matters*.

## 4. The utilitarian point of view

As we have seen previously, utilitarians have an instrumental view of networks: they are interested in them because they believe that they are useful for achieving a given purpose. If school networks have increasingly attracted the interest of practitioners and policymakers (e.g., Veugelers & O'Hair, 2005; Katz, Earl & Jaafar, 2009), it is mostly because these individuals and entities regard these formations as instrumental for accomplishing their educational goals.

### 4.1. Potential benefits of school networks

Schools and teachers can have many reasons for joining or forming a collaborative alliance with several partners. Networks in education can potentially function as effective forums for sharing knowledge about “best practices” and for offering teachers professional development opportunities across organizational boundaries. They can work as an appropriate model for making available swift, flexible ways of diffusing up-to-date knowledge and practices across organizational borders. These potential benefits are well documented in a small number of studies on networks in education (Lima, 2013).

In order to make concrete these potential benefits, utilitarians have reflected on the best ways to structure their networks. This debate has not yet developed significantly in the educational field, but elsewhere there have been proposals for the best, most effective network arrangements.

### 4.2. Classifications of networks based on the utilitarian perspective

Based on the notion that some network forms are more useful than others, utilitarians have come up with their own typologies or classifications of networks. A particularly interesting typology, which has had a strong impact on the public administration and management literature, was proposed by Provan and Kenis (2008), who laid out three alternative “network governance modes”: shared governance, governance by a lead organization, and governance by a network administrative organization (NAO). In the shared governance model, there is no formal administrative entity – all members ensure the management and leadership of the network. In the lead organization mode, a leading member ensures network management and administration. Finally, in the network administrative organization mode, the management of the network is accomplished by a separate administrative entity that is hired by the network or externally designated to manage it (Provan & Lemaire, 2012). According to the authors, each of these three models can be an appropriate option under different conditions (Provan & Kenis, 2008). In their view, shared governance seems to be preferable for small networks (with no more than 6 to 8 members) where trust is widely distributed, goal consensus is high and decision-making is decentralized. In contexts where trust is narrowly distributed, the network has a moderate size, consensus is moderately low and decision-making is centralized, a lead organization model is preferred. Finally, when trust is moderately distributed, the size of the network is medium to high, consensus is moderately high and decision-making represents a mix of centralized and decentralized procedures, the network administrative organization solution (monitored by network members) is recommended.

It is not clear, however, if and when these models are adequate for networks implemented specifically in an educational context, as opposed to a policy, public administration, private management or public-private partnership context. Also, even in more general contexts such as these, the evidence for the desirability of the models seems to be mixed, although the Network Administrative Organization (NAO) option seems to have received the most support so far from scholars publishing in the public management and administration field (e.g., Raab et al., 2013).

However, in education, a study by Schulz and Geithner (2010) advocates the adoption of a network structure organized as a “learning platform” (Ciborra, 1996), where representatives of the network meet to exchange views and develop joint work. This model closely resembles the shared governance structure conceptualized by Provan and Kenis (2008). This example suggests that it is important that education practitioners and policymakers avoid uncritically importing into education organizational models that seem to have produced good

results elsewhere. Yet, the bottom line is that there is still insufficient research and evidence to test the effectiveness of any of these organizational structures, either in education or elsewhere.

## 5. Structure and agency in networks

The analytical/utilitarian dichotomy that I have sketched out previously can be related to an important standing debate that has dominated the social sciences for quite some time, referring to the relation between social structures and social actors' agency.

Structuralists emphasize how structures have primacy over agency in shaping human behavior. However, this view has been increasingly challenged by advocates of a greater recognition of human agency in explanations of the constitution and evolution of social networks (Emirbayer & Goodwin, 1994; Galaskiewicz, 2007; Salancik, 1995). The critics underline that social actors are not pre-programmed and totally constrained by social structures – that they are capable of acting independently and of freely making their own choices. It is no surprise that such a position would be much more attractive to holders of the utilitarian perspective, given, as we have seen, their focus on actors' deliberate planning and management of network structures.

Proponents of a more theoretical recognition of the importance of agency in social networks emphasize what they regard as the limitations of the concept of structure in most social science writing. These limitations have been the object of severe critiques by some key social science theorists. Sewell (1992), a prominent critic of the ordinary use of the concept of structure in the social sciences, pointed out several key problems in the common use of the term. For him,

the most fundamental problem is that structural or structuralist arguments tend to assume a far too rigid causal determinism in social life. Those features of social existence denominated as structures tend to be reified and treated as primary, hard, and immutable, like the girders of a building, while the events or social processes they structure tend to be seen as secondary and superficial, like the outer "skin" of a skyscraper, or as mutable within "hard" structural constraints, like the layout of offices on floors defined by a skeleton of girders. What tends to get lost in the language of structure is the efficacy of human action – or "agency" (...). A social science trapped in an unexamined metaphor of structure tends to reduce actors to cleverly programmed automatons. (Sewell, 1992, p. 2)

In fact, even when clearly formalized and measurable, the dominant notion of network structure prevalent in the network literature still allows little place for actor agency. So a way to bring actors into network research is clearly called for.

### 5.1. The duality of structure and agency in social networks

There have been important attempts in contemporary social theory to reconcile the concepts of structure and agency. The most complete and satisfactory of these is probably Anthony Giddens' (1976, 1979, 1981, 1984) "structuration theory", in which the author tries to move beyond the dualism of structure and agency.

Giddens (1984) proposed his "structuration theory" on the basis of the idea that social structures both *constrain* and *enable* social action and choice. In his concept of the "duality of structure", social structure is viewed as *both* the genesis and the product of social action (Giddens, 1981). Giddens emphasizes social actors' agency by introducing the term "reflexivity", which refers to actors' capacity to purposefully adjust their place in social structures. Social actors are thus conceived as knowledgeable, enabled agents and agency is thought of both as depending on structure and as simultaneously constituting it. As Sewell (1992) observes, commenting on Giddens' theory, "structures shape people's practices, but it is also people's practices that constitute (and reproduce) structures" (p. 4).

Giddens' conception of actors as "knowledgeable" and "enabled" implies that they have the capacity to deal with the structures that constrain them in innovative, imaginative ways. Importantly, if we regard this capacity as a collective process, then actors may be able to transform the very structures that empower them with the

ability to act. As Sewell (1992) argues, “agency is collective as well as individual. (...) [It is] profoundly social or collective. (...) Agency entails an ability to coordinate one’s actions with others and against others, to form collective projects, to persuade, to coerce, and to monitor the simultaneous effects of one’s own and others’ activities” (p. 21).

The implications of this conception for a vision of networks as both structured and agentic are profound. Sewell’s (1992) emphasis on the collective nature of agency is key to a better understanding of the relation between structure and agency in social networks in general and in school networks, in particular. Giddens’ (1984) work on the duality of structure and Sewell’s (1992) rethinking of the notions of structure and agency in the social sciences provide fruitful conceptual avenues for looking at networks in a way that gives special attention to the ways that actors “create, perpetuate, and modify structure through their actions” (Gulati & Srivastava, 2014, p. 76).

## 5.2. Agency processes within networks

A theoretical consideration of agentic processes in networks needs to be based on a clear definition of the concept of “network action”. I understand this concept here in the sense proposed by Gulati and Srivastava (2014), who define network action as the choices that actors make with respect to one or more social ties. The authors highlight four primary network actions that network actors can take with regard to a social tie:

- \_ acquiring – forming a new tie where none existed previously exist;
- \_ activating – converting pre-existing dormant or latent ties into active ones;
- \_ altering – changing the content that flows through a pre-existing tie;
- \_ adjusting – deactivating a tie (by shifting it from an active to a dormant or latent state) or purposely severing it.

It is possible to recognize some of these actions, for example, in Christakis and Fowler’s (2009) elaboration on what they call the “rules of life in social networks”. While recognizing the impact of structure on actors’ behavior and opportunities, Christakis and Fowler also emphasize that actors shape their networks in important ways. They do so:

- \_ firstly, by choosing who they interact with;
- \_ secondly, by deciding how many actors they want to be connected to;
- \_ thirdly, by influencing how densely interconnected their network is (that is, by promoting *versus* not promoting ties between other actors in their network);
- \_ and finally, by controlling how central they are in the network (through actively nurturing and seeking new ties *versus* actively staying on the sidelines).

If we multiply these individual behaviors and micro-decisions by every actor in a network, we obtain a dynamic multitude of structural possibilities. Network structures are not static: they evolve as result of these micro-level, multi-actor behaviors. Through the aggregation and differential combination of micro-level interactions, actor agency gives rise to network architectures (Ahuja, Soda & Zaheer, 2012), which subsequently frame actors’ agency. Recent work on the role and relational activity of network orchestrators (Paquin & Howard-Grenville, 2013) is a good example of how network members actively make use of their agentic possibilities to purposefully shape network processes and structures.

Still, most of the work that I have referred to so far relates almost exclusively to actor agency *within* networks. However, a comprehensive focus on network actor agency needs to take into consideration not only action *in* networks but also action *through* networks. Both are necessary in a complete theory of the duality of structure in networks. To understand action *in* networks, one needs to analyze how individual members or groups of members dynamically interact with one another within the network and how this eventually brings about transformations in their structural positions and in the very processes that characterize the networks’ operation. To understand action *through* networks, one needs to focus on *the network itself as a collective actor* and

to examine how it behaves, operates and performs in different fields of social life. This latter aspect has been even less researched than action within networks.

## 6. Myths and oversimplifications about school networks

The recognition that there is agency in networks doesn't imply that networks will necessarily enable actors to materialize everything that they desire or dream of. To illustrate this idea, let's take a simple example from ordinary, social life. We all know of people who have decided to lose weight, so they bought a nice treadmill to have at home and to do daily exercise, but days have passed, and then weeks, and then months, and they still haven't lost any weight.

Well, having or being in a network can be a little like having a treadmill at home: it's not worth owning if you don't use it. No question, owning your treadmill will probably make you feel better about yourself, as you feel you've invested in something worthwhile, but the fact is that objectively your condition may not improve at all. In fact, it can even become worse: your financial status may worsen as a result of having spent so much money on this piece of equipment and, in terms of weight, you can still be right where you were before you bought it. So you cannot simply assume that having a treadmill is necessarily better than not having it at all. The same can be said about networks.

Indeed, networks have the potential to be faddish (Bate, 2000) and they can be adopted only superficially. While networks often represent adequate organizational solutions to complex problems, they also face operational, performance and even legal roadblocks that compromise their effectiveness (McGuire & Agranoff, 2011). In the utilitarian, instrumentalist approach to networks, there is insufficient recognition of these limitations.

In a recent reflection on the problems and tensions inherent in school networks (Lima, 2013), I have listed numerous important, recurrent difficulties that many networks of schools experience. I will not go in detail into each of these potential problems here. Instead, I will highlight two relevant issues, related to the limitations of networks, which are worth discussing in more depth. More specifically, I will elaborate on the possibility that networks face two important, interrelated problems, both of which point to a superficial adoption of the network model: (1) the emergence of core/periphery patterns within the network and (2) delusive community.

### 6.1. The emergence of core/periphery patterns within the network

In order to understand how a network of schools is actually structured and evolves, it is relevant that we look not only at what organizations are members of the network, but also at which members of these organizations are actually representing their institution in the network. It is often the case that representatives of schools who regularly participate in most networks are school managers or representatives of school management. As I have warned elsewhere, "the generally held but largely untested assumption is that these individuals serve as bridges between the network and actors affiliated with the participant organizations, but not directly involved in the network's activities" (Lima, 2010, p. 12). However, we know very little about how well connected these individuals are in their home organizations. There is a risk that they are the only people benefiting from network participation, while their school colleagues remain unaffected by what goes on at the "network" level. The literature does portray situations in which these individuals are poorly connected within their own organization. For example, Lieberman and McLaughlin (1992) allude to "the sometimes chilly reception that network teachers encounter in their schools or departments" (p. 675) and Rusch (2005) mentions that "network members report hostility, ruptured relationships, and marginalization when they attempt to share their learning in their home school district" (p. 87). We should keep in mind that the potential benefits of a schools' participation in a network strongly depend on the strength of connection of the schools' representatives within their own organizations. When this level of connection is poor or inexistent, some schools and teachers can remain in the periphery of the school network to which their organization formally belongs.

This process can give rise to core-periphery structures within the network – an entity that is supposedly a flat, highly interactive organization with multiple, dense links between most members. A good empirical illustration of this phenomenon can be found in a recent study of school networks conducted by Paquin and Howard-Grenville (2013). The authors' results show that participation in the network can have a clear impact

on school representatives in the network's platform, at least at the subjective, attitudinal level, but impact on the home schools may be much more problematic. Findings reported in another study, conducted by Schulz and Geithner (2010), point in the same direction. The authors report that "within the network, ideas and concepts were shared (95 percent), problems from school practice were discussed (93 percent) and experiences were exchanged (92 percent). (...) [However], the implementation of network ideas in the schools got the lowest positive ranking (59 percent)" (p. 75). As the authors themselves put it, "it can be observed that development processes of single persons at the platform level do not necessarily bring about development processes on the organizational level" (Schulz & Geithner, 2010, pp. 82-83).

## 6.2. Delusive community

Another common oversimplification present in current utilitarian discourses on networks in education is that school networks are naturally educational communities. The implicit theory behind this idea is that networks will naturally generate professional learning communities where, through extended interaction with colleagues, educators will produce new knowledge and design novel practices that will subsequently be transferred into the schools that are members of the network (Earl & Katz, 2005). My previous emphasis on core/periphery patterns in networks suggests that this is not necessarily the case.

Utilitarians expect that the use of networks will lead to the development of "communities of practice" (Wenger, 2000). However, "before knowledge and learning can start to be transferred, the community must exist" (Addicott, McGivern & Ferlie, 2007, p. 96).

In face of the widespread confusion between the concepts of network and community, I have systematized elsewhere (Lima, 2012) some of the conditions that are necessary for communities to exist in networks. I have done this by sketching out some fundamental pre-requisites for a network to be considered as a community. A network is not necessarily a community when it is merely:

- \_ *a self-proclaimed community* – having a set of teachers or of educational organizations that self-entitle themselves as a "community" does not automatically turn them into one;
- \_ *an officially or administratively declared community* – officially labeling a set of teachers or of schools with some designation that includes the term "community" does not mean that we have to interpret it as such;
- \_ *a mere community of affection* – a professional community should not be confused with an array of mere emotional affiliations (e.g., a set of colleagues who join together and frequently communicate solely for emotional reasons and for purposes of mere personal support, without explicit and expanded professional involvement) (Lima, 2001);
- \_ *a communication network with a high level of centralization* – a group of teachers or school organizations in which the overwhelming majority of relational activities are focused on a single actor or on a small set of actors can hardly be understood as a community, since most of its members remain alienated from what most of the others think, say or do.

Therefore, we need independent criteria for the empirical identification of professional communities in networks, criteria that allow us to distinguish these communities from mere clusters of teachers or school organizations.

From a technical point of view, a community is simply a set of actors that have something in common. The problem with many network community analyses is that this "something" that actors have in common, and which is adopted as a criterion for defining membership in a community, is often too trivial, too superficial – a mere minimum common denominator between actors, rather than something that connects them strongly through intense interaction and collective identification.

So it is important that we pay close attention to what it is that actors have in common in a so-called network "community". If it is simply a similarity in some superficial feature, like being in the same geographical area or having formal membership in the same organization, or even being acquainted with most of the other actors in the network, then, from a conceptual point of view, this is clearly insufficient. The technical dimension of the concept, which focuses exclusively on ties or similarities between actors, is important, but it runs the risk

of overlooking a key aspect – the *cultural* dimension of communities. Many network analyses of communities apply a merely technical definition of the term and this is the main reason why they are so limited.

The cultural dimension, understood here in its deepest anthropological sense, is key to a comprehensive conception of community in networks. To be communities, the members of the organizations involved in a network will need to display the following cultural features, both *within* and *across* schools (Lima, 2013):

- \_ *to be together* – a community necessarily implies the occurrence of regular encounters among its members, preferably face to face, but not necessarily, given the increasing availability of means that technologically mediate interpersonal interaction. No significant community exists without communication. But this communication must be of a special kind. On the one hand, it cannot be too centralized or unidirectional. So a group of professionals who interact almost exclusively with a single colleague (or a small group of colleagues) or who only receive unilaterally communication from that colleague or small group of colleagues cannot be considered a community. Furthermore, this interaction needs to be *frequent* (involving numerous, regular communication episodes), *intense* (developed at significant levels of professional depth) and *comprehensive* (i.e., addressing various areas of work life and not only one or two very specific issues) (Lima, 2002);
- \_ *to act together* – in schools, no matter how important communication is, it will always be limited if the interaction is only conversational (Lima, 2002). While speech can and should be understood as a fundamental social practice, it needs to be associated with more concrete behavioral components: the development of joint practices, such as the design and production of teaching materials, the definition of collective action plans, the joint production of strategic documents, the exchange of materials, the regular assessment of work, the organization and implementation of mentoring initiatives, etc., etc.
- \_ *to be in common* – a professional community is more than a purely objective entity that exists independently of the consciousness of its members. In this respect, professional identity and the sense of belonging that goes with it are key. There is no professional community in a network without an ontological and phenomenological dimension, reflected mainly in the sense that its members have of being part of a larger whole with which they identify;
- \_ *to feel in common* – being in common is associated with feeling in common, that is, with a coherent set of perceptions and evaluations of common phenomena by the various members of the network. When group identification is strong, members share a deeply collective culture, they collectively produce it and reproduce it, and they look at the world through the eyes of the group rather than merely through their individual points of view;
- \_ *to endure together* – finally, a community is durable: it lasts in time (Noddings, 1996) and survives the entry or exit of any specific member, including its main leader. This criterion emphasizes the primacy of continuity over the ephemeral. Only this enduring over time will allow for the production of culture and the consolidation of a collective identity.

## 7. Conclusion

In this paper I have argued that two main, very different perspectives dominate the network literature: the analytical/structural approach and the utilitarian/instrumental approach. Each has strengths and weaknesses, which on the one hand help us better understand networks but on the other hand place limits on this understanding. Structural analysts have made important contributions to our knowledge of networks. They have offered us concepts, a vocabulary and methodological strategies and tools for characterizing and assessing these entities. Unfortunately, they have often held a static view of networks and overly deterministic notions of actors' structural locations and destinations. However, this is gradually changing and the network analysis field is increasingly acknowledging and recognizing the role of agency in network genesis, operation and evolution. Utilitarians, on the other hand, dream of networks and fantasize about them. They often hold simplistic assumptions about networks and what they can deliver. They have excessively optimistic views of what networks can achieve and difficulty in recognizing the limitations of these organizational formats. But they are also the people who get things done in the real world – many of them don't just talk networks, they do networks. So they have an experiential notion of agency that can be useful for enriching our view of how networks are formed, evolve and operate. Although the dialectics between both of these modes of understanding are far from linear, each side has definitely got something significant to contribute to a more comprehensive conceptualization of networks in general and of networks of schools, in particular.

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## SCHOOL NETWORKS, KNOWLEDGE CIRCULATION AND SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT: THE ESCXEL PROJECT'S RESEARCH AGENDA

Susana Batista<sup>16</sup>, Eva Gonçalves<sup>17</sup>, Rui Santos<sup>18</sup>

### Abstract

ESCXEL Project – School Network for Excellence is a network of public schools in eight Portuguese municipalities, the respective local authorities and a research team in CICS.NOVA, an interdisciplinary centre of social sciences at Nova University of Lisbon. This paper presents ESCXEL's activities in order to illustrate the roles of knowledge within a school network. Three main axes of ESCXEL's activities are explored: a) *benchmarking* of results in national exams; b) *collaborative learning* in seminars and training; c) data collection, analysis and dissemination for *local planning*. All of them illustrate new ways in which knowledge circulates among different actors involved in the political process, pointing not only to regulation mechanisms of school practices but also to the potential use of knowledge as a resource to define problems and action plans at the local level.

**Keywords:** school networks; knowledge circulation; regulation; benchmarking; collaborative learning

### 1. The ESCXEL Project: an empirical reality to study new modes of regulation in education

For the last three decades, education systems worldwide have known normative transformations on their organization and management, in a context of decentralization and school autonomy policies. These changes favour the emergence of decentralized, horizontal and networked forms of regulation and configure a complex regulation system of education, promoted by different scales and actors (Barroso, 2005).

School networks are being conceptualized as a new school administration and organization tool based on horizontal relationships in order to achieve common goals. They constitute a form of voluntary regulation of a collaborative nature (Justino & Batista, 2014): they derive from the organizations' or the actors' own will, and their joint action guides, conditions or influences the allocation and management of resources and the goals and results of educational action. Within this framework, some salient questions arise, such as: How are networks in education built and by whom? How do they work and for what purpose(s)? Do they constitute a regulatory instance in education systems?

In Portugal, projects involving networks or partnerships between schools and other educational actors are becoming more common nowadays, trying to address issues such as the promotion of educational success and the reduction of school-leaving, or to draw attention to questions like the environment or volunteering. A certain number of these projects emerged from the initiative of schools, university researchers, local actors or civil society organizations.

This paper aims to present a Portuguese school network, the ESCXEL Project – School Network for Excellence. Through the description of its main activities, it is possible to raise questions about the role of producing and sharing knowledge in a school network. On the one hand, there are specific knowledge-based mechanisms in this school network which can be seen as tools for regulating school practices. On the other hand, the circulation of knowledge in this school network constitutes a resource for local action.

The ESCXEL Project is a network based on a partnership between public schools of eight municipalities (which count 38 school units totalling 166 schools<sup>19</sup>, in which are enrolled around 59.500 students), their local authorities, and CICS.NOVA, an interdisciplinary research centre<sup>20</sup>. This project was born in 2008 from the initiative of some researchers and their interpretation of the Portuguese educational system's trends and challenges. Its main goal is to foster a continuing endeavor to improve quality and performance in its schools. "Excellence" does not mean a state of top quality: ESCXEL network and its schools do not claim to be the best, but rather

16 CICS.NOVA, Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas da Universidade Nova de Lisboa (FCSH-NOVA), Portugal. Email: susanabatista@fcs.unl.pt

17 CICS.NOVA, FCSH-NOVA, Portugal. Email: evapdongalves@gmail.com

18 CICS.NOVA, FCSH-NOVA, Portugal. Email: rsantos@fcs.unl.pt

19 The Portuguese school system has been rearranged during the last years by grouping individual schools into "school clusters". Here, "school units" refers either to those clusters, or to individual schools as yet unclustered, which remain as discrete establishments. For commodity's sake, we will henceforth use the term "schools" for both situations.

20 CICS.NOVA is a research centre at Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities from Universidade Nova de Lisboa (FCSH-UNL).

that they are working each day to improve, following Aristotle thoughts suggestively summarized by Durant (2006 [1926], p. 98) that “We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit”.

The specific aims derived from this general goal consist on capacitating schools and communities (comprising students, teachers, parents, policy agents and citizens) to promote educational excellence; support municipalities in the adoption of local educational development plans; identify, disseminate and monitor “good practice”; develop self-evaluation processes; and produce scientific knowledge about education. To achieve those aims, researchers mobilize scientific competencies, local authorities contribute with mobilization and coordination of resources, and schools offer their experience and innovation capacities (see Gonçalves, Cunha & Batista, 2011). In the next section, we present ESCXEL’s activities along three main axes: a) benchmarking of results in national exams; b) collaborative learning in seminars and training; c) data collection, analysis and dissemination for local planning. In each of those axes, we will illustrate our purposes with examples and some quotations from principals’ interviews and a focus-group of department coordinators, which were conducted in an exploratory study on the use of ESCXEL activities in three schools with diverse academic and socioeconomic realities and results (Batista & Gonçalves, 2015).

## 2. ESCXEL’s activities

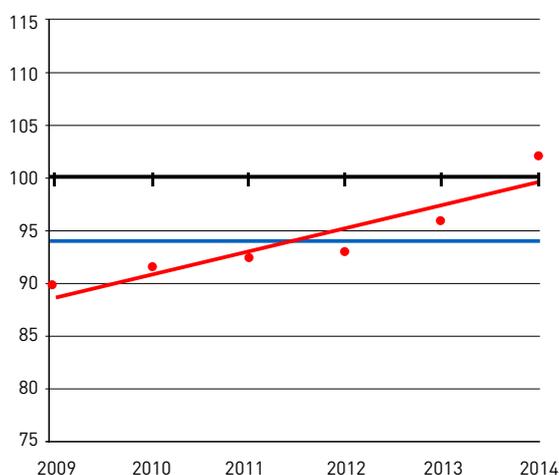
### 2.1. Systematic analysis of results in national exams: *benchmarking*

Since the beginning of the ESCXEL Project, researchers have drawn and disseminated annual reports analysing schools’ and municipalities’ results in national exams. Those reports contain several statistical indicators, which were improved throughout the years according to the users’ feedback.

Results on national exams are always analysed in relation to the national average marks, using an index in order to eliminate spurious variation due to differences in the exams’ difficulty over the years. Annual indexes are obtained dividing the average marks in each school and municipality by the national average, multiplied by 100. The national value therefore corresponds to the constant index basis of 100.

Most figures and tables track school or municipality average indexes and their progression trend over a 6-year series<sup>21</sup>. As we can see in Figure 1, the results of School A are compared to the national average (which equals 100). Each point represents that year’s index; the blue line is the index average in the analysed period; the red line represents the progression of results. In this case, although the school average in the six-years period was 6% below the national average (index average: 94,0), the progression of results was positive, and in the final year the average of School A in national exams was above the national average.

Figure 1. Average marks index in national lower secondary education exams in Mathematics in School A, 2009-2014, national average marks = 100



<sup>21</sup> It might be asked why the researchers defined a 6-year period to analyze school and municipality results in national exams. This was not a wholly arbitrary decision, as the Portuguese 12-grade schooling system is organized, according to international nomenclature, into two main 6-year levels with two cycles each (elementary, 4+2 and secondary, 3 lower + 3 upper). A 12-year period would be too distant from current school practice to make sense for school actors, and too many things might have changed in the school system in the meantime. A 6-year period thus seemed to be a reasonable choice.

These indicators are then related and summarized in an easy-to-read benchmarking tool called scoreboard, which compares all ESCXEL schools and municipalities. The scoreboards are tables encoded according to a “traffic lights system”, from green = good to red = bad, as in the example in Figure 2.

These tables present three summary indicators for each education stage and discipline:

- i) the 6-year average in relation to the national average (A, equivalent to the blue line in Figure 1, where a value of 100 or more is denoted in bright green; a value between 95 and 100 in light green; a value between 95 and 85 in yellow, and, finally, a value of 85 or less in red;
- ii) the 6-year progression trend<sup>22</sup> (P, equivalent to slope of the red line in Figure 1), where improvement is coloured green (2 or superior bright green; higher than 0 and below 2 light green), stable or slightly negative yellow, and decreases of 2% or more a year red;
- iii) the outlook (O), a qualitative measure which combines the two previous indicators according to predefined criteria.

Figure 2. Scoreboard for lower secondary education exams in Mathematics, 2009-2014 (example)

		Mathematics		
		A	P	O
Municipality A	School B	Bright Green	Bright Green	Bright Green
Municipality A	School D	Bright Green	Light Green	Bright Green
Municipality A	School A	Yellow	Bright Green	Light Green
Municipality C	School F	Red	Bright Green	Light Green
Municipality G	School I	Bright Green	Yellow	Light Green
Municipality G	School H	Yellow	Light Green	Yellow
Municipality G	School J	Red	Light Green	Yellow
Municipality B	School E	Light Green	Yellow	Yellow
Municipality K	School L	Bright Green	Red	Yellow
Municipality K	School K	Yellow	Yellow	Red
Municipality G	School G	Red	Yellow	Red
Municipality K	School M	Light Green	Red	Red
Municipality A	School C	Red	Red	Red

Schools and municipalities are ranked primarily according to outlook, which is consistent with ESCXEL’s main focus on improvement. This means that even if a school has obtained an average equal or superior to the national average (A = bright green), if the progression is negative and inferior to 2% (P = red), the outlook will be negative (O= yellow) and the school will not appear in the top positions (as is the case of School L in Figure 2).

<sup>22</sup> Progression is measured by the slope of the regression line mathematically adjusted to the set of the indexes’ values obtained by the school or municipality over the years under analysis.

Conversely, in the cases of Schools A and F in Figure 2 their good progressions (P = bright green) compensated for their average results being below national average (A = yellow and red, respectively), and the resulting positive outlook (O= light green) positioned these schools at the top area of the table.

The elaboration and dissemination of these reports and indicators became one of the key activities of the researchers' team. This activity contributes to the creation of a benchmarking culture among schools, in the sense that principals and teachers are now able to compare performances in relation to common references, particularly to the national average and to comparable ESCXEL schools. This feature is particularly evident in the following statement:

We never had another referential [before ESCXEL]. [...] It is good to have references and to know how very far or close to the norm we are (Principal 2).

The scoreboards are not elaborated to be used merely as school or municipality rankings. They are comparative maps in which each school can locate itself and, more importantly, identify other schools with which to compare itself. Schools are then able to use this network as a benchmark platform and learn from practices in comparable schools. In this sense, as argued by Barroso and Afonso (2011), the indicators can generate new circuits of knowledge and diffusion of good practice:

When we look at the comparative results, we identify municipalities with some [...] similarity in terms of size and in terms of type of students and we ask why they have better results [...]. If there is a form of organization that we can replicate which will better prepare our kids in terms of learning, we are receptive (Principal 1).

More recently, indicators of the socioeconomic context of school results at the municipal level were built upon multiple linear regression models of average exam marks at each education stage on municipal-level socioeconomic variables, such as sociodemographic, socioeconomic or educational variables (Batista, Franco & Santos, 2014). Since the regression models displayed a considerable weight of socioeconomic contexts on exam results, the derived indicators are a reliable measure of socioeconomic underpinnings of results at the aggregate municipal level<sup>23</sup>.

It is possible, then, to contextualize the municipalities' results and measure the deviation of observed results to regression estimates. As shown in Table 1, the reports state whether municipalities' results are above, similar or below to those estimated according to socioeconomic indicators. Deviations provide a different kind of benchmark from which local actors can evaluate education performances, and compare to similar socioeconomic contexts.

**Table 1. Socioeconomic indicators, observed results, estimated results and deviations, lower secondary education, in three selected municipalities (Indexes average, 2009-2014)**

	Socioeconomic indicator	Indexes average (National = 100)	Estimated indexes average (National = 100)	Deviation
Municipality A	14,3	97,1	103,9	-6,8
Municipality B	5,7	96,2	95,3	0,9
Municipality C	12,3	105,5	101,9	3,6

Pending on sufficient data availability, the range of socioeconomic indicators and estimates will be extended to earlier schooling stages, as well as to different units of analysis, namely the schools.

<sup>23</sup> The models explain 35% of the variation in municipality results in national exams in the upper elementary education, 54,5% in lower secondary education and 47,4% in upper secondary education (Batista, Franco & Santos, 2014). The lower explanatory power in the former case is due to the fact that national exams were implemented more recently at that level; therefore, a shorter series was employed and the resulting averages did not iron out as much spurious variation as in the other educational levels.

## 2.2. Seminars and training: *collaborative learning*

Learning in school networks happens precisely by “sharing experiences [...], and examining different views, perspectives and experiences” (Veugeliers & O’Hair, 2005: 5). Therefore, another main activity in ESCXEL is the organization of seminars in its municipalities in order to provide a common space for school principals, teachers and municipalities’ representatives to share practices, debate specific questions and think of possible solutions. Each of these seminars has a general topic that framing the discussions, like “information and communication technologies in schools”, “school and community in the elaboration of education plans”, “pedagogical organization strategies”, and “pedagogical articulation between educational levels”, among others. The topics are defined and agreed upon in the EXCEL coordination board meetings, in which are represented all network participants. In seminars, schools shared their own experiences and listen to others:

Seminars are moments to exchange experiences with other schools, and that is very useful to us (Principal 3).

Those seminars were initially called “good practice seminars”: some schools presented to the plenary of attendants their internal projects or practices that stood out for their good results or effects. More recently, the seminar format was changed, responding to the schools’ needs for more structured information. The sharing of good practice remains at the heart of the seminars, albeit in a more framed way. Morning lectures on the selected topic are given to the plenary by experts or researchers, followed by a questions and answers period. In the afternoon, the participants are divided into three or four smaller groups to discuss specific subthemes (which can be introduced by short presentations or by a set of questions to address) and/or share specific tools and experiences related to those subthemes. In the end of the day, a summary of each of these discussions is shared with all the participants.

All seminars take place on Fridays and include a lunch gathering, besides which there is always a small and informal work meeting and a dinner the day before. Such convivial moments have been crucial to develop trust among all the network members from different schools and municipalities, which favours the establishment of a background for collaborative learning.

Training courses are another way in which collaborative learning is fostered in the ESCXEL Project. For instance, following an analysis of schools’ Educational Projects, a strategic institutional document that presents each school’s identity and main goals for a 3-year period, a team of researchers wrote down and distributed a template which schools could use to build their Educational Projects in order to overcome some critical issues identified in the analysis (namely those of unclear aims and strategies). Following a request from schools, a professional training course on Educational Projects was organized and certified by the scientific committee for teacher’s continuing training. Besides the training course contents themselves, this experience also proved to be an important way to create and strengthen the ties of the school network, through the discussion of ideas and sharing of experiences between teachers and/ or principals, as illustrated in the following statements (quoted from the training course evaluation reports):

Share of experiences/ knowledge of other schools’ reality. Professional enrichment.

It also allowed us to see which Educational Projects existed in other schools.

A second training course, requested by teachers after the first experience, is currently in place, addressing tools for data collection and systematization in school context.

In seminars and training courses, principals, teachers, municipalities’ representatives and researchers meet face to face and engage in activities that foster collaborative learning. However, as identified in an inquiry conducted in 2010 to all network members as part of the network self-assessment report, there is a need to create more possibilities for teachers to exchange ideas and resources, and follow up the discussions initiated in seminars, specifically through digital media.

### 2.3. Data collection, analysis and dissemination for *local planning*

The third core activity consists in data collection, analysis and dissemination for local education planning. This is as yet the least developed activity, and also the one in which researchers have been more involved during the last few months. This takes place at three different levels: municipalities, schools and classrooms.

At the municipal level, the research team is assisting local authorities in promoting an integrated territorial development. This work is based on a proposal to help design Municipal Educational Development Plans and to support their implementation, through the collection/ dissemination of data and the production of diagnostic and monitoring reports, in a pioneering approach on local education planning in Portugal.

The aforementioned survey applied to ESCXEL members also identified the communication between the research team and municipalities' representatives as a crucial area for improvement. In order to tackle this issue, two experienced researchers from the geography and territorial planning field joined the team, and databases are being organized with patterned information on partner municipalities.

At the school level, the research team is also organizing and presenting tables with relevant information on school variables. This information is based on a national database provided by the Ministry of Education, which integrates data on all public education establishments. Tables contain values for all ESCXEL schools and municipalities, as well as the national averages. They cover information on the size and distribution of the student population across the school offer (for instance, the number of students per class according to levels and modalities of education), demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the student population (gender, nationality, type of social support, parental education), information about the teaching staff (size, age and time of service average, students to teacher ratio) and results (retention and leaving rates according to level and modality of education).

The availability of this information allows schools to compare some of their socioeconomic and organizational characteristics; it is also important as a diagnostic for the definition of goals and school strategic planning. These are some of the issues pointed by teachers in a feedback of a first draft of these tables:

[The document] contains interesting and important data to define and characterize our school and it allows, at the same time, a comparison with other schools of this municipality and of the network [...]. Anyway this data will be taken as a starting point for a further analysis of the evolution on the improvement of the school's results.

Data on organizational variables, schools and results characterization [...] [are] a working basis for the development of school's strategic documents, namely the Educational Plan and Annual Activities Plan.

Finally, at the class level, there is a pilot project under way in one ESCXEL school called "profile classes", which aims at experimenting a different way to group students in classes in order to improve their achievement in the core disciplines of Mathematics and Portuguese, which may avoid the problems inherent to full "level" or "track classes" while still helping teachers to plan lessons according to the requirements of each child profile. "Profile classes" is a model for organizing classes and planning lessons, involving five stages: i) identifying students' profiles, ii) organizing classes, iii) selecting human resources, iv) implementing adequate teaching strategies, v) monitoring students' performance and adapt teaching strategies.

ESCXEL researchers were responsible for the first stage by analysing students' performance during the previous school year. Each student performance in Portuguese and Mathematics was analysed in comparison to the student's average final grades obtained in both disciplines in the previous school year. Whenever a student had either a negative grade in both disciplines, or a lower grade in one discipline as compared to his/her average, regardless of whether the grade was negative or positive, this was interpreted as displaying a performance deficit in those disciplines.

This analysis produced four groups of students with similar performance profiles – Group 1, deficit in Portuguese; Group 2, deficit in Mathematics; Group 3, deficit in both Portuguese and Mathematics; and Group 4, No deficit (students with similar and positive grades in both disciplines). Within each group, smaller subsets were identified according to their fragilities in each specific competency: reading, writing, grammar and oral speech

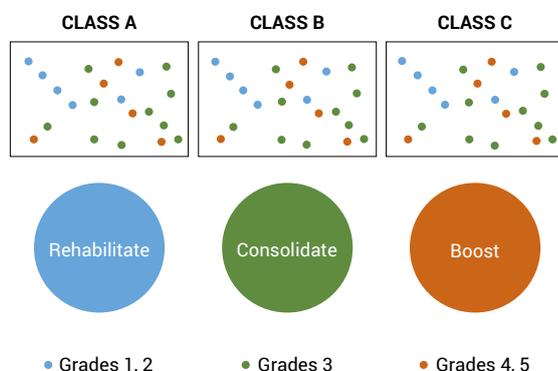
in Portuguese, and problem solving, mathematical thinking, mathematical communication and mental calculation in Mathematics, which were assessed through an analysis of the scores obtained by each student in each competency within each discipline.

Stages 2 and 3 were the responsibility of the principal's team within the school. First they organized classes according to the groups identified in stage 1, mixing students with positive and negative grades but with deficits in the same discipline. Secondly, to each Portuguese class and each Mathematics class, the principal allocated the most adequate teachers, according to the respective profile requirements. It was also necessary to organize a weekly schedule that would guarantee that all Portuguese classes in the same educational level took place at the same time, as well as all Mathematics classes.

Next stage, number 4, is the design and implementation of teaching strategies by teachers of Portuguese and Mathematics, as well as by all teachers of the main classes. For example, in a main class with students of a Portuguese profile showing deficits in reading, teachers from all disciplines may implement a strategy to have those students reading out loud a text or a problem more often.

During stage 4, teachers experimented with the new model of class organization for the main disciplines (See Figure 3). Students attend lessons in most disciplines (History, Geography, Physical education, etc.) in their main class (A, B or C). In Portuguese and Mathematics, students from all main classes with grades 1 and 2<sup>24</sup> in the discipline were dislocated to the "Rehabilitate" class to recover the competencies they needed to improve. Students with grades "3" were placed in the "Consolidate" class to consolidate their competencies, and the ones with better grades went to the "Boost" class where the assigned teacher was able to work on strategies to boost their performances.

Figure 3. An illustration of the organization of profile classes in a given discipline (Portuguese or Mathematics)

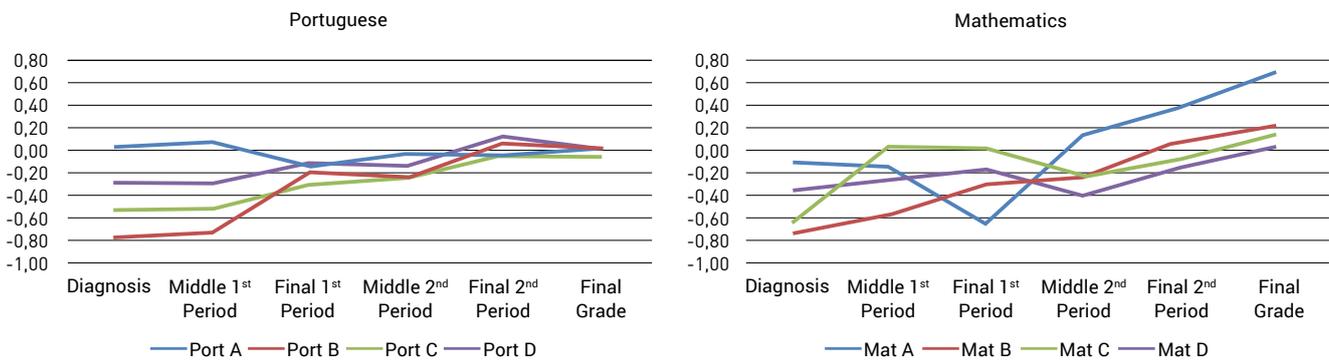


Finally, ESCXEL researchers are responsible for implementing the last stage of the model, which is to monitor students' performance. The team is currently working on the analysis of data collected since the beginning of this pilot project, in order to present stable monitoring reports on students' and class progress. For instance, Figure 4 displays the evolution of the disciplines' marks in four fifth grade main classes (A, B, C, D) throughout the school year, as deviations from the reference mark 3<sup>25</sup>.

24 Marks are scored from 1 to 5.

25 According to the rating scale, 3 is the positive threshold grade, which is why it was used as the reference mark.

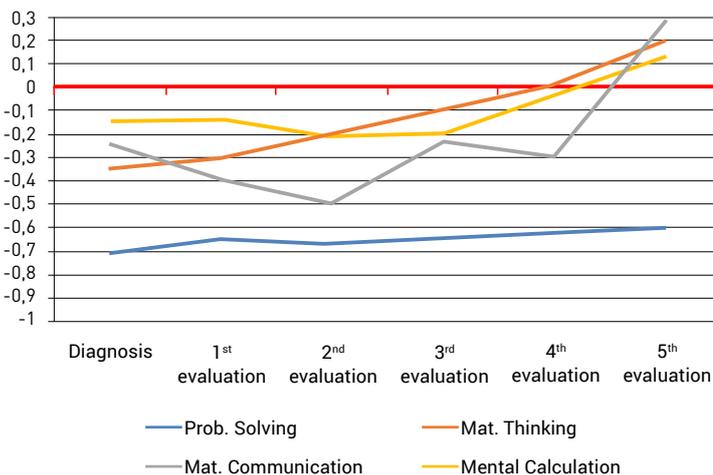
Figure 4. Evolution of disciplines grades (as differences to the reference mark = 3) in fifth grade, school year 2013/2014



In this school, classes A and D were identified as Mathematics Profile and B and C as Portuguese-Mathematics Profile. Figure 4 shows considerable improvement in the performance of classes A and D, especially the former, in students' performance in the respective profile discipline of Mathematics. The other two classes also improved over the school year, in both Mathematics and Portuguese.

The monitoring reports also provide information about each students' performance in each discipline according to the specific competencies. To complete the set of data which the teachers may use to implement the adequate strategies, researchers added information about each class's performance in key competencies (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Evolution of the average marks (as differences to the reference mark = 3) in the key competencies of fifth grade Mathematics in Class A, school year 2013/2014



For example, class A in Figure 5 shows one main deficit, that of problem solving, which all teachers, and more specifically the Mathematics teacher, should consider addressing better in their strategies. Teachers in profile classes are working on how to use monitoring reports to set and adapt strategies according to each class specific deficits.

The survey applied to ESCXEL members as part of the aforementioned self-assessment report pointed to another possible area of development within the activity of data collection, analysis and dissemination for local planning: communication between schools and students' families and surrounding communities. One researcher has concluded her PhD thesis on those subjects (Gonçalves, 2015). Upon the results of this research, pilot projects will be elaborated to improve families' formal participation and involvement in ESCXEL network.

### 3. Knowledge circulation in school networks: regulation and resource for school improvement

The ESCXEL school network, which has the particularity of having a research centre as a partner, illustrates the new relation between knowledge and policy, reflecting the wider movement towards cognitive and reflexive societies in which knowledge is at the centre of social action (Pons & Van Zanten, 2007).

First of all, the relation between knowledge and policy means that knowledge is used to create regulation tools, or becomes a regulation tool itself (Barroso & Afonso, 2011; Pons & Van Zanten, 2007). Knowledge-based regulation tools represent new ways in which public action is coordinated, based in knowledge production, dissemination and exchange among actors in the field of knowledge and political actors (Afonso & Costa, 2011). Through these types of tools, the actors' behaviour is regulated by knowledge circulation mechanisms rather than constraint. Benchmarking in ESCXEL Project can be seen as a knowledge-based regulation tool and in its own way, it promotes a regulation of practices within a school network. The same can be said about the sharing of good practice, which is a potential source for regulated actions, as they show what could be done and how (Barroso & Afonso, 2011). This constitutes a soft regulation, which effect depends on the reception, interpretation and use by local actors. In fact, the meaning of knowledge is built during its interpretation and not inscribed in the tool itself (Freeman & Sturdy, 2007 in Mangez, 2011).

The relation between knowledge and policy points, secondly, to an understanding of knowledge as a resource for action and decision making (Mangez, 2011), which depends on the local mobilization of knowledge. Some activities in ESCXEL network, like training courses or dissemination of data analysis for local planning, are specifically dedicated to capacitate actors for action (Maroy, 2013). Other activities, including the ones presented as knowledge-based regulation tools (cf benchmarking and good practices), can also be seen as resource for action, simultaneously based upon knowledge, knowledge producers and knowledge users, without rigidly set roles: at different stages in the process, all actors in the network reciprocally become producers and users drawing on each others' knowledge. In this sense, we follow Delvaux's (2009) approach, which breaks with the formal and scientific concept of knowledge and with previous linear perspectives of the traffic between knowledge producers (usually actors from the scientific field) and receivers (political actors). The new approach considers a wider definition of knowledge and studies how different actors select and combine various kinds of knowledge in the political process.

Regulation and reflexivity in a collaborative environment are present in the three underlying goals of the construction and dissemination of indicators in ESCXEL network identified by Santos (2014): i) to add new ways to analyse and present the results on national exams and their evolution, in order to "inform the perception, *problematization*, *discussion* and action orientations" of educational local actors (pp. 152-153 [our emphasis]); ii) to contribute to a collaborative and *benchmarking culture* among network members; iii) to stimulate a *self-evaluation culture* and the presentation of results to external evaluations.

In fact, knowledge produced and disseminated in ESCXEL network activities can induce self-evaluation and reflexivity processes among local actors on their educational practices and results, similarly to what happens with some external evaluation tools (Afonso & Costa, 2011; Ozga, 2008). The reflection stimulated within schools and municipal agencies by reports or by presentations in seminars contributes to the creation of new knowledge, combining codified knowledge drawn from ESCXEL activities with tacit local knowledge (Mangez, 2011). Thereby, knowledge is contextualized in social interactions within schools, which are crucial for the reconstruction of meanings and production of new meanings (Afonso & Costa, 2011).

Most of the persons interviewed in an exploratory work (Batista & Gonçalves, 2015) mentioned the use of ESCXEL reports and presentations in seminars to discuss results and instigate reflection within schools. Based upon new knowledge, these reflections contribute to the definition of problems or action plans. These are two crucial moments in the political process where knowledge is used as resource, defined by Delvaux (2009) as "problematization" and "preconization". In the following statements, we can see how reflections induced by ESCXEL network's activities can lead to the definition of new problems (generally in the form of issues to be addressed by school goals) or changes in educational or organizational practices:

ESCXEL report [...] is one of the tools which also serve to set goals and guidelines (Principal School 1).

[ESCXEL results reports] give a widening perspective because they inform us of our school's outlook. And that is important to debate the future, to make a plan and establish strategies and benchmarks for the future (Principal School 2).

We have been changing the structure of our Educational Project to ensure that all strategies and benchmarks can be evaluated with the proper indicators according to what we learned in the ESCXEL training course (Department Coordinator School 1).

All our teachers that attended [Municipality X] Seminar brought a considerable amount of ideas that were debated and some of them implemented in our school (Principal School 3).

I should tell you that we also have been improving the information we put on MISI [the digital platform which stores data on students' socioeconomic characterization]. Until two years ago, the school's administrative services uploaded data on MISI. End of story. I never bothered to go and check. And then [when ESCXEL distributed analyses based on MISI data] I noticed that there was a lot of wrong data [...]. In this issue too, it forced us to have a better look at our data [...] and now I insert the data into MISI myself (Principal School 1).

School networks are important structures that can bring about changes in education: they create the conditions for knowledge creation and sharing by and among schools (Veugelers & O'Hair, 2005) and also other actors, as it is the case in the ESCXEL network. Through ongoing discussion and reflexion, both across and within schools in networks, new ideas, tools and practices are created, in a process where the initial knowledge is substantially transformed (Veugelers & O'Hair, 2005), combining different sources and types of knowledge (Delvaux, 2009).

However, as stated by Katz, Earl and Jaafar (2009), simple connections are not enough to create significant change in practice: effective networks are learning communities, "groups of schools working together in intentional ways to enhance the quality of professional learning and to strengthen capacity for continuous improvement, in the service of enhanced student learning" (p.9). Upon ideas, practices and information from the network, actors in schools are aware of new challenges and initiate self-reflexion, which also can contribute to the development of a shared vision of education (Veugelers & O'Hair, 2005) – especially if the new knowledge produced locally is based on a professional learning community, where it is shared and helps to elaborate collective know-how in order to improve students' performance (Normand & Derouet, 2011). According to Katz, Earl and Jaafar (2009), participation in school networks fosters the development of professional learning communities in schools, by linking them to other school-based groups and allowing new and diversified circuits of knowledge creation and sharing to emerge; once new knowledge is created and shared within the school, it is likely to influence educational practices.

Our description of ESCXEL's main activities raises some important questions on the role of knowledge in education policy, in the context of new modes of regulation in educational systems. We were able to identify how, in a school network, knowledge can be used simultaneously as a regulation tool and as a resource for action in schools. However, mobilization of knowledge may differ according to schools (Batista & Gonçalves, 2015) and there is a need to explore further whether and how self-evaluation and reflexivity processes in ESCXEL network do lead to effective changes in educational practices and local institutionalization of know-how to improve students and school's results, thus setting a new topic in our evolving research agenda.

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## NETWORKING PRACTICES

Adelaide Abreu<sup>26</sup>, Paulo Antunes<sup>27</sup>, João Coelho<sup>28</sup>, Maria Clara Moreira<sup>29</sup>, Susana Neves<sup>30</sup>, Paulo Portugal<sup>31</sup>, Luís Romão<sup>32</sup>, Ilídio Vicente<sup>33</sup>

### Abstract

This work is the result of a group reflection on the role of the ESCXEL municipality coordinator in the activation of the dynamic interaction flows among CESNOVA researchers, the municipality, schools, and teachers. This is a network process in continuous mutation and evolution, which demands a critical look at the multiple relations that are constantly being built and rebuilt.

Working as a network enhances the exchange potential and constant assessment of experiences, promoting the reinforcement and assimilation of a self-assessment culture in schools, which is essential for the development of sustainable and effective education models and projects. More than reinforcing the schools' identity matrix, it has allowed us to recognize a set of common problems, for which solutions have been sought within the network.

The relational web established between the network partners has been strengthened over time, progressively being felt as something natural, required, and fruitful. People and institutions are now closer, mutual trust has grown, and the initial fear of revelation to others has vanished, giving place to the serious assumption of what each one is, with all their advantages and disadvantages, virtues and shortcomings. From this constructive dialogue we have witnessed the growth of the belief that it is always possible to do better and that for each problem there is one, or more, solutions, and that it is essential to strive in the never-ending quest for improvement.

**Keywords:** networking Practices; ESCXEL Project; Municipality Coordinator.

## 1. Introduction

This work is the result of a joint reflection on the ESCXEL Network Municipality Coordinator's role in the activation of the dynamic interaction flows between CESNOVA researchers, municipalities, schools, and teachers. This is a network process in constant mutation that requires a critical look at the multiple relations that are constantly being rebuilt.

A brief project contextualization will be made, followed by the description of the municipality coordinator's role, and finally a reflection on the implemented processes.

## 2. Project contextualization

The ESCXEL Network is a project that was created by a group of CESNOVA (Centro de Estudos de Sociologia da Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas da Universidade Nova de Lisboa) researchers, with the aim of promoting the principle of educational excellence through the creation of a network comprised of municipalities, schools and researchers, who cooperate in the exchange and evaluation of experiences in order to build educational development models.

The goal of the project is to strive for the success of every student, engaging all the educational partners in a constant and persistent quest for better solutions, better processes and better performances, which are consistent with each student, school and community's potential.

26 Agrupamento de Escolas de Carnaxide, Portugal. Email: adelabreu@gmail.com.

27 Agrupamento de Escolas do Centro de Portugal, Portugal. Email: pauloantunes1@gmail.com

28 Centro de Formação da Associação de Escolas de Amadora, Portugal. Email: jmaltacoelho@gmail.com

29 Agrupamento de Escolas Nuno Álvares, Portugal. Email: clara.moreira@aeacb.pt

30 Agrupamento de Escolas de Constância, Portugal. Email: susananeves@aeconstancia.edu.pt

31 Agrupamento de Escolas da Batalha, Portugal. Email: paulo.portugal@aebatalha.ccems.pt

32 Agrupamento de Escolas Dr<sup>a</sup> Laura Ayres, Portugal. Email: luis.romao@esla.edu.pt

33 Agrupamento de Escolas Verde Horizonte, Portugal. Email: ilidio.vicente@verdehorizonte.net

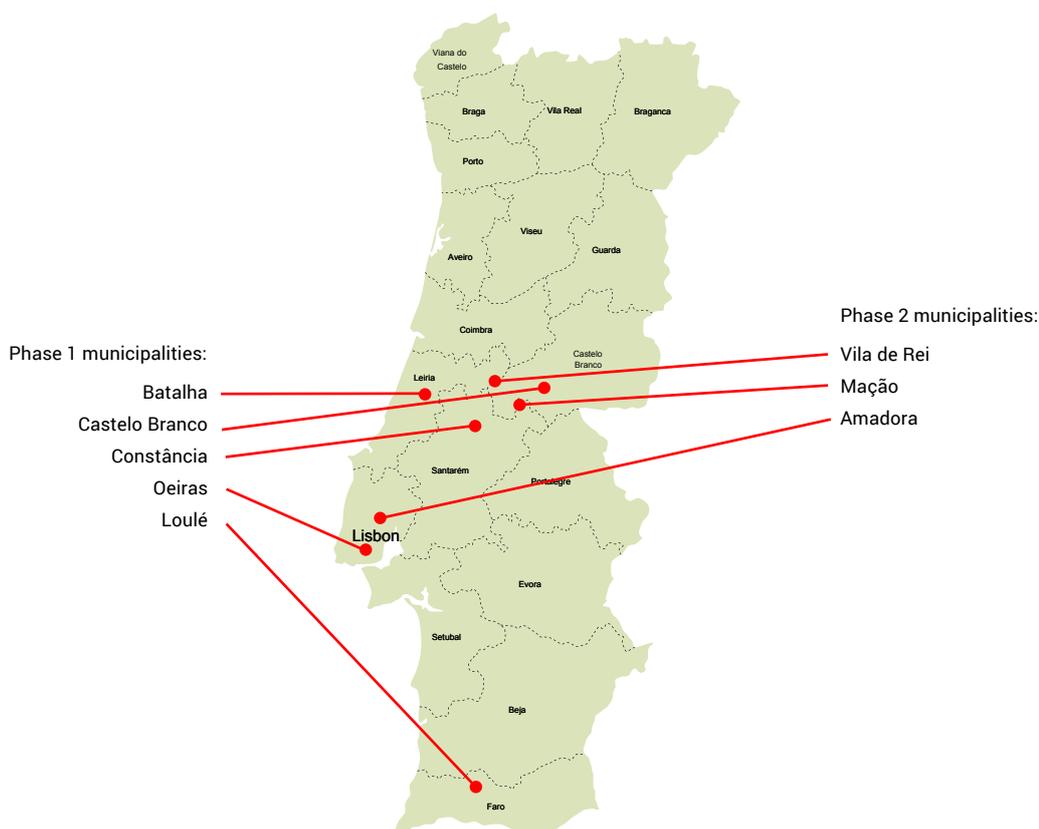
Responsibility for this continuing quest for improvement is not solely of teachers and schools. The whole community, including families, municipalities, enterprises, social institutions, media, researchers, the students themselves and many others who are able to generate increased value for the school, share this responsibility. The ESCXEL Network was established in the 2008/2009 school year and is currently in its second stage (2012 – 2015), involving three partners:

- \_ ESCXEL researchers, who contribute with their scientific competence, elaborate and publish the results, and share the diagnostic, analysis and intervention tools.
- \_ The municipalities of Batalha, Castelo Branco, Vila de Rei, Mação, Constância, Loulé, Amadora, and Oeiras. The mayors of these municipalities have shown the will to transform the education of their youth and the qualification of the schools located in their municipalities, mobilizing the much-needed resources for this to happen.
- \_ The public schools in these municipalities, which welcome and work alongside with these new agents in the quest for improved performance, taking a leading role in the school performance improvement process. In order to achieve that improved performance, they provide the researchers with their experiences and their innovation abilities while sharing organizational practices.

CESNOVA manages the network, having detached a team of researchers led by three doctorate professors, who undertake its scientific coordination. Eight municipality coordinators are also members of this network. Their main responsibility is to coordinate the network activities in their respective municipalities.

Each municipality has two representatives: a political decision-maker within the educational scope of the municipality and a technical representative in that same area. A teacher (the “school mediator”) and the school principal of each school are also part of the network.

Figure 1. Phase 1 and Phase 2 municipalities' location



### 3. Activities of the municipality coordinator

The profile and role of the municipality coordinator are well defined in the project charter. The coordinator's actions are defined around four cornerstones:

- \_ the ESCXEL researchers;
- \_ the municipality;
- \_ all the mediators in its municipality;
- \_ all the other coordinators.

Coordinators meet with the researchers and contribute with the knowledge of their municipalities' school environment. As such, they bridge the gap between the school needs and the researchers' support and intervention. In preparation for the seminars, it has been proven essential for the coordinator to listen to the schools in his/her municipality and articulate the needs and opinions of the schools with the interests of the CESNOVA researchers. Coordinators are involved in the preparation, publishing, and coordination of these seminars, in which the hosting coordinator plays a more active role. Nevertheless, all the coordinators are involved in the organization of the seminars when needed.

Seminars aim to identify, reflect, and discuss solutions or concerns that may be common to several municipalities. The organization of the seminars has changed over time. Specialists have been invited to share their knowledge in their area of expertise. Schools belonging to the network have presented their practices. The seminar general topics are subdivided into more specialized issues, which are debated in groups ("workshops"), whose conclusions are subsequently presented to all the participants in the seminar. Right from the second seminar, a tradition was started: to hold a more or less informal meeting on the night before the seminar, where questions pertaining to the work at hand are debated.

From these seminars, a report is made in which all the communications and conclusions are shared.

Municipality coordinators collect the data requested by the CESNOVA team. Coordinators write a yearly report in which they present all the work that was done.

Regarding the interaction with the municipality, the coordinator shares and presents the CESNOVA reports and the seminar reports to the municipality representatives. There is also a close relation with the municipality to promote sharing and reflection work sessions with the municipality schools for the implementation of diagnostic actions and interventions in order to improve the students' performance. Coordinators must enable the communication between the different agents in the education process. There must be a sharing environment in which all the participants feel their participation has added value to the community's wellbeing.

### 4. Collaborative networking potential

This kind of work is a process in a constant (re)construction that implies  $\frac{3}{4}$  in its first stage  $\frac{3}{4}$  time to build a climate of trust and responsibility between the different members, paving the way for the definition of common goals in a shared interaction of decisions and actions.

In our view as municipality coordinators, these have been the positive aspects started by the ESCXEL Network up until now:

- \_ Networking has allowed us to understand that collaboration between teachers, schools, municipalities, and research centres is an indispensable mechanism to attain more effective classroom practices, pedagogical organization methods, and student learning. This collaborative interaction  $\frac{3}{4}$  which is horizontal and absolutely volunteered  $\frac{3}{4}$  is sensed as a positive asset to improve processes, school structure organization, and students' performance.
- \_ The Network has contributed to the participation and involvement of the school community that is clearly committed to quality, namely through the systematic sharing of good practices, thus promoting a favourable environment to teaching/learning. Teachers and schools analyse and discuss  $\frac{3}{4}$  on a regular basis and either formally or informally  $\frac{3}{4}$  students' results and their causes, how these can be improved, and the importance of ongoing projects in which schools are involved for those same results.

- \_ Sharing practices and experiences helps to change teachers' minds. The implementation of communication paths improves the self-regulation of their day-to-day strategies. Teachers are now more prone to change and partaking.
- \_ A new attitude towards students' results is becoming visible. Although schools did self-assessment reports, CESNOVA reports have been gathering all the information on the schools and their environment and translating it into a batch of indicators crisscrossing those results with the social and economic background of each district population. This data is used to build monitoring and evaluation models to promote a culture of problem solving. This is paramount to producing the strategic guidelines that every school needs to fulfil its goals in a more sustainable way.
- \_ Understanding the different performances but, above all, the joint reflection and quest for improvement, through more or less institutionalized practices, has been crucial. The interest in a more cooperative line of work is growing and it is essential that we build more sustainable and effective models and plans.
- \_ Several individual partnerships have arisen within this network of municipalities in order to develop certain strategies or call attention to problems that can affect the school's regular functioning, such as the ones inherent to assessment, school-family relationships, or the Projeto Fénix<sup>34</sup> (Phoenix Project) (underway in several schools).

Concerning the mediators' role, the coordinator develops various activities to maximize their collaborative work, based on the partaking of experiences upon which the network was built in a sturdy reflective and challenging environment. Thus, regular meetings are promoted in the several schools, or within school groups, with the respective mediators, in the presence of the school principals whenever possible. These meetings are objectively valuable to strengthen the bonds between mediators and the rest of the teachers that work in the schools involved in this project. In these meetings, besides the disclosure of all the information flowing from the CESNOVA, prioritized subjects that have been previously selected by the schools are discussed. These subjects focus on areas such as school evaluation, student learning assessment, school organizational aspects, the role and presence of the guidance and psychology services, special teaching for children with special needs, among others. By means of reflection and debate, problems detected in one or several schools are approached in order to achieve practical solutions. Moreover, several actors share practices and strategies with positive results.

The goal is to create awareness to the inevitability of change, and improve school and classroom practices developed to achieve the students' learning success. Collaboration between teachers, schools, municipalities, and researchers is an indispensable mechanism to achieve better approaches to students' academic difficulties. Coordinators set in motion all the necessary strategies needed to guarantee that the mediators fully disclose the practices stated on CESNOVA reports that apply to school results. They also make sure their presentations to the intermediate school power structures can help to improve the decision-making process regarding the quality of the educational service provided, always in direct contact with the school principal. These data is entirely analysed by the different schools' power structures in order to undertake the necessary improvement measures.

There are periodical seminars, where the concerns and needs of the various schools are debated from several angles. Coordinators promote meetings with the school principal to present facts and figures concerning the network's activities and assessing those needs, acting as liaison officers between the project head office and the other participants.

Coordinators exchange points of view, pedagogical tools and resources with their fellow teachers, aiming to increase cooperation and assistance to meet the project goals.

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<sup>34</sup> 'Projeto Fénix' is a project aiming to improve student results in Portuguese and Mathematics. Students with difficulties are temporarily removed from their classes (during the Portuguese or Mathematics hours) and assigned to a 'nest', where a more personalized teaching method is applied. When the expected performance level is achieved the student returns to his/her regular class.

## 5. Improving aspects

The planned digital platform is essential to allow for a better disclosure of organizational and educational good practices. This platform will enable news and event management, the disclosure of scientific papers, and a user's mode to promote the exchange of ideas and constructs. Likewise, this platform would allow further exchange of ideas among seminar participants, even after they ended, besides enabling survey application and data download and upload. This would benefit teachers in general because it would open up this project, making sure good practices were well publicized. This would surely take this project to the next level since it would promote the wider participation of teachers that could thus showcase to others what they have been doing. Trust and responsibility between all the project agents are essential to the definition of common goals and decision-making. No one can grow up locked inside himself or herself and schools <sup>¾</sup> that are made by people and for people alike <sup>¾</sup> are no exception. Showing innovative practices and experiences within a whole network of schools is a path well worth travelling.



**SCHOOL/LOCAL  
COMMUNITY  
PARTNERSHIPS  
AND STRATEGIC  
PLANNING**

## STRATEGIC PLANNING BASED ON DEMOGRAPHIC PROJECTIONS OF SCHOOL DEMAND: WHAT CHALLENGES DO THE DIFFERENT ACTORS HAVE TO FACE?

Teresa Pimentel<sup>35</sup>

### Abstract

As partners, municipal and school authorities are faced with the challenge of strategically planning the education of their young citizens. When we refer to strategic planning, we envision it divided into three stages: analysis or diagnosis of the system; policy formulation; and action plan. The first stage deals with the diagnosis of the existing reality by quantifying the population that is going to be educated. This quantification has been developed based on a cross-sectional analysis. We chose to present a methodology based on a longitudinal analysis, namely the reconstruction of the educational trajectories of individuals of the same cohort, thus applying the principles of demographic analysis to school events (Bandeira, 2007). This methodology allows us not only to analyse current educational trends but also to project the impact of maintaining enrolment and education rates in the 2025 timeframe, based on projection scenarios of the population within the normal age for attending school. Therefore, we took the municipality of Castelo Branco as the unit of analysis and applied the principles of demographic analysis to school events. As a result, and despite the limitations identified throughout the study, we think the longitudinal analysis of the school trajectories of students coupled with population projections allows us to have a better understanding of the possible and/or probable futures regarding school demand in Castelo Branco.

**Keywords:** strategic planning; school demand; demographic projection; school trajectory

### 1. Introduction

In Portugal, education policies have been taking a leading role, especially since the turn of the 1980s, when we witnessed a reformulation in the regulation mode of the national education system. Since the Law on the Education System (1986), the topic of “decentralization” began to guide the Portuguese educational policy. We understand decentralization as a process associated with the concept of subsidiarity, i.e., the transfer of functions and tasks to the lowest level of the social order able to complete them, assuming a redistribution of authority, power, resources, and responsibilities. This redistribution can be made between functions or between “territories”. Either there is a distribution of powers between various authorities working in parallel, or there is a transfer of powers from higher to lower levels of government. In the latter, the authority can be allocated to the central, regional or municipal government, district or local council, and/or schools boards (McGinn & Welshthem, 1999 as cited in Batista 2012).

Increasingly, municipal authorities are faced with new responsibilities delegated by the central government (Municipal Councils of Education, Educational Charter - Laws No. 115-A/98 and No. 7/2003, later amended by Laws No. 41/2003 and No. 6/2012). Furthermore, the relationship with schools and vertical clusters of schools has been strengthened.

As partners, municipal and school authorities are faced with the challenge of strategically planning the education of their young citizens. When we refer to strategic planning, we envision it divided into three stages: analysis or diagnosis of the system; policy formulation; and action plan (Chang, 2008).

The first stage deals with the diagnosis of the existing reality by quantifying the population that is going to be educated. This quantification has been developed (particularly in municipal charters and educational projects targeted at schools/vertical clusters of schools) based on a cross-sectional analysis, i.e., the evolution of total students enrolled in a particular school year and the enrolment rates calculated by the normal age for attending school.

<sup>35</sup> Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Portugal. Email: teresa18pimentel@gmail.com

We chose to present a methodology based on a longitudinal analysis, namely the reconstruction of the educational trajectories of individuals of the same cohort, thus applying the principles of demographic analysis to school events (Bandeira, 2007). This methodology allows us not only to analyse current educational trajectories in the present but also to project the impact of maintaining enrolment and education rates in the 2025 timeframe, based on projection scenarios of the population within the normal age for attending school.

In this analysis, we can see past trends (perspective) and simultaneously projecting them into the future (prospective). Our goal is to provide an overview of possible futures through a simulation exercise that will allow us to highlight what can happen under many previously established and justified assumptions. This exercise does not aim to be a forecast or a futurology practice but a reflection that can lead to action and fight against fatalism (Nazareth, 2009).

At the policy formulation stage, the previous approach will allow the different actors (mainly municipal and school authorities but also the community in which the school is located and families) to discuss the challenges that municipalities and vertical clusters of schools/schools will be facing in the next decade, as well as potential solutions via the formulation of policies (We can't forget that these policies should be analysed taking into account the constraints of national education policies and European guidelines in the area of education). Although we do not intend to elaborate on the third phase, we must clarify that the action plan refers to the physical product of the strategic planning process. Besides the initial diagnosis, it includes goals and priorities for action, as well as the strategies and policies to be implemented in order to achieve these goals. In other words: it is the document that gets the action going.

## 2. Methodology

According to Bandeira (2007), the school population  $\frac{3}{4}$  like any other population  $\frac{3}{4}$  lives and reproduces itself through its own dynamics. The dynamic of school activity includes the permanent and cyclical succession of inflows and outflows of students in the educational system. But while a larger population (e.g. the Portuguese population) ensures its renewal by generational replacement, the school population depends on exogenous factors in order to reproduce itself. These can be: demographic structures (that are in turn conditioned by births, mortality, and migrations); public policies that affect access to education; individual propensity to pursue further studies; and the availability of families to match this propensity (Bandeira, 2007, p. 517).

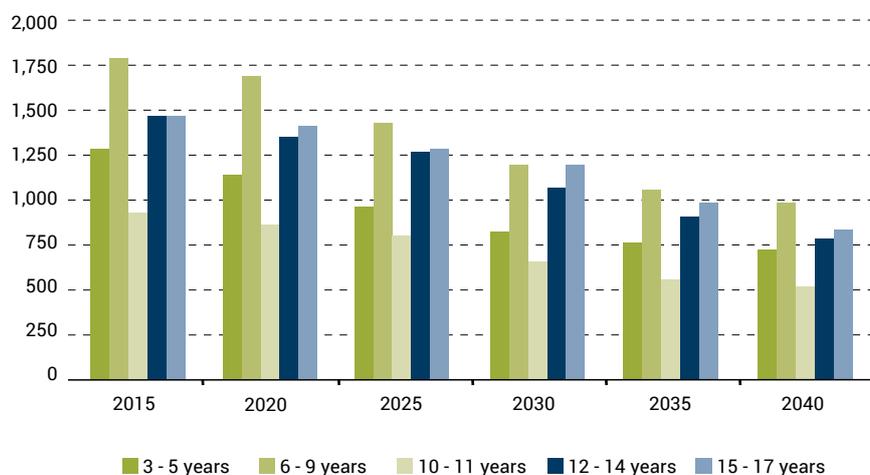
Therefore, we took the municipality of Castelo Branco as the unit of analysis and applied the principles of demographic analysis to school events. We transposed the principles of construction of mortality tables to the population of students enrolled, and enrolled for the first time, by age, academic year, and school year. This process was aimed at the construction of a school enrolment panel and a panel of schooling. These panels are built upon, respectively, the calculation of enrolment ratios (which relate the students enrolled with the population of a specific age attending school) and schooling rates (which indicate promotions, grade repetition, and dropouts in each academic year). Disaggregating data by age allows us to reconstruct the school trajectories of students in a particular cohort.

In a prospective exercise, we have assumed that the identified school trajectories would remain constant over the next 10 years (until 2025). We have also traced the expected school demand over that period based on the evolution of the number of students that are of the right age to attend a certain level of education. The calculation of this number of students is based on previously completed population projections by age.

## 3. Results

As we said before, this methodology allows us to project the impact of maintaining enrolment and education rates in the 2025 timeframe, based on projection scenarios of the population within the normal age for attending school. In the graph below, the expected school demand at Castelo Branco until 2025 in the moderate scenario of projection shows a clear downward trend. In this scenario, in 2015 children between the ages of six and nine years old would slightly exceed 1 750 and in 2040 the expected school demand would be below 1000. This means that in the next 25 years, Castelo Branco can lose more than 750 children only in this age group.

Figure 1 - Projection of expected school demand in Castelo Branco until 2025 (moderate projection scenario) based on the number of students that are of the right age to attend each cycle of education.



If we look at this projection based on the number of students that are of the right age to attend each academic year, we can see the impact over the next ten years.

Table 1 - Projection of expected school demand in Castelo Branco until 2025 (moderate projection scenario) based on the number of students that are of the right age to attend each academic year

Academic Year	School year													
	2015/2016			2016/2017			...	2020/2021			...	2025/2026		
	MF	M	F	MF	M	F		MF	M	F		MF	M	F
Kindergarten	1287	666	678	1287	656	658		1131	594	591		945	527	526
1 <sup>st</sup> year	429	222	226	428	221	226		404	209	208		336	183	183
2 <sup>nd</sup> year	447	234	223	429	222	226		426	214	213		348	188	187
3 <sup>rd</sup> year	451	237	224	446	222	226		426	220	218		360	193	192
4 <sup>th</sup> year	457	240	226	450	222	226		426	221	226		374	198	197
5 <sup>th</sup> year	464	244	228	456	234	222		425	221	226		387	203	202
6 <sup>th</sup> year	473	249	232	463	236	223		425	221	225		400	208	207
7 <sup>th</sup> year	483	255	236	472	239	225		442	221	225		421	214	212
8 <sup>th</sup> year	491	259	240	481	243	227		446	221	225		421	219	217
9 <sup>th</sup> year	496	262	244	489	249	231		450	233	221		420	220	224
10 <sup>th</sup> year	496	261	248	494	254	235		457	235	222		419	220	224
11 <sup>th</sup> year	492	258	252	494	258	239		466	238	224		418	220	224
12 <sup>th</sup> year	487	255	256	490	261	243		474	242	226		434	219	224

As mentioned before, we have transposed the principles of construction of mortality tables to the population of students enrolled, and enrolled for the first time, by age, academic year, and school year. This process was aimed at the construction of a school enrolment panel and a panel of schooling. Table 2 corresponds to the school enrolment panel of the students from the 2001 and 2002 Cohorts.

For example, the children of the 2002 cohort were 9 years old in the 2008-2009 academic year, with an enrolment rate of 933 students for each 1000 children that had that age in the municipality of Castelo Branco. There were 471 children enrolled in school and 61 dropouts (this can include children that go to other schools outside the municipality because at this stage we have no information that would allow us to identify and exclude those cases).

Table 2 - School enrolment panel of the students from the 2001 and 2002 Cohorts (10 and 11 years old in 2011).

	Academic Year		
	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011
<b>2001 cohort</b>			
Age	8	9	10
Rate (%)	801.51	780.72	896.03
Enrolled (N)	424	413	474
Dropouts (N)	0	-61	-
<b>2002 cohort</b>			
Age	9	10	11
Enrolment rate (%)	932.67	1053.47	1055.45
Enrolled (N)	471	532	533
Dropouts (N)	-61	-1	-

In the following table, we applied the school enrolment panel of the students from the 2001 and 2002 Cohorts to the 2025 population with 10 and 11 years old, assuming that the identified school trends would remain constant until then. As we can see, in the 2023-2024 academic year, 9 year-old children enrolled in school would be 375 and 48 children would not be enrolled.

Table 3 - Application of the School enrolment panel of the students from the 2001 and 2002 Cohorts to the 2025 population with 10 and 11 years old, assuming that the identified school trajectories would remain constant until then.

	Academic Year		
	2023-2024	2024-2025	2025-2026
<b>2015 cohort</b>			
Age	8	9	10
Rate (%)	801,51	780,72	896,03
Enrolled (N)	312	303	347
Dropouts (N)	9	-44	-
<b>2016 cohort</b>			
Age	9	10	11
Enrolment rate (%)	932,67	1053,47	1055,45
Enrolled (N)	375	422	422
Dropouts (N)	-48	0	-

#### 4. Conclusions

Despite the limitations identified throughout the study, the longitudinal analysis of the school trajectories of students coupled with population projections allows us to have a better understanding of the possible and/or probable futures regarding school demand in Castelo Branco. This approach, in our view, is a very important part of the system analysis and provides a valid contribution to the debate on the merits and the challenges that education in this district is facing today and will face in the near future, taking into consideration the different educational actors. Remembering the words of Chang (2008), planners and managers can look at this contribution (as part of the overall system analysis) from the perspective of the system's strengths, weaknesses, lessons, and opportunities regarding educational development and use it to help to identify critical issues and challenges, and design remedial actions and policy provisions.

From the policy formulation perspective, in Castelo Branco the population decline in pre-school and school age children over the next 10 years can be seen as an opportunity to promote educational excellence but represents a challenge to the management of physical and human resources and the planning of educational offers.

Assuming a scenario of maintenance of school trajectories over the next 10 years, we find that the focus will be increasingly on improving the quality of education for a progressively reduced group of individuals who represent the future of the municipality.

Also, the strategic planning of education in Castelo Branco cannot be oblivious to the net migration, which has been negative in the past few years, a trend maintained in the moderate scenario of the projection used in this exercise. In fact, the educational actors are responsible for suggesting policies to promote the permanence of the younger generations in the municipality, which can include, for example, a better integration of Gypsy students<sup>36</sup> and simultaneously promote their academic success, as this population has a higher school drop-out. Let us remind that these policies should be part of the goals and purposes defined along the following threefold dimension (Chang, 2008): access (access, participation, including gender, and equity issues); quality (quality, internal efficiency, relevance, and external effectiveness), and management (governance, decentralization, resource management).

We would like to end this reflection by saying that education planning has become more complex because it involves various actors, it is influenced by the system analyses, it involves more complex and multidimensional problems and it requires the involvement of many diversified and specialized skills and competences of the education managers.

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36 National Strategic plan to integrate Gypsy Communities - Law No. 51/2013; and "Tackling Gypsy Needs in the 2014-2020 Structural Funds Programming Period" in the European Anti-Poverty Network EAPN <http://www.eapn.pt/documentos.php?ID=7#sthash.NBvbGbF7.dpuf>

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## HOW GERMAN ALL-DAY SCHOOLS BROADEN THEIR REGULAR CURRICULA THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS

Bettina Arnoldt<sup>37</sup>, Christine Steiner<sup>38</sup>

### Abstract

The essay gives a short overview over the development of All-day schools in Germany and discusses specific aspects of partnership between schools and other (educational) actors as well as multi-professional cooperation within the schools. The first part of the essay informs about typical partners and various forms of partnership and how they support the extended every day school life with a wide range of extracurricular activities. Partnerships are a key element of the present all-day school in Germany. Especially politicians and experts in the field of education have great expectations for partnerships to improve school development and individual support of students. However, traditionally the cooperation between teachers and educational staff from outside the school has been regarded as difficult. Because of this, the idea of an All-day School has only been partly pressed for by teachers and educational specialists. Moreover, both sides connect multi-professional cooperation with a nearly inevitable over-stepping of professional boundaries and a loss of individual and institutional autonomy. The second part of the essay presents some empirical findings about the concrete work conditions and the experiences teachers and educational specialists have been made by working in such multi-professional teams. All findings are based on several data sets from the "Study of the Development of All-Day Schools".

**Keywords:** all-day school; partnership; professionalization; multi-professional team; Germany

### 1. The Expansion of the All-Day School in Germany

Until a few years ago there were only a small number of all-day schools in Germany. The half-day school was the rule, and the students attended it until around noon. A minimum definition of an all-day school was provided by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany (abbr.: Standing Conference). It states that a school is to be called an all-day school when on at least three days a week, for at least seven hours, an all-day program is offered. In addition, a concept explaining the connection between the lessons and further offerings is supposed to be laid out (Standing Conference, 2015). The German states adopted these requirements, and in some cases made additions that went even further. As a rule, the all-day schools at the primary level present their offerings five days a week, until 4:00 pm. At the first-level secondary schools, simplifying, the all-day offerings are usually presented four days a week until 4.00 pm, often ending earlier on Fridays (StEG-Konsortium, 2013). The individual states are also responsible for the staff and supplies.

A rapid expansion has since taken place, which can be attributed to two causes. First, it had become clear - particularly in the old states in western Germany - that there were not enough child care spaces for grade school children to meet demand, and that there was a growing need to better reconcile the competing demands of work and family life. Additionally, Germany's first-ever participation in the PISA study in the year 2000 yielded a negative surprise concerning the average performance of its students when compared internationally. More time spent in school was seen as a way to help the students achieve more (BMBF, 2003).

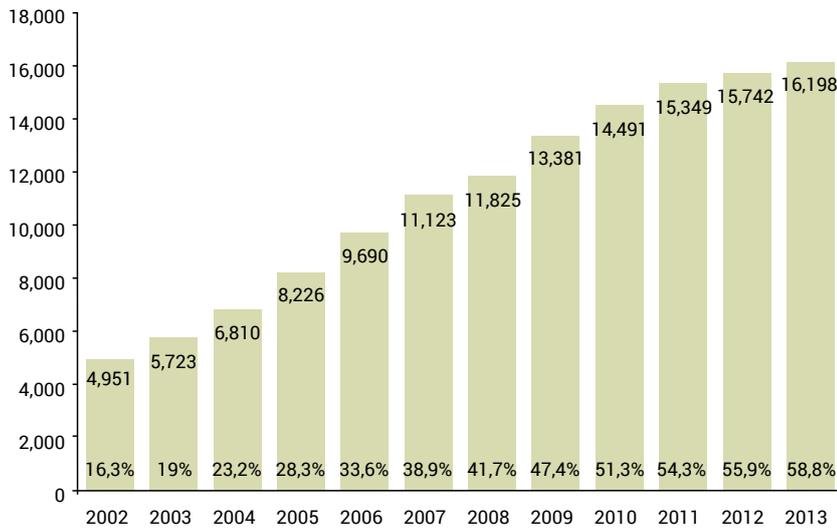
For these reasons, between 2003 and 2009, the German government at the time invested 4 billion euro in building improvements at the half-day schools that were willing to be converted into all-day schools, and at existing all-day schools that wanted to expand their offerings. Within ten years, these educational reforms contributed to a tripling in the number of all-day schools. While only 16% of all the schools were all-day schools in the academic year 2002/2003, the proportion was already 56% in the academic year 2012/2013 (see Figure 1). Since participation in the all-day program is not compulsory at many of the all-day schools, the proportion of all-day students was lower in both years: their numbers increased from 10% to 32% during the same period (Standing Conference, 2008, 2012, 2015).

37 German Youth Institute Munich, Germany. Email: arnoldt@dji.de

38 German Youth Institute Munich, Germany. Email: steiner@dji.de

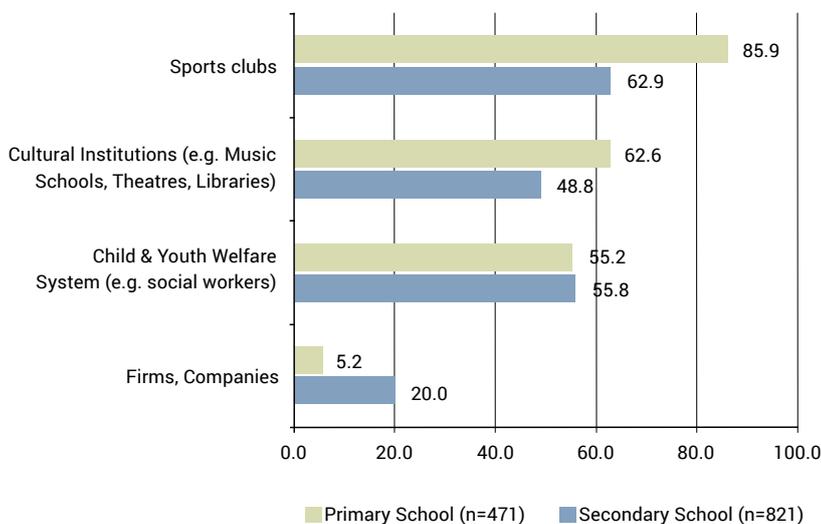
**Figure 1. Development of the all-day schools in Germany**

Source: Standing Conference, 2008, 2012, 2015



**Figure 2. Activities of the all-day schools in Germany**

Source: StEG - Headmaster Survey, 2012

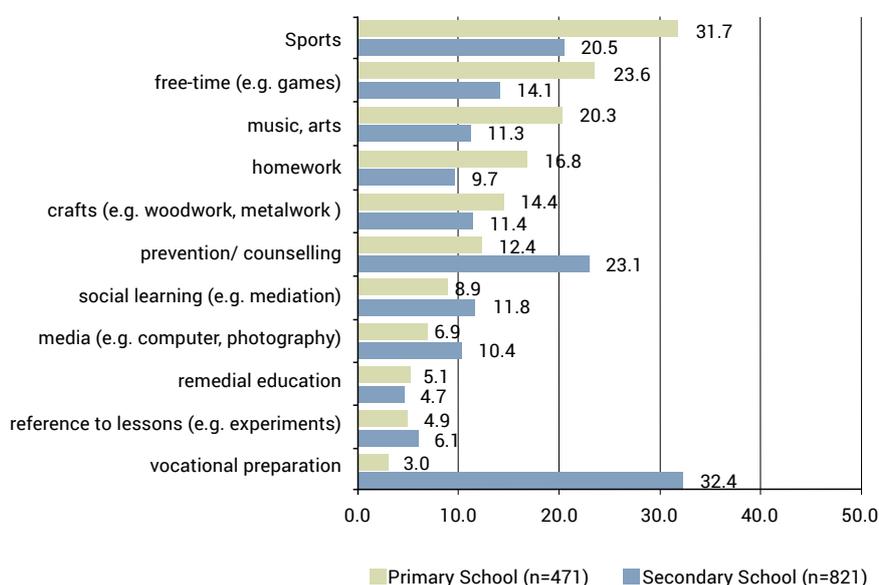


Among the secondary schools, 63% cooperate with sports clubs, 56% with the German child and youth welfare system, and 49% with cultural institutions. At 20%, a much higher percentage of secondary schools cooperate with private companies than do grade schools, usually because they offer help in planning and preparing for a career (see Figure 2).

The activities conducted by the partners at the all-day schools are thematically quite diverse. In addition to sports, which is very common, grade schools also often offer music, art and free-time activities. At secondary schools the most common activities are connected with vocational preparation as well as with prevention and counseling (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3. Extracurricular activities conducted by partners**

Source: StEG – Cooperation Partner Survey, 2009



Apart from the subject matter they deal with, the partners of the all-day schools differentiate themselves according to how many activities they conduct at the school—and this in turn further influences the conditions of the cooperation. The number of hours per week that a partner covers in conducting activities at the all-day school is between one and forty, with the average being seven hours. At eleven hours per week, the partners from within the German child and youth welfare system are in this respect the most important partners; sports clubs, at three hours, are not as important. Partners who are more intensively involved are also more likely to be represented in school advisory bodies than are the other partners. On average, about 10% of the partners are represented in school committees. However, the partners who are putting in above-average hours are included in such bodies at a rate of almost 40%. The same applies for the working out of the concept of the school and its all-day program. While 20% of the partners participate in the conceptual work, the partners averaging more hours do so at a rate of 40%.

Moreover, different types of all-day organizations can be found, according to how much responsibility the schools relinquish to the partners. Thus, there is a small group of schools (15%) that shoulders the complete all-day program without any partners. They only work with their own staff. Another small group of schools (10%) has a partner conduct all of the all-day activities. Among these there is also the special case in which schools assign the all-day program in its entirety to a partner. This partner conducts the all-day activities with its own personnel or, according to circumstances, with yet other partners. Three-fourths of the all-day schools let only a part of the activities be conducted by partners and they have their own staff conduct the other part. Table 1 illustrates the various types of schools according to the different utilization of labor. Schools that shoulder the all-day program without any partners have the highest number of teachers who conduct extracurricular activities, and they have the highest number of additional educational specialists on the paid staff (see Table 1). Schools that let a partner conduct the complete all-day program only have a very small number of teachers who participate actively in the extracurricular program, and none of the additional educational specialists do. The number of educational specialists that the partners employ is highest in such cases. Schools that let a part of the activities be conducted by partners have a high number of teachers who actively participate in the extracurricular program, but fewer of their own additional educational specialists do. The number of educational specialists that come to the school via the partner is however average.

Table 1. Personnel in all-day schools

Source: StEG – Headmaster Survey, 2012

Organization of the all-day school	Teachers in extracurr. activities		Additional staff employed at school		Additional staff employed at partner	
	Mean	N	Mean*	N	Mean*	N
Extracurricular activities without any partners	17	168	3	134	0	137
Extracurricular activities with some partners	16	881	2	780	3	707
Extracurricular activities conducted completely by the partners	5	93	0	75	4	73
<b>Altogether</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>1.142</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>989</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>917</b>

Legend: \*= „0“ included; p=,000

### 3.2. Multi-Professional Cooperation at All-Day Schools

The fact that the educational work is not only being done by teachers is no small thing in Germany. Apart from a few exceptions in which various attempts at integrating school social workers or school psychologists were made, everyday school life before the expansion of the all-day schools was shaped first and foremost by the teachers. Because of this, German schools are regarded as organizations that are decidedly mono-professional in their make-up.

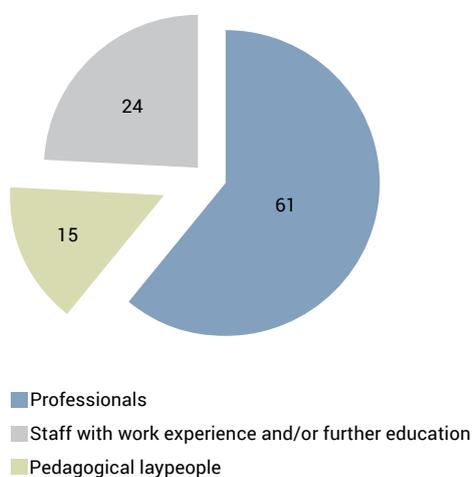
Given this background, the plan to cooperate with a variety of professionals was met with particularly high hopes and great expectations –especially on the political side, but also among experts in the field of education. From the beginning, there was a readiness to accept a much wider spectrum of contributors than one might expect from the list of partners already mentioned here. In addition to teachers and educational specialists, all-day schools welcome contributions from sports trainers, tradespeople, entrepreneurs, and artists, as well as volunteers such as the students' parents. In principle, no one is excluded and every idea is welcome that supports the maturation and individual development of the children and youth. This approach clearly calls to mind the concept of community education (Buhren, 1997).

In the public debate in particular, the cooperation among so many diverse people is tied to the idea of a multi-professional team, i.e., the idea of an intense cooperation among all staff members. It is expected, for example, that all participants organize their cooperation in a permanent, binding and faithful manner; and that a regular exchange take place concerning professional matters and common educational goals. In this way all of the contributors would also have a chance to broaden their knowledge and gain more experience. The hope is sometimes voiced that this path might ultimately lead to the establishment of new and innovative pedagogical methods at the schools. In brief, intensive processes of team building and school development are expected, through which the traditional mono-professional faculty will transform themselves into a multi-professional all-day teams.

However, it is not only because of the extremely heterogeneous group of people involved that this expectation is so far-reaching. The expansion of the all-day schools is first and foremost a government reform program that is supported chiefly by politicians specializing in education and social issues, and by experts in the field of education. The idea of multi-professional cooperation anchored in the community is supported in no small part as a means of assuring that the all-day schools have the necessary personnel for their daily operations; the widest possible spectrum of contributors is thought to promise this result (Speck, Olk & Stimpel, 2011, p. 70). In comparison, when referring to a transfer of knowledge and experience, the possible motives for teachers and the additional staff members are only weakly defined. It should be added that the cooperation between the teachers and the educational staff from outside the school has been regarded as difficult from the very beginning, most importantly owing to the very different professional self-images (Brenner & Nörber, 1992). Because of this, the reforms have only been partly pressed for by teachers and educational specialists (Tillman, 2011,

p. 16). Moreover, both sides connect multi-professional cooperation with a nearly inevitable over-stepping of professional boundaries, which would lead in the end to a loss of individual, but also institutional, autonomy. This is deemed all the more to hold, given that the strived for cooperation within the multi-professional team is latently contradictory. The cooperation with existing community organizations and their staff is associated with a kind of networking. This conflicts however not only with the interest in maintaining permanent work and exchange relationships within such multi-professional teams, but also with the limited time volunteers or committed parents have at their disposal. As a result, the teachers and specialists fear an increased workload that will not be shared fairly. At the same time, opening up the schools to interested people who have had no educational training and/or experience can lead to growing competitive pressure in the educational work. Many specialists, and especially those specialists coming from outside the school and their representatives, fear that participation in multi-professional teams is the sure road to a de-professionalization of their work. Has such a de-professionalization really come to pass? One sign of this would be a clear increase in the proportion of genuine educational laypeople, understood as a group of people that has neither completed any educational training program, nor had comprehensive experience in working with children and youth. The available research coming from our project shows that, at 61%, the majority of those coming new to the all-day schools possess a relevant professional degree (see Fig. 4). If, in addition to the existence of a professional degree, one also takes into account work experience and participation in pertinent further education, it becomes clear that even those who have not graduated from a formal educational training program do possess professional skills and experience.

Figure 4. Additional staff members at all-day schools according to pedagogical qualification and career experience, in percent  
Source: Steiner, 2013, p. 73



Only 15% of the contributors could be regarded as real educational laypeople. Hence, the all-day school has remained by and large a field composed of educational professionals. From the perspective of those desiring a broad anchoring of education in the community it is possible to regret this, but it is absolutely intended. So, for example, the administrative provisions that regulate the introduction of the all-day schools in the individual German states often make note of the fact that it is important to pay attention to the educational skills of the contributors to the all-day schools. In the main, though, the relatively small proportion of educational laypeople poses no real threat to the professional status of those specialized in educational occupations.

Nevertheless, the integration of the additional staff members into the all-day schools proved to be quite difficult with respect to the organization of the work. This was partly due to the sheer number of newly arrived employees, which can be quite substantial at some of the schools. For the illustration in Table 2 we divided the schools included in our study into 4 quartile groups based on the size of the additional staff working there. We have only included the schools in which, alongside the teachers, additional pedagogical staff members were

also working. As can be seen, in the upper quarter of the schools we examined, on average 30 further staff members were working in their respective all-day programs. More important than the number, though, is the fact that, especially at the secondary schools, as the number of employees on the staff increases, the amount of time each person puts in goes down significantly. Precisely at the schools with a large number of additional employees, staff members often work only a few hours a week at the school.

The main reason for this, besides the lack of financial resources, is the cooperation with the partners from outside of the school. As already mentioned above, the educational staff is not always directly employed by the school itself, and so therefore its members have different employment contracts. A large part of the cooperation is not only limited to a few hours per week; additionally, many of the employees have fixed-term contracts.

**Table 2. Average number of additional staff members and their employment conditions**

Source: StEG – Survey of Additional Staff, 2009

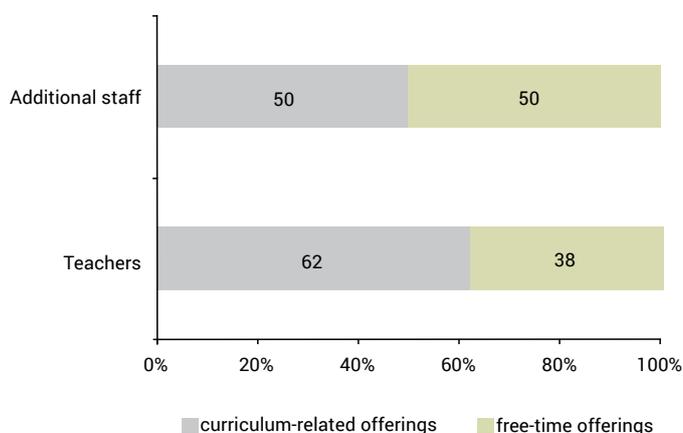
Average Number Additional Staff Mean, (SD)	Weekly Working Hours (Median)		Fixed-Term Contracts (in per cent)	
	Primary Schools	Secondary Schools	Primary Schools	Secondary Schools
1 <sup>st</sup> Group 3.5, (1.2)	31	27.8	21	44
2 <sup>nd</sup> Group 8.0, (1.4)	25	14.5	32	63
3 <sup>rd</sup> Group 13.8, (2.2)	20	8	49	53
4 <sup>th</sup> Group 29.7, (11.6)	23	5	27	66
N	476 p<0.01	695 p<0.00	623 p<0.00	752 p<0.01

It is immediately clear that these are difficult conditions for building stable team structures. Particularly the additional staff members complain about a number of aspects of the workload, such as that there is too much time pressure and excessive demands for flexibility, as well as a lack of clarity concerning work and responsibilities. We think that such complaints may be regarded primarily as an expression of the increase in the demands made on the management, which is almost inevitable when dealing with network-like work arrangements. By now it is expected that the school administrators in particular should take over the management of the program. However, due to their heavy teaching loads, school administrators in Germany have until now only been involved in management on a rather limited scale. For this reason, they also have only a limited amount of experience in professional organizational management. Moreover, it might be the case that a moderator rather than a manager is required for a network composed of diverse, independent partners.

An unclear distribution of the responsibility and work among the contributors in a multi-professional team may however also be seen as indicative of an imminent loss of autonomy. Generally, teachers are also working beside the additional staff members in the extracurricular part of the school's program. In 2012 this was, depending on the type of school, between one-third and almost half of all those employed at the school (StEG-Konsortium, 2013, p. 45). As a rule, there is no explicit decision concerning who may conduct which activity; whether, for example, only teachers may conduct remedial work connected with the curriculum, or whether only specially trained educators are permitted to care for the children and youth in the afternoon. This is reflected in the results shown in Fig. 5. They show that both the teachers and additional educational staff conduct curricular-related offerings such as monitoring the completion of the homework, as well as the more classic extracurricular offerings such as free-time activities.

**Figure 5. Spectrum of offerings of the teachers and additional staff members at the all-day schools**

Source: StEG – Survey of Teachers (n= 7.586 information/ 2398 respondents) and Survey of Additional Staff (n= 3.560 information/ 1584 respondents), 2009



However, this graphic also reveals that the teachers are noticeably more active in the offerings that are related to the curriculum, while the additional staff members are about equally occupied with both curricular offerings and free-time activities. That suggests that the concrete work in the extracurricular area is at least partly assigned according to individual competencies. Such a conclusion is supported by observations of teachers and additional staff while discussing how to share the day's work (Breuer, 2011). A „fallback“ to the core competencies of one's own professional profile is viewed quite critically because it can lead to a reinforcement of the hierarchies already existing among the professions. Certainly, it is also possible to see this as a way of sharing the work that preserves the professional autonomy of those involved, and so also serves to endorse their pedagogical approach (ibid.).

By sharing the work according to professional qualifications, not only are there fewer worries about facing a de-professionalization over time, or perhaps even losing one's job; this way of splitting up the workload also seems to lead to experiencing the cooperation among diverse professionals as something that contributes to job enrichment. So, for example, in our survey both the additional staff and the teachers tend to agree with the statement that the work contributions of those newly arrived at the school is valued. In addition, particularly the teachers associate the work in multi-professional teams with a lightening of their own personal workload, despite the extra time and effort that must be put in to coordinate everything. Overall, the early fears of a de-professionalization appear to be unjustified, not least because boundaries are maintained when cooperating.

#### 4. Closing remarks

For over ten years now, a massive expansion of all-day schools has been taking place in Germany. Already representing more than 50% of the schools, the transformation from a half- to an all-day school system has progressed enormously. At the same time, there is a growing acceptance of the all-day program among the parents. According to a recent survey, around 70% of all parents with school-aged children would like to send their children to an all-day school (Tillmann, 2014, p. 76). This last point might in no small part find its explanation in the fact that, when looking at the goals set for it, the expansion of the all-day schools has yielded quite positive results. This applies as much to the goal of helping parents reconcile the competing demands they face in the separate spheres of work and family life, as it does to the goal of providing the students with more individual attention. For children and youth who attend all-day schools there are positive effects on their personal and social development and, under certain conditions, also a beneficial impact on their academic development (for an overview see Fischer et al., 2011).

All-day schools not only emphasize curricular assistance, but also provide children and youth with broader learning opportunities and organized ways of spending their free-time through the systematic integration of non-formal offerings. Owing to the focus on teaching in German schools, as well as to the fact that non-formal educational activities and organized free-time and care possibilities have traditionally been housed outside the schools, all-day schools are dependent on cooperation with partners from beyond the school in order to realize the everyday all-day school life.

Our project's results show that by now the majority of the schools meet the needs of their all-day program by working together with partners. Seen together, the latter conduct a wide variety of activities at the all-day schools, beginning with sports groups, through courses designed to promote social learning, and on to career planning and preparation. It should however be noted that there are large differences among the all-day schools concerning how much responsibility they are willing to relinquish to their partners in the running of the program. We were able to show that the level and kind of personal commitment at the schools also depends on this factor. At most of the schools, however, everyday school life is organized together by both the school and the partners.

In the public debate, political and academic experts in educational policy have connected far-reaching expectations with the cooperation among diverse professionals. In contrast, especially at the beginning of the expansion of the all-day schools, the teachers and in particular the educational specialists have been worried about a de-professionalization. Our results suggest that such a de-professionalization has not occurred. For one thing, most of those working at the all-day schools have educational experience. Additionally, teachers and educational specialists usually maintain their professional autonomy when organizing their workday.

However, there is a growing demand for coordination both between the school staff and the partners as well as within the multi-professional teams, and the schools' administrators should be assuming the main responsibility for meeting this need. However, the administrators do not always possess the required know-how, and in addition to this, there is no clear idea concerning how such coordination within the framework of a network can or should be carried out.

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## SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AT SCHOOL AND BEYOND. CASE STUDY ON A VOLUNTEERING PROJECT IN A SCHOOL FROM THE AUTONOMOUS REGION OF MADEIRA, PORTUGAL

Alda Rosário<sup>39</sup>, Fernando Serra<sup>40</sup>

### Abstract

This presentation is based on a descriptive study case that was developed in the Horácio Bento Gouveia School (HBG) that is located in Funchal, the capital city of Madeira, Portugal. It is aimed at characterizing and evaluating an educational volunteering project named «*Clube Viver a Vida*»<sup>41</sup> (CVV).

The study involves a mixed methodology in order to meet the following objectives: characterizing the CVV from the point of view of social responsibility and active citizenship; identifying social and personal skills acquired by students during and after their participation in volunteering activities; evaluating the project's impact on the relationship between the school and the community.

**Keywords:** school; social responsibility; community service; volunteering; skills

### 1. Introduction

The CVV is an educational volunteering project based at HBG School that aims to value and recognize volunteering service as a means to participate in an active citizenship and consequently promote the school's social responsibility. As far as this is concerned, the Portuguese Ministry of Education and Science and the Ministry of Social Security and Solidarity claim the following in the preamble to a legal document: «Valuing the volunteering activities in educational institutions is a means to access the reinforcement of the school's role as an active agent when it comes to building relationships and creating models for the consolidation of social responsibility values».<sup>42</sup>

According to Alarcão (2001, p.18), «the school must prepare future citizens, but it cannot be understood as a time of preparation for life. It is life itself, a place to experience citizenship» and where «solidarity is a component of citizenship» (Perrenoud, 2005, p.16). Therefore, it is reasonable to invite young students from an early age to participate and play an active role in society through the engagement in volunteering activities. For Delors (1996), it is important that students integrate and participate in pedagogical proposals in which there is the involvement of project methodology and educational volunteering. According to this author, whenever students engage in such methodologies, they tend to acquire and develop skills that will be «pillars of knowledge: to learn to recognize, to do, to live in community, to "be"» (Delors, 1996, p.90).

HBG School motivates students from different classes, ages, and sociocultural origins to be integrated in heterogeneous volunteering groups and activities, thus promoting a democratic school (Cortêsão, 1999). On the other hand, this school allows the collaboration among teachers through the participation in common projects. According to Cortêsão (1999, p.13), «this characteristic enables the implementation of educational projects that will have more variety, difference, creativity» and will simultaneously provide the opportunity to «discover means to reach the potential that everyone has and that is sometimes underneath deviant and disturbing behaviours». The school tends to create an opportunity to receive and integrate the students very naturally, in a way that they will no longer feel unmotivated or out of place.

In this paper we focus on the description of the main steps of the case study developed at HBG School with the following objectives:

1. Characterizing the CVV Project according to the social responsibility and active citizenship perspectives;
2. Identifying the social and interpersonal skills acquired in the volunteering experiences;
3. Evaluating the impact of the project on the relations between the school and the community.

<sup>39</sup> Escola Básica dos 2º e 3º Ciclos Dr. Horácio Bento de Gouveia – Madeira, Portugal. Email: aldamatosrosario@gmail.com.

<sup>40</sup> Instituto Superior de Ciências Sociais e Políticas - Universidade de Lisboa. Email: fserra@iscsp.ulisboa.pt

<sup>41</sup> This can be translated as "Live Life Club".

<sup>42</sup> Ordinance No. 333/2012 of 22nd October.

## 2. Educational volunteering: a strategy for the development of social responsibility, citizenship, and social and interpersonal skills

For some authors, the term «social responsibility» has been acquiring an increasing importance in the behaviour of the organizations and has thus gained considerable improvement regarding its goals and strategies. For Ashley (2002), social responsibility is defined as «the compromise that an organization must have towards society, expressed through acts and attitudes that generally affect it positively, or more specifically, acting with the clear and coherent purpose concerning the society and its accountability to it». On the other hand, Grajew (2001), president emeritus of the Ethos Institute, one of the main institutions that are responsible for the dissemination of the concept of social responsibility in the Brazilian society, defines social responsibility as:

(...) the ethical behaviour of the company in all its activities. It is tied with the company's interactions with its employees, its suppliers, its customers, its shareholders, the government, its competitors, the environment, and the community. Social responsibility principles may even constrain all corporate political activity (Grajew, Ethos Institute, 2001).

Alternatively, Daft (1999, p.88) defines social responsibility as «(...) the obligation of the administration to make decisions and actions that will contribute to the welfare and interests of the society and the organization».

In this same work, Daft considers the pyramidal model of Archie Carroll that subdivides corporate social responsibility into four types. From the bottom to the top of the pyramid, the four types are: economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary or philanthropic.

For Daft (1999, p.90) «(...) responsibilities are ranked from bottom to top based on their relative importance and the frequency with which managers have to deal with every aspect». So at the bottom of the pyramid, and thinking about the organization as a profitable entity, we can find the economic aspect and profit, which is the main reason for companies to exist. Having economic responsibility means ensuring economic return to the organization. However, it is important that this profit is legal  $\frac{3}{4}$  legal liability  $\frac{3}{4}$  i.e., the organization should be aware of all the relevant laws and their application in its activity: «At least, it is expected that companies are responsible for the compliance with local, state, and federal laws regarding their employees» (Daft, 1999, pp. 90-91). Beyond ensuring a legitimate financial course pursuant to the law, it is necessary to ensure activities and projects that, although not prescribed by law and not really serving the economic interests of the company, are ethical towards society  $\frac{3}{4}$  ethical responsibility. Finally, when we get to the top of the pyramid, the discretionary or philanthropic responsibility, according to Daft (1999, p. 91), is «purely voluntary and guided by the company's desire to make a social contribution that is not imposed by the economy, law or ethics». According to the same author, this kind of social responsibility tends to be visible by the donations given to charity or throughout contributions to community projects or any other forms of support that do not offer returns to the company. For Alencastro (1997), when the school integrates its internal (students, teachers, staff, parents, and tutors) and external audiences (Non-Governmental Organizations, private companies), the social problems that greatly affect the living conditions of people and the environment they live in inspire the creation of projects that will be beneficial not only for the school but also for all the individuals that are part of the community  $\frac{3}{4}$  the stakeholders.

Therefore, through the act of questioning, through discovery and access to culture, according to Vygotsky (1998), the school should have a conscious responsibility to fight and erase all kinds of problems, including hunger, illiteracy, drugs, violence or anything that might harm the society. Thus, schools allow for the articulation with the existential reality of those involved, via social interactions, dialogue among peers, challenges, rich and varied experiences, curiosity, discovery, and access to culture. As a result, schools tend to assist in solving the nation's problems as they contribute to building a more equitable and more humanized country that is better economically structured, and that respects and values human dignity.

Social responsibility is considered a new form of education that is more comprehensive and conscious, which is not limited to isolated activities on certain dates but that starts intrinsically with every gesture and every thought. In this context, Delors (1996, p.154) states that «the problems of the surrounding society cannot be

left outside the school door: poverty, hunger, violence, drugs, these all come with students into schools, while not long ago they were left on the outside along with the children who did not go to school».

For Makower (1994), a socially responsible organization is aware that its activity creates a wide range of direct and indirect impacts inside and outside the organization, which affect everything: consumers, employees, the community, and the environment. Tolovi (1999) considers that social responsibility still remains a rising concern in business. Therefore, it increasingly changes to fulfil its mission in the society. For this author, social responsibility is a concern as well as a strategic issue that is not only limited to giving money to those in need, but is primarily seen as the sum of the internal and external actions of an organization.

According to the UN (United Nations Organization), «a volunteer is a young person or an adult that due to his/her personal interests and civic spirit devotes much of his/her time to various forms of activities, organized or otherwise, social welfare or other fields without any compensation». For Ferreira *et al.* (2008), voluntary work is an activity in which a person donates his/her time to benefit others, without expecting any retribution. According to Fonseca (2001, p. 28), volunteering is more than a probable «maybe», it is

(...) an educational/training tool (...). It can teach processes, techniques, procedures that are directly tied with the actual purpose of the activity, something visible and easily tailored and even measurable. (...) It extends social horizons by placing youngsters into contact with groups with which they would normally have no contact (given their inherited and/or acquired social status), it develops the capacity to think about political, social, and economic issues, it allows them to strengthen leadership and interaction skills, facilitating the acquisition of organizational and self-management skills.

In Portugal, volunteering began to take its first legal steps at the end of the 1980s, through the establishment of a voluntary social insurance, which is a contributory regime of the Social Security<sup>43</sup>. Almost ten years later, the Government laid the foundations for its legal framework, which aims to promote and guarantee that all citizens can participate in volunteer activities. *Volunteering* was defined as the «collection of actions of social and communitarian interest that are altruistically performed by people in the context of projects, programs and other forms of assistance to the service of individuals, families, and the community, developed in a non-profit approach by public or private entities»<sup>44</sup>. And the *volunteer* was defined as an individual who «freely, unselfishly, and responsibly» undertakes to participate in volunteering activities in order to promote and support volunteering as a means to build a more solidary and caring society. In 2000, the composition and function of the National Council for the Promotion of volunteering<sup>45</sup> were defined. Five years later, the procedures for the recognition of the length of service for teachers/trainers who sign voluntary contracts with non-governmental organizations and other private entities of public value were defined. In 2010, the European Year of Voluntary Activities was established in order to Promote Active Citizenship in Portugal in 2011 (AEV-2011) nationwide.<sup>46</sup> The volunteer activity was finally legally valued in the educational and teaching context in 2012<sup>47</sup>. In that same year, schools were required to start the registration of all extracurricular activities developed by their students, predominantly those that were done within the scope of volunteering, and the students' level of qualification is written in the certificate. Recently, the National Assembly Resolution No. 32/2013 values and recognizes non-formal education skills acquired by young people through youth and volunteering associations. It is worth highlighting in this study that, at an international level, Portugal was invited, as all governments were, by the United Nations General Assembly Resolution No. 40/212 of 17<sup>th</sup> December 1985 to annually celebrate the International Volunteer Day on 5<sup>th</sup> December. Furthermore, Resolution No. 52/17 of the General Assembly of the United Nations proclaimed the year 2001 as the International year of Volunteers. Sberga (2012, p. 11) believes that educational volunteering may represent a «training proposal that provides the maturation of young people through experiences of solidarity and commitment» and states that this type of volunteering may even prevent risk situations and suffering, because if young people are given the opportunity to face danger situations, it will provide them with an opportunity to grow, mature, and anticipate wellness. The author also emphasizes that

43 Decree-Law No. 40/89 of 12<sup>th</sup> February 1989.

44 Law No. 71/98 of 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1998.

45 Resolution of the Ministers Council No. 50/2000 of 30<sup>th</sup> March (published in DR, Series II, No. 94 Order No. 4456/2005, of 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2005).

46 Resolution of the Council of Ministers No. 62/2010, of 25<sup>th</sup> August, 2010.

47 Decree No. 333/2012 of 22<sup>nd</sup> October, 2012.

when the relationship between education and prevention is enhanced, volunteering becomes important. Therefore, young people will grow personally; they will develop self-criticism skills and dynamism to improve the quality of social life through their participation. Thus, it is possible that skills such as leadership <sup>¾</sup> the ability to influence, guide and lead a group towards achieving a certain goal <sup>¾</sup> and resilience <sup>¾</sup> the «ability to employ knowledge, attitudes and skills in order to prevent, minimize or overcome the damaging effects of crises and adversity» (Jardim and Pereira, 2006:152), will come through volunteering, proving to be extremely important for their personal and social development during formative years. This point of view is shared by the Secretary General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, who stated on the occasion of the International Volunteer Day in 2009:

(...) Volunteering as well as solidarity and social cohesion are sources of energy and resilience at a community level and can provide positive social change, to encourage respect for diversity, equality and participation. Volunteering is among the most important resources of society.

The *volunteering issue*, is also highlighted by some authors that state the importance of the presence and the role of the educator. According to Capellato (2013, p. 10):

(...) for young people, the references are people, words, gestures that will provide the formation of identity. Young people establish harmonious relationships in their moments of frustration, through which they receive love and understanding, develop a healthy identity, manage to withstand frustrations until the appropriate time to carry out their wishes happens.

At this point, it is wise to clarify the concept of competence as this will appear with some frequency over our work. For Gilbert and Parlier (1992, p.14) the term competence means a «framework of knowledge, action skills and behaviours which are structured according to a purpose and a given type of situation». According to these authors, the competent individual tends to dynamically combine knowledge, know-how and awareness of himself as a person. Therefore, they are able to fairly easily adapt to various situations and different contexts. Perrenoud (1999) further states that having power means having the ability to act effectively when given a certain situation by using it for their knowledge. In a constructivist perspective, the interaction between the subject and the environment generates knowledge. Therefore, whenever the School provides its students with an opportunity to act, to have their own initiative, to develop self-confidence through varied experiences, thinking, criticism and confrontation skills will give them the opportunity to perform meaningful learning by themselves in a wide range of situations and circumstances.

Sberga (2012, p. 9) corroborates Fonseca (2001) and equally endorses the idea of the existence of educational volunteering that she describes as

(...) a solidarity action concerned with the training of young volunteers. Its principles are based on the comprehensive training of the young volunteer, on social inclusion, on the dynamism and joy felt for doing something good to others. It is a volunteering of action and reflection, a socio-political area of education, which helps in the development of critical thinking, the awareness of human and social rights, the respect for cultural differences, and the witnessing and experiencing of solidarity. The central concern is not so much the service the volunteer provides, but the training and qualifications of the youngsters while performing their volunteer activities.

For Mori and Vaz (2006), educational volunteering, when developed through planned and targeted solidarity activities according to the pedagogical proposal of the school, can be very useful and important as it can provide meaning to the curricula and the learning of values by the students. Vilela and Cruz (2004) also state that schools should go beyond the transmission of subject content. For this, it is necessary and important for teachers to take a look at educational volunteering as an incentive to improve the teaching/learning process, as this tends to enrich the classroom work by bringing elements for the discussion of transversal themes, which supports what was written by Mori and Vaz when discussing the topic of project methodology.

Having in mind that every young person has their growth rhythm, it will be worth opening a parenthesis to present, albeit rather briefly, the classical theory of identity development put forward by Erik Erikson. For Erikson (1968), speaking about development necessarily means to speak about interactions between inborn instincts and social requirements. Consequently, the development of the individual is dependent on their ability to come across the increasingly difficult and demanding challenges that society has to offer. The individual, tends to experience certain crises when facing these challenges but, according to this author, if they are well addressed, they will foster human qualities, otherwise they may turn into problems of various types. The formation of identity, according to Erikson (1968), involves overcoming eight crises that arise throughout the life cycle and that correspond to eight stages of development:

Given that our study embraces students aged 13 to 18, we fit it in the exploration of the 5<sup>th</sup> stage of Table 1. The fifth stage, from 13 to 18, takes place during the period of adolescence and refers to the construction of identity. Questions like «Who am I?» or «What do I want to be?» are frequent at a stage when many changes, both at the physical level and at the level of the demands of society, are particularly critical for the establishment of their identity.

Table 1 - Psychosocial development stages according to Erikson (1968)

AGE	BIPOLAR CRISIS
0-24 Months	Trust vs. Mistrust
2-3 Years	Autonomy vs. Shame/Doubt
4-6 Years	Initiative vs. Guilt
6-12 Years	Industry vs. Inferiority
13-18 Years	Identity vs. Identity confusion
18-35 Years	Intimacy vs. Isolation
35- 65 Years	Generativity vs. Stagnation
+ 65 Years	Integrity vs. Despair

Heath (1977) sets out some of the features of the competent «I»: clarity about their identity, positive attitude to problem solving, orientation of the reality, self-esteem, tolerance, honourable responsibility, openness to experience, persistence in the face of failure and adversity, fitness and willingness to get help from others, and assertiveness.

To Franta and Colasanti (1993, p.120), «helping students to get to know themselves differently is particularly useful in both cases, whether they underestimate themselves or are unaware of their abilities, such as when they overestimate and amplify their skills». Therefore, when students are able to recognize and accept their fears, their body, as well as their emotions and anxieties, they will more easily accept themselves for who they are. Serra (1985) defines the self as the perception that the individual has of himself or herself in various dimensions <sup>¾</sup> social, emotional, physical or academic.

In this context, Sberga (2012, p.7) seems to have no doubt about the importance of volunteering for the development of young people and their sense of security, «volunteering is presented as an alternative space not only for social inclusion and commitment to responsible citizenship but also as a proposal that helps young people to know themselves and discover their potential». On the one hand, the well-formed self by the youngster may result in appreciation and positive evaluation by others, including their teachers and their peers. Consequently, the youngster may experience an increase in self-esteem that, according to Jardim and Pereira (2006:75), means «the way each person sees and judges himself or herself, i.e., it refers to the types of values people identify in themselves». Closing the parenthesis regarding the formation of identity, according to Erikson, the question of the presence and role of the educator is essential, Capellato (2013, p.11) claims that «teenagers need educators that provide them with the experience of affection. It is through experiences with caretakers that structured relations will be established with the society in general». Corroborating Capellato, Sberga

(2012, p.16) states that «one of the key aspects of youth volunteering is the presence of the educator who, through her personal characteristics, professional skills, and calling, plays a unique role in the formative accompaniment of the young volunteer». According to this author, the educator «can guide the youngsters' path through educational principles, while simultaneously offering them the possibility of having a role model that will help them to devise their own projects» (ibidem). Sberga (2012, p.16), most likely because of her extensive experience with young people, even provides valuable information to various educators around the world who believe and invest in educational volunteering, saying:

(...) Another characteristic of their [the educator's] identity is their capacity to welcome young people and establish an alliance with them. As an older, more mature, friend, this educator can walk alongside with them, listen to their worries, help them formulate their problems and make their interests more objective, giving them hope, valuing their positive aspects, and helping their gifts and talents fully blossom. This educator guides their affections with dedication and love, avoiding any paternalism or possessiveness, and promoting their growth and maturity. The main concern of this educator is not to do things, but to be a friend and share a fraternal presence, encouraging others with their life-giving and joy.

By being present in volunteer activities, the teacher performs the role of mediator between theory and practice. This way you can watch beginner leadership acts, facilitating and strengthening community life and group work. The teacher may be based on his or her expertise and experience to carry out an ongoing review of activities and make room to evaluate the students and enable the growth of all the individuals involved (Sberga, 2012).

According to Dewey (1979, p. 260) «a class or a group which is organized as a social unit of common interests and is driven by a mature and experienced person enhances the mental enthusiasm». Another equally important aspect which is referred by some authors about volunteering is the desire of young people to belong to a group. In this context, Sberga (2012, p.18) explains that the group has two main functions: «collaboration in the development of the individual personality and their integration into the social organism in which they live». Delors (1996) argues that students who integrate and participate in educational proposals, who are engaged with the methodology of educational volunteer projects, develop and acquire skills that, according to the four pillars of education for the twenty-first century, will be key throughout their life and will become the pillars of knowledge for these young people: «learning how to know, learning how to do, learning how to live together, learning how to be» (Delors, 1996, p.90). For Delors (1996, p.102), «learning how to live together» is also important; it is essential for the acquisition of social skills in order to be able to maintain meaningful interpersonal relationships with others.

Whenever an individual faces a necessity she must operationalize knowledge, attitudes and skills in order to support and be supported by others. That can reveal, according to Bernardino (2003:136), another competence called social support. When developing this competence, the individual must face the concept of «social network», i.e., she knows she can count on the help and collaboration of a group of people and organizations, namely: family, friends, acquaintances, and institutions. Still, the same author states it is in this social network that the individual will find support and help and thus will be able to fulfil her commitments of her daily life and overcome some difficult obstacles. The «ability to employ knowledge, attitudes and skills in order to act together, to achieve a common goal, maximizing the potential of each individual's durable and balanced way» corresponds to the definition of cooperation and is another competence to have in mind while the personal and social development occurs as Jardim and Pereira (2006) write. Comoglio and Cardoso (1996) go further when they say in this context that one of the important conditions for the suitability of cooperation to be developed is that the individual faces the complex and unpredictable tasks of research, preparation or execution of a project.

According to Jardim (2003), the definition of cooperation implies the logic of a team, i.e. every person who uses the power of cooperation is aware that all individuals who are part of a group are interdependent at a cognitive level. As a result of this interdependence, according to Jardim (2003), people start to feel they are part of the group, i.e., they have a sense of belonging, which is a key element implied in cooperation  $\frac{3}{4}$  the influence  $\frac{3}{4}$  the possibility that the individual has to provide input to improve the performance of the group. Authentic commu-

nication, if guided by transparency and consistency, is an asset for the cultivation of friendship and conflict management (Franta and Salonia, 1993). It is also an important experience for any person, since it helps to open the individual to others (Mounier, 1987).

According to Jardim and Pereira (2006:108), the social development of the youngster also implies the exercise of competence  $\frac{3}{4}$  assertiveness  $\frac{3}{4}$  that is, according to these authors, «a behavioural way to communicate, which means supporting what each one wants, feels and thinks, both giving the rightful space to each other». Being assertive means possessing «social skills», or having a range of behaviours that are always suitable for the situation that exposes their feelings, attitudes, desires, opinions or even rights (Caballo, 1993). Another skill that has proved to be important in the personal and social development of an individual is creativity.

Alluding to different theories that address the concept of creativity, Jardim and Pereira (2006) argue that creative people have some characteristics that distinguish them from the others, namely: they are mentally flexible, adapt easily to new situations, have extensive knowledge on a particular field that has been achieved and consolidated with study and experience, offer an interior that promotes action and production, and therefore can «create» very easily. The concept of competence tends to be associated with the guidelines of an active school. Considering the view of Alarcão (2001, p.78) who says that the educational dimension of the political-pedagogical and curricular project lies in the «intention of the school to develop actions in order to fulfil its purpose of educating citizens in the socio-cultural, political, professional, and human dimensions», that the twenty-first century school has started to prove that it cares about the students and their preparation for life and therefore has obtained another meaning. In a socio-constructivist perspective, when the school invites students to volunteer in social projects, it presents them with an opportunity to be an active agent; the protagonist of the action; the subject learner, who constantly searches for the meaning of things. In addition, the young person gets the ability to acquire and develop many skills, which have already been mentioned above, and may also develop others such as self-realization and empathy. Some authors consider these two skills essential both for the personal training of young people and for their intrapersonal relations. Therefore, we will devote them some attention right now. For Jardim and Pereira (2001, p. 91), self-realization is the «ability to operationalize the human tendency to independently expand, develop and implement personal, social and professional potential».

Connecting their needs, youngster are led to the fullness of their being, as they will find meaning for their actions and therefore experience a full sense of well-being (Palma and Lopes, 2012). «Self-realization is the path to happiness» state Palma and Lopes (2012, p.133) who, in their research, highlight some benefits that are associated with the powers of empathy in the context of interpersonal relationships: precise understanding, overcoming conflicts, achieving popularity among friends, reducing emotional problems, and understanding their peers. An empathetic person, whom people usually call a sensitive person, a friend who «can put herself in somebody else's shoes», is described by Lazure (1994) as a person with verbal and/or non-verbal communication skills; a person who, through looks, gestures, postures or a smile can convey and reveal that she understands the other person. Therefore, this ability may prove fruitful when the youngster is at a development stage. Regarding the implications of personal and social skills for the individual, Beauchamp and Anderson (2010) state that the presence of ruptures on the individual's socialization process may be of such importance that they may compromise the development and adjustment of the subject, both personal and socially.

### 3. Methodology

Based on the problem, the general objectives, and the theoretical basis reviewed for our study, we found it necessary to draw up a descriptive research by using a mixed qualitative and quantitative methodology (Bogdan and Biklen, 1994).

The collection and analysis of data followed different strategies: (1) document analysis (several official documents and legislation); (2) focus group involving eleven students of the school; (3) a survey distributed to a random stratified sample of fifty students from the same school; and (4) one individual semi-structured interview with the delegate of an NGO. Once the interviews were carried out, we did the respective transcripts and content analysis, according to the guidelines set out by Bardin (2011).

#### 4. Results and discussion

Proceeding to the triangulation of the data obtained, we will now present some of the main results that provide the answers to the following research questions:

- \_ How can the CVV be described as far as social responsibility and active citizenship are concerned?
- \_ How does the participation in the project and in volunteering activities contribute to the acquisition and promotion of the interpersonal and social skills of the students involved?
- \_ What kind of impact has the CVV on the development of the relationships between school and community?

#### 5. Students' opinions and perspectives

**«Before you were a student at HBG School, had you ever had the opportunity to participate in volunteer activities?»**

We noted that from fifty volunteer student responders, 84% had not had the opportunity to participate in volunteer activities before attending that school. Only 16% of the students had already experienced it. Therefore, this reveals that in the HBG School, 84% of the students inquired found the first opportunity to be educated for responsibility, since they are already raised to make their own choices, which implies acquiring an ability to «discern, evaluate, and decide» (Sberga, 2001:184). These volunteer students were invited to experience a new «lifestyle, a way of being and relating in society, according to the principles of solidarity and cultural values, active citizenship, promoting peace and the development of people» (Sberga,2001:183). In this sense, state policies corroborate, promote and facilitate the strategy that is adopted by HBG School, for example, through the Ministry of Education and Science and the Ministry of Solidarity and Social Security by claiming in the preamble to Ordinance No. 333/2012 22<sup>nd</sup> October: «For young people, actions of volunteering initiation constitute a special area in active citizenship». The same decree adds that: «The valuation of volunteer activities in educational establishments and education in general is a gateway of support and a role for the school as a structuring agent in building human relationships and consolidating social models of responsibility values». We believe that the existence of legal frameworks and effective support at the public policy level tends to value and strengthen the construction of identity and culture of the HBG School.

As the CVV is a promoter and facilitator of volunteer activities that establishes partnerships with other organizations, it tends to create unique opportunities for students, teachers, staff, parents, and guardians to cooperate actively and democratically and consequently participate in the management of the School. In this context, the statement of Alarcão (2001, p.18), «It [the school] is life itself, a place for citizens to experience life», seems to make perfect sense.

In this study, we were curious about the real reasons that have led students to participate in these activities and to «take time away» from their own leisure activities to experience it.

Regarding the question **«What made you to start participating in volunteer activities?»**, it is easy to see that **the reason that stands out is «I like helping others»**  $\frac{3}{4}$  62 %  $\frac{3}{4}$  a fact that corroborates the opinion of Sberga (2001, p.150) when she states: «The young person is by nature aiming for relationships and interested in the common good» and Delors (1996, p.96) stresses the importance of «Learning to live together, learning to live with others» and how that can be fruitful to acquire social and interpersonal relationship skills that the young people will employ with others.

For Morin (2004, p. 65), «Education should contribute to a person's self-training (learning to accept the human condition and how life is) and show how to become a citizen». The author even adds: «We are truly citizens when we actually feel solidary and responsible» (Morin,2004, p.74). In this sense, the CVV, through the implementation of its strategy (what to do?) and its strategic planning (how to do it?) (Barroso, 1995), attempts to provide opportunities for students to become active citizens. As regards these two aspects, it is worth opening a parenthesis to read the opinion of a delegate of an NGO, our interviewee: «You [CVV] prepare the process,

because you talk to classes, divulge, do exploration sessions about Action Fund, then take part in the action. They [the volunteers] come here onsite and do an “afterwards action” so I think it’s very, very complete!»; «Volunteers have been prepared before being involved in participations», stated the delegate of an NGO; «They [the students] know they have to do a mission, a volunteering mission and therefore it helps a lot»; «[volunteering] gives a sense of civic participation and credit to [students]. You have value in the participation in society, you have a role, it gives you a very great personal greatness»; «This commitment gives them responsibility and maturity in terms of behaviour»; «I think you [CVV] are doing very well. I have already given your example to other schools», said the delegate of an NGO.

Table 2- Questions asked/ Answers from students inquired.

Questions/Questionnaire	%						
	Strongly disagree	Quite disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree.	Agree	Quite agree	Strongly agree
Does being a volunteer mean to know yourself better?	2	2	10	8	26	28	24
Did I become autonomous after volunteering?	0	0	0	0	92	4	4
Am I more responsible because I'm a volunteer?	2	0	2	14	34	20	28
Do I think my work is important for the volunteering institutions?	2	0	0	10	20	18	50
Are my skills enhanced each time I accomplish a volunteering activity?	2	0	8	12	30	28	20
Have I already received any compliments from my family/friends/teachers after enrolling in volunteering?	2	2	0	18	18	18	42
Am I a happier and more fulfilled after volunteering?	2	0	0	24	16	24	34
Would I be happy to quit volunteering?	70	8	16	4	0	2	0

HBG School tends to have social responsibility at the «micro-scale» and «meso-scale» levels (Carmo and Esgaio, 2012). «Micro-scale», since it turns into individual, family and group responsibility. «Meso-scale», since it materializes in an organizational and corporate responsibility that is implemented in «actions directed outwards and from within organizations» (Carmo and Esgaio, 2012, pp. 8-9).

To what extent does participation in the CVV project and streamlined voluntary practices contribute to the acquisition and promotion of the personal and social skills of the students involved?

When faced with the question **Does being a volunteer mean to know yourself better?** we found that from the fifty respondents, the answer «quite agree» got a percentage of 28%, the «I agree», and 26% «strongly agree» a percentage of 24%.

The quotes from some of the students interviewed in focus groups also deserve some attention: «(...) it [volunteering] opens up our eyes, it makes us feel like we are someone else», Kelly; «I think we found ourselves», Gonçalves; «In volunteering I find a little bit of me (...) and I am being myself and then I find out who I am”, Isabel; «(...) and I changed a lot, really a lot [after volunteering]», Clara.

Proceeding to the triangulation of the data collected from the fifty respondents and quotes from young volunteers that are mentioned above, we confirmed Sberga’s theory (2001, p. 169) that «The social commitment made through volunteering is an effective collaborator in the construction of the adolescent identity.»

The data also supports the view of Delors (1996, p.99) when he states that youngsters have a great opportunity to «learn how to be» and understand that they can become «active or passive subjects in their life context, when volunteering» (Sberga, 2001, p.171). Youngsters can, if desired, be the main characters of their own story and, according to Sberga (2001, p. 217), when this acts directly «in the process of organizing and planning activities, participation in decision-making and responsibility for the implementation of tasks, they grow as social actors and mature in terms of personality.»

During her interview, the delegate of an NGO says: «it [volunteering] develops a critical sense in them (...) it [volunteering] seems to me very good for the formation of the person and when using what students tell us: “I belong to an NGO because I’ve been there, I also raised donations! And so if that organization works, it is also because I also belong to it! And that is spectacular...”. They [the volunteers] realize they are influencing the whole, but it was them who had the ability to influence the whole»; «it [volunteering] works on their own [the volunteers’] conscience.»

The data triangulation is also validated by Barbosa (2007, p. 399) when he ensures: «The volunteer is not the one that does, but the one that is, which is a progressive way of structuring your own personality towards the oblation, the gift of the self». So we think we can infer that the sixty-one youngsters surveyed (interview and questionnaire) in this project have the perception that volunteering tends to deepen their human and relational potential and build a strong and firm personality (Sberga, 2001). Once young people «realize they are modified as to their conduct» (Sberga, 2001, p. 171), they tend to recognize and take volunteering as «a vehicle to build a new identity» (Fernandes, 2005, p. 2).

When analysing the question **Did I become autonomous after volunteering?**, the highest percentage, at 92%, was attributed to the answer «I agree», followed by 4% of the answers «I quite agree» and «strongly agree». For Barbosa (2007, p. 100), this data tends to perfect the sense, since for this author, «self-knowledge processes, critical analysis and awareness-making are indispensable for the moral-evaluative life and contribute to the achievement of the ideal state of autonomy.» From this, we can infer that our adolescents tend to have personal and social responsibility, as according to Sberga (2001, p. 173), «The activities and actions that help adolescents and young people increase their degree of autonomy guide them as regards personal and social responsibility.»

Such prerogative is also supported by the data obtained when the fifty students answered the question **Am I more responsible because I’m a volunteer?** As can be seen on Table 2, 34% of the students answered «agree», 28% answered «strongly agree» and 20% answered «quite agree», thus confirming the opinion of the delegate of an NGO when in her interview she says: «this understanding of being in the “world of work”, so to speak and then return to school only gives them a little more commitment, responsibility. They have the responsibility to be here on time and get back at the previously scheduled time.»

The delegate said «organizations often fail to take the time and availability to ask the volunteer. “Look, did it go well? (...). The [CVV] can make this process»; «It’s good [that young people do volunteering] for everyone, for the society, for the organizations that really have active people». Faced with these two witnesses, we consider they legitimate 50% of the responses «totally agree» obtained to the question **Are my skills enhanced each time I accomplish a volunteering activity?** This fact is endorsed by Sberga’s view (2013) that, in the article published in the Silesian Bulletin said: «Everyone wins when someone is willing to support a cause. The winner will receive, either in a project or in a social organization, as it has expanded and optimized its resources, the whole society that recognizes the citizen in their great transformative potential will also win. And most people will triumph in volunteering by donating their time, work and talent to make it possible to live in a fairer society where everyone must participate. Volunteering is the opportunity for the person to act in society by promoting social transformation».

Affection is another important point that stands out in some of the testimonies that we received, «(...) I have treated them like family, the affection that they [the users] have for us is important», Diana; «They [the users] begin to give us hugs and kisses, they want to sit on our lap (...)», Eduarda; «(...) and then a boy took me by the hand and started talking to me», Mariana; «I was going to miss them in the next nine days, well, it would be such a long time (...)», Isabel.

Such testimonies that are beautiful and deep reinforce the view of Capellato (2013, p. 10) when he says «For young people, the role models are the people, words, gestures that will provide and identify formation. Young people establish harmonious relationships in their moments of frustration, through which they receive love and understanding, develop a healthy identity».

The testimony of young Ana: «I love, I love the sister [sister Fernanda, head of the volunteers at the nursing home]»; Gonçalo: «The Sister is spectacular!»; and Isabel: «She [sister Fernanda] tells us several things for us to reflect upon» thus strengthening the idea of this clinical psychology and psychotherapy for children, adolescents and families, when he states that: «teenagers need educators who provide them with the experience of affection» (Capellato, 2013, p. 11). This author adds that «the desire to take care of themselves, of the others and of all of us makes us aware of healthy subjects, of the notion of solidarity and citizenship» (Capellato, 2013, p. 13), which was a fact that is reinforced with a quote by young Mariana, when interviewed in our focus group: «(...) We learn to be more loving, to be more dear, when we are talking with them [children in psycho-rehabilitation, in Funchal]». This affection and the natural affection that rises and sets between volunteers and organizations is also present in the words of the delegate of an NGO when she speaks about these young people: «I usually recognize the faces [of the volunteers]»; the delegate of an NGO adds: «(...) We take a snack, take a refreshment and end up talking a little bit and we ask: "So, was it very difficult?" or "Did you enjoy it?"». Fearing that respondent students could not recognize the meaning of the term «competence» we tried to clarify the issue by putting in parentheses the words «abilities» and «skills», thus using the concept of competence as stated by the authors Cardoso, Neto and Oyadomari (2010:93), for whom the word responsibility means «quality of those who are able to appreciate or solve a certain problem, to do something, capacity, ability, aptitude and suitability». We note that the answer «I agree» is the most voted one by the students, with a percentage of 30%, followed by the answer «I quite agree» with 28%.

#### **Have I already received any compliments from my family /friends/ teachers after enrolling in volunteering?**

This was another of the issues raised in the questionnaire of student volunteers; we can see that 42% is the percentage of students who answered «strongly agree» and 18.0% is the percentage of answers «Neither disagree nor agree», «I agree» and «quite agree». Eleven students interviewed collectively, answered similarly to the questions: Do you feel a different person than you were before volunteering? Did parents, friends, and teachers notice these differences? «I didn't use to help at home before but now I like doing it and I help with the household chores. My father even noticed it», Isabel; «(...) Now, I no longer argue with my sister», Teresa; «(...) A teacher of EV [Arts] (...) came up to me and said "Beatriz is quieter!"», Ana; «My grandmother said I was different, I hadn't realised it before... I had grown as a person», Kelly; «Márcio is now more of a people's person (...) he speaks with people, interacts more, he's more sociable. When I joined the class he was closed and did not talk with anyone but now [after volunteering] he is already better» (said Beatriz when talking about her colleague Márcio).

The delegate of an NGO also opines on this matter, saying: «(...) and we have felt it year after year. Volunteers are more certain of the role they have to play, they believe more in themselves and that they can make a difference.»

Proceeding, once again, to the triangulation of the data obtained through the questionnaire and focus groups, we realized that these witnesses testify, according to Barbosa (2007, p. 390), that young volunteers recognize «their place in the world» and have a «system of recognition of their own capabilities». For this author, this recognition is an essential element for them to become «active subjects capable of exercising responsibility and finding out that they are working to develop their skills» (ibidem).

Let us then consider the degree of satisfaction, joy and self-realization of the young people before their participation in voluntary activities. In the question **Am I a happier and more fulfilled person after volunteering?** we found that 34% of the teens surveyed said they «fully agree», while 24% said that they «Neither agree nor disagree».

Nevertheless, we decided to validate this issue, by assuring that the students were aware of their responses and attentive to the questions posed in the questionnaire. For this, we decided to include in another position of the questionnaire, the following question: **Would I be happy to quit volunteering?** The answer that comes out is «Strongly Disagree», with a percentage of 70.0%. The answer «I disagree» reached a percentage of 16.0% and «I quite disagree» a percentage of 8.0%. We noted in the analysis of the answers to these two questions that students tend to be consistent in their responses and therefore the relationship between Volunteering/Self-realization/happiness tends to exist and make sense to them. Let us also quote some of the students surveyed: «(...) we always want to do something even better and always go further (...)», Diana; «(...) and then we go home and we feel good about ourselves (...)», Diana; «I love volunteering in hospitals, with the homeless, in nursing homes (...)», Ana. By analysing these small but valuable testimonies of teenagers aged 14, we noticed joy, satisfaction, and pleasure that are inherent to the activities performed. Each youth is led to the fullness of his/her being, as they carry out activities that are in line with their own identity (Palma and Lopes, 2012). According to Maslow (1968), these volunteers will have reached the top of the pyramid (Self-realization)  $\frac{3}{4}$  and hence their welfare and their happiness  $\frac{3}{4}$  which will be present during and after the performance of the volunteer activity.

For Palma and Lopes (2012), the relationship voluntary/self-realization/happiness tends to make sense as young people make choices and accept activities that are consistent with finding their own identities, that give them meaning and direction to their own lives. For Palma and Lopes (2012:132), «our achievements allow us to apply the skills we value most, contributing to greater life satisfaction» and self-realization is the «way to happiness» (Palma and Lopes, 2012, p. 132). This self-fulfilment and happiness we can see in our students is also observed and witnessed by the delegate of an NGO during her interview: «(...) We can see that it is a lot of fun for them, that it is a unique experience», she laughs and then repeats: «(...) Sometimes we ask them to make [more volunteer hours] and as they love it so much they answer that they should do even more!»

The self-control and assertiveness skills that are essential for young people are trained in a group and/or individually during volunteering hours and therefore volunteering can be a formative space. We think it will be worth quoting some other testimonies of those surveyed students: «(...) before, someone would tell me something and I would react badly or on impulse, but now I am more patient, quieter, I even think that I listen to people, I hear their point of view and then state my findings», Kelly; «We smile! [In response to rude people]», Ana; «In the beginning I felt like I also needed to be rude, but now [after volunteering] I accept people's opinions more naturally», Kelly; «You have to breathe a lot so as to not react immediately after bad manners, but....», Margarida; «(...) volunteering (...) gives us strength in terms of assertive behaviour», Margarida; «I say thank you, even if the person is rude, (...) I go on my way», «In my life I intend to continue doing it! [Being rude to people who are poorly educated towards us is not the correct attitude]», Ana.

## 6. What impact has the CVV had at the level of involvement in school-community relationships?

For Capelatto (2013:17), when the school offers «voluntary early experience programs, it can form a conscious teenager, who learns how to care for herself and others. The adolescent joins it and fundamentally works with the community, constructing basic values throughout their education.» This compromise between the teen and the Club is witnessed and felt by the delegate of an NGO, when in her interview she states: «A volunteer that is involved with you, with the CVV (...) realizes what volunteering is about and what she will have to do.»

In addition to the voluntary commitment to the CVV, the delegate of an NGO also highlights other important facts, which should be noted in this study: «(...) it is very good to have a core of teachers and an open mind strategy in the school». When analysing the testimony of the delegate of an NGO, we realize that the fact that

the HBG School has a club that promotes and coordinates network activities with various non-governmental organizations, makes it a «Living Organization» and «a place where citizenship is experienced» (Alarcão, 2001, p. 18).

The quotes of our interviewee, the delegate of an NGO, show the great impact of the club for the «local sustainable development»: «Organizations also gain, because there are volunteers»; «(...) There is an interpretation of the results and I think the results serve not only the Club but also us [NGO]» (...) it [volunteering] is good for the teen [volunteer], and the civic development, because we need people with a critical attitude towards things»; «We also know how the School [HBG] and the whole process is developed [on NGO-coordinated campaigns]». Besides all the personal and social skills that students acquire with these experience and that we have already focused several times throughout this work, they tend to acquire other assets, including entrepreneurship, leadership and pro-activity skills, as shown in the following statements: «(...) I think it would be interesting to invite a few volunteers [students] to give their own testimony in other classes», Eduarda; «I would like my class to visit a nursing home», Ana; «And it's important to go to other classes, as they do not know us», Margarida. The income resulting from opening the school to others is really great: «(...) I think that the management is open to this type of activities and skill development, which seems to have evolved positively over the years», said the delegate of an NGO.

The success of the club and the potential revenues for the organizations may have been an intention of the delegate of an NGO, since at a given point in her interview she made a suggestion to the school in terms of management and organization: «(. . .) [schools] could create a link between these boys and girls coming out of HBG [that finished the 9<sup>th</sup> grade] and go to the *Liceu Jaime Moniz* [one of the large and well-known secondary schools in Funchal].»

In part IV of the questionnaire when we asked students **What are your expectations for the volunteer work and what do you intend to continue doing it?** We found that 58% of the respondents revealed that, if given the choice, they would like to continue volunteering, while 26% say they plan to «volunteer until the end of 9<sup>th</sup> grade» and 12% indicate that they will volunteer until the end of University. The percentage of 58% is, in fact, the one that calls our attention because it means that 29 students out of 50 respondents would like to volunteer until the end of their lives if they are able and therefore continue to have an «open attitude to new experiences, to a learning opportunity, to feel happy for being useful, to create bonds and feel that they fit in and are assertive in a community spirit» (Sberga, 2001: 39). Thus we conclude that, after leaving HBG, these volunteers will still express a desire to participate in other volunteer activities promoted by other schools or other organizations.

## 7. Conclusion

The CVV is part of the operational strategy of HBG School that has proved to be an asset for the definition of the «mission» of the organization, as it seeks to motivate, encourage and, whenever possible, change values, beliefs and attitudes that can create an «organizational distinctiveness» (Stephen 1998: 18). This school practices social responsibility at a «micro-scale» by promoting education for citizenship and at a «meso-scale» by operationalizing it in the groups outside and inside the organization (Carmo and Esgaio, 2012, p.8). The club has outlined strategic plans and through the action of its coordinators it invites teachers to participate in various volunteer activities, a fact that in practice will reflect the achievement of some club and organizational goals. Moreover, motivated teachers encourage the participation of students and other members of the school community, providing opportunities for them to be active citizens of the world. More than knowledge transmitters, teachers can create the necessary conditions for students to learn (Barroso, 1995) and play the role of «workers» rather than «training objects» (Barroso, 1995, p. 11). Students, teachers, staff, and parents are often faced with the first invitation for students to participate in volunteer activities and accept that invitation due to intrinsic or extrinsic motivations. Then they are already in an oriented, continuous path, and in context with reality. Thus, volunteers, as a group, have an opportunity to participate socially and politically in the «school of

life» by acquiring and developing personal and social skills, such as character, leadership, resilience, cooperation, communication, assertiveness, creativity, self-actualization, and empathy, among others.

Organizational functions will thus pay less attention to the individual and group/team skills (Bilhim, 2006) and more to mixed and heterogeneous teams of volunteers that will help to «improve the efficiency and productivity» of the organizations. This cohesion between the school and the community, in our particular case, concerning volunteer actions and the common good, can, according to Bilhim (2006, p. 61), facilitate and increase intra, interpersonal and organizational communication – a «key to the establishment of good working relationships» (Bilhim, 2006:67) and consequently obtain a «key for a better organization, a more serene and less tense organization and more effective cooperation between all» (Bilhim, 2006:61). These data support the view of Fonseca *et al.* (n.d., p. 12), when they argue that voluntary work «reinforces the role of the school as a centre for citizenship, culture, a meeting place where you practice a democratic coexistence» and as a result the school «earns more respect from the community, awakens the interest of their students towards studies (...), develops a more democratic and efficient management, spreads a culture of peace and solidarity, and promotes inclusion and social participation.»

Through these partnerships, HBG School  $\frac{3}{4}$  the CVV project  $\frac{3}{4}$  and the organizations can ensure a «sustainable local development» at school economically, as the club tries to efficiently manage the material, financial and human resources available and rehearses functional practices. And socially, as the club tries to uphold the social and human rights of the students and their respective families who are in need by providing them with a higher quality of life (Carmo and Esgaio, 2012, p. 7). The participatory leadership based on values that HBG School tends to adopt enables the decentralization of functions and, following a motto that aims at «Serving more than ruling» (Bilhim, 2004, p. 30), it will give all the agents the possibility to collaborate in managing the organization through participation in many and varied volunteer activities that are created and developed by the CVV, both within and outside the school. By participating in volunteer activities, volunteer students tend to enjoy many and varied moments of happiness, sharing dialogue, reflection, dedication, motivation, enthusiasm, satisfaction, and personal fulfilment, which may, in the near future, change their view of the practices adopted by the school and their behaviour, attitudes and feelings for the organization and the world.

According to Vilella and Cruz (2004, p. 102), these young volunteers may feel and act with the intention of «promoting citizenship, forms of social inclusion and building a fairer, responsible, caring, and transformative community». In an ongoing action, and as a side effect, it is possible that, over the time, there will be a significant improvement in the set of «rules, values, and beliefs underlying an organizational life» (Bilhim, 2013, p.3), as the processes of socialization among stakeholders increase. The «*Clube Viver a Vida*» is presented as a project of solidarity action in harmony with the School Educational Project, which makes HBG a school committed to education for solidarity and consequently a centre of active citizenship (Perrenoud, 2005). Taking into account social responsibility as defined by Taft (1999: 88), «(...) the obligation of the administration to make decisions and actions that will contribute to the welfare and interests of society and the organization», we can conclude by saying that HBG School aims for a collaborative culture that is targeted at social responsibility. Thus, it shows great potential to be considered an innovative school, which can be seen as a «competitive advantage» in relation to other competing organizations.

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