

Teacher Leadership in Portugal: Constraints and Possibilities

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Abstract

This paper reports on findings from a 3-year research project funded by *Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia* (National Foundation for Science and Technology) aimed at examining conditions for teacher leadership in challenging circumstances. A mixed-method research design was devised, including a national survey on teacher professionalism (2700 teachers) and the policy context and interviews about professional culture and organizational features of the schools. Findings indicate that bureaucracy in teaching has increased with greater control over teachers' work and greater accountability and public criticism of teachers. Ambiguity and ambivalence in teachers' views and perceptions of both leadership and professionalism emerged from the data which may be linked to two levels in which their discourse may be associated: the rhetorical level – in which the language of policy shapes teachers' discourse; and the practical – which has to do with what teachers actually do. Overall, this study provided empirical evidence of the complexity of teacher leadership in context and it highlighted the need to support and sustain teachers' professional learning and innovative practices through the exercise of leadership. These and other issues will be explored further in this paper.

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I begin with a discussion about the importance of teacher leadership for education reform before presenting the outcomes of a research project in Portugal that is linked to the International Teacher Leadership initiative.

The importance of teacher leadership

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

However, the terms *teacher leadership* and *teacher leaders* are widely used in the literature in a variety of contexts and meanings (Frost and Harris, 2003; Davis and Leon, 2009; Yow, 2010; Ross, Adams, Bondy, Dana, Dodman & Swain, 2011; Alexandrou and Swaffield, 2012; Bangs & MacBeath, 2012). York-Barr and Duke (2004), for instance, argue that teacher leadership constitutes:

an umbrella term that includes a wide array of work at multiple levels in educational systems, including work with students, colleagues, and administrators and work that is focused on instructional, professional, and organisational development (p. 288)

They go on to say that teacher leadership is:

the process by which teachers, individually or collectively, influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of school communities to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increased student learning and achievement.

Poekert (2012:171) highlights the importance of this definition as it draws attention to the centrality of leadership that is built “on influence and interaction, rather than power and authority”.

In contrast to a rather limited, organisation-focused approach to teacher leadership, a number of authors tend to emphasize the informal kind of leadership in which teachers engage in order to enhance their professionalism and to make a difference in the schools in which they operate (Frost, 2004; Frost and Durrant, 2003; Spillane, 2006). In this context, Frost (2012) argues for an approach that “does not assume leadership is automatically linked with positions

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

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

Within this broader perspective, teacher leadership is associated with the concept of teacher professional development in context. For instance, Alexandrou and Swaffield make the link to leadership for learning in the following statement.

Since teacher leadership is a form of leadership, and professional development is a form of learning, the connections between them can be explored using a model derived from research that sought to develop understanding of leadership, learning, and their interrelationship (Alexandrou and Swaffield, 2012:159)

Similarly, Poekert (2012:185) draws attention to teacher leadership as “a form of job-embedded professional development” and he adds that “professional development leads to teacher leadership, which leads to further professional development for the teachers enacting leadership and their colleagues” (p.169). Similarly, Hunzicker (2012:268) states that “teacher leaders are best prepared through a combination of job-embedded professional development and collaborative experiences.” Issues of collaboration and strategic teacher leadership have also been identified in the literature (Frost & Roberts, 2004).

This is also the understanding of teacher leadership underpinning the project described in this paper. It includes therefore a wide array of strategies and initiatives fostering innovation and

improvement projects in schools that are not necessarily linked to set roles and hierarchies or administration positions at school. In general, Poekert (2012:185) stresses the contribution of recent literature on teacher leadership, namely as far as its foundational components are concerned, but he asserts that further studies are needed to explore the means by which it is developed and practiced in schools as well as its influence and impact on teaching and learning. It is within this framework that the research described in this paper was carried out.

Research goals and context of the study

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

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

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

Data collection and analysis

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

A nationwide survey was conducted through an online questionnaire (using the surveymonkey device) which was sent to the principals of elementary and secondary schools in mainland Portugal. The questionnaire was then distributed to the teachers in each school. Permission for administering the questionnaire in public schools was previously obtained from the Ministry of Education. The questionnaire included both closed and open-ended questions according to two main dimensions: i) motivation and job satisfaction (including questions about current motivation, areas in which teachers experienced the greatest increase in satisfaction and the most dissatisfaction, etc.); and ii) leadership, autonomy and school culture (factors that hinder or promote teacher leadership, opportunities and motives for engaging in professional development opportunities, etc.).

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

Quantitative data were analysed statistically. The process of qualitative data analysis was undertaken according to two phases: an analysis of data gathered in each school through the voices of teachers, students and the principal. A second phase was then carried out according to a comparative or horizontal cross-case analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In this phase, it was possible to look for common patterns as well as differences. Issues such as views of leadership, barriers to exercising leadership, strategies and activities used by teacher leaders,

qualities and characteristics of a good leader, etc. were identified. In this paper, data collected during phase one of the project are presented.

Table 1. Phases of data collection, methods and participants

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

Participants

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

Table 2. Age of the participants

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

Table 3. Academic qualifications

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

The majority of the participants have between 11 and 20 years of experience (37.6%) and between 21 and 30 years (34.9%) (see Table 4). Most of the participants have between 1-10 years of experience in their present school (65.8%) (see Table 5). Also, the vast majority of the participants have a permanent post at school (83.3%).

Table 4. Years of experience

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

Table 5. Years of experience at the present school

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

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

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

Table 6. Type of school

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

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

Table 7. Levels of teaching in which teachers taught*

Teaching levels	Frequency	%
1st Cycle	327	18.9
2nd Cycle	418	24.1

3rd Cycle	725	41.9
Preschool	148	8.5
Secondary	574	33.2

* Note: Some teachers listed more than one option.

Main findings

Motivation, job satisfaction and commitment

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

Table 8. Teachers' current motivation

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

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

same, 39.1% acknowledge that it decreased. The participants also claim that the recognition of their work stayed the same (46.9%) and decreased (37.6%) over the last three years.

Table 9. Teachers' perceptions over the last three years

	Decreased	Stayed the same	Increased
... my motivation	61.6% (1623)	29.8% (784)	8.6% (227)
... job satisfaction	44.5% (1160)	41.7% (1087)	13.8% (360)
...my commitment	9.3% (243)	66.8% (1737)	23.8% (620)
... my professional competence	2.8% (74)	47.8% (1245)	49.4% (1287)
... my confidence as a teacher	19.2% (497)	54.0% (1400)	26.8% (696)
... my self-esteem	39.1% (1015)	43.6% (1134)	17.3% (450)
... the recognition of my work	37.6% (969)	46.9% (1209)	15.5% (401)
... the confidence in my ability to influence student learning and achievement	19.2% (500)	57.7% (1500)	23.1% (601)
... my involvement in the school life	15.6% (405)	48.5% (1258)	35.9% (930)
... my responsibility for the success of my students	3.8% (99)	60.5% (1565)	35.6% (921)
... my motivation to undertake new roles related to school projects	37.1% (962)	40.2% (1042)	22.7% (589)
... my sense of belonging to my school	36.7% (951)	45.2% (1172)	18.2% (471)

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

Conditions for teacher leadership in schools

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

collaboratively at the department level (66.4%), as well as at the subject matter level (76.8%) and at school level (60.3%). They also agree and strongly agree that they work together in planning activities at school (73.5%), they share ideas and materials (67.4%) and they reflect on their practice (67.3%). They also state that in general teachers are informed about the policies, projects and activities at school (20.5% strongly agree and 57.1% agree). However, 50.3% agree and strongly agree that over the last three years there was an increase in teacher individualism, 25.5% neither agree nor disagree and 24.1% disagree and strongly disagree (see Table 10).

Interestingly, when asked about encouragement to make decisions and involvement in school projects, although the participants tend to agree, ambiguity emerges from the data. For instance, teachers agree and strongly agree that they feel encouraged to make decisions about how to assess (47.3%), 28.9% state they neither agree nor disagree and 23, 9% disagree and strongly disagree. Similarly, teachers feel they are encouraged to make decisions about how to teach (40.4% agree and strongly agree), but others do not agree nor disagree (33.2%) and disagree and strongly disagree (25.4%). As far as the encouragement to participate in projects at school and in in-service training activities, although the majority agrees (53.1%), others do not agree nor disagree (27.4%) and disagree (19.6%), respectively. In addition, in relation to the item “In my department I am encouraged to exercise leadership”, most teachers state that they do not agree nor disagree (36%).

Table 10. Teachers’ work and working relationships in context

	Strongly agree	Agree	I do not agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
In my department teachers work collaboratively.	21.2% (391)	45.2% (832)	17% (314)	13.2% (243)	3.4% (62)
In my department teachers reflect on their practice.	17.9% (328)	49.4% (906)	16.6% (304)	12.6% (232)	3.5% (64)
Teachers work together in planning activities at the school level.	21.7% (401)	51.8% (957)	14.4% (266)	10.1% (186)	2% (36)
In general, teachers work collaboratively in my school.	12.2% (224)	48.1% (884)	23.2% (427)	14% (257)	2.4% (45)
In general, teachers work collaboratively in my subject group.	31.7% (579)	44.8% (819)	12.1% (222)	9.1% (166)	2.4% (43)

In my school teachers share ideas and materials.	12.5% (230)	54.9% (1007)	20.4% (375)	10.5% (192)	1.7% (31)
In my department I am encouraged to make decisions about how to assess.	6.6% (121)	40.7% (747)	28.9% (530)	17.0% (312)	6.9% (126)
In my department I am encouraged to make decisions how to teach.	5.6% (103)	34.8% (639)	33.2% (608)	18.5% (340)	7.9% (144)
In my department I am encouraged to develop projects.	7.5% (137)	45.6% (834)	27.4% (501)	14% (256)	5.6% (102)
In my department I am encouraged to participate in in-service training activities.	9.3% (169)	44.8% (815)	30.6% (557)	10.7% (195)	4.7% (85)
In general, teachers are informed about the policies, projects and activities in my school.	20.5% (378)	57.1% (1052)	13.3% (245)	7.4% (137)	1.6% (30)
Over the last three years there was an increase in individualism in teachers' work.	22.8% (415)	27.5% (501)	25.5% (464)	20.3% (370)	3.8% (69)
In my department I am encouraged to exercise leadership.	5.8% (106)	20.0% (513)	36.0% (661)	20.5% (376)	9.8% (179)

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

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

Table 11. Characteristics of teachers' work

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

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

Table 12. Dimensions of teachers' work

	Frequency	%
Collaborating with colleagues	1140	63.4
Supporting students	1056	58.7
Reflecting on one's own work	919	51.1
Planning teaching	882	49.1
Continuous professional learning	810	45.1

Developing innovative practices	801	44.5
Monitoring student behaviour	801	44.5
Accessing educational resources	497	27.7
Communicating with parents	463	25.8
Participating in decision-making process	355	19.7
Using ICT	354	19.7
Developing team work	337	18.7
Involvement within the local community	260	14.5
Performing administrative tasks	134	7.5

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

Table 13. Level of involvement in school projects at school

	Frequency	%
Sporadic collaboration	313	23.9
Team member	729	55.6
Coordination role	632	48.2

Note: Some teachers listed more than one option

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

Table 14. Kinds of projects teachers are involved in

Kinds of projects	Frequency	%
Extra-curricular projects	496	44.1
Curriculum projects	150	13.3

International projects	154	13.7
Projects organized by both teachers and students	119	10.6
Projects devised by the Ministry of Education	136	12.1

Teacher leadership and professional development

In regard to reasons for attending in-service training activities, teachers tend to value emancipatory and pedagogical motivations such as improving practice (83.1%), increasing professional knowledge (81.1%), and developing innovative teaching strategies (60.5%). Also valued are collaborative motivations such as sharing ideas and experiences between colleagues (52.4%). However, pragmatic reasons associated with career progression were also identified (47.4%) (see Table 15). The least valued motivations related to policy implementation such as implementing policies and initiatives from Central Administration (4.8%), to developing leadership skills (6.3%) and undertaking roles or functions at school (6.8%). Reflecting on the values underlying school's role in society (13.2%) and increasing self-esteem (14.1%) were also amongst the least valued motives to undertake in-service training activities.

Table 15. Motivations to participate in in-service training activities

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

To develop leadership skills	111	6.3
To implement policies/initiatives arising from central administration	84	4.8

These findings lend support to earlier research which point to the valorization of emancipatory and practical motivations (Flores, Rajala, Simão, Tornberg, Petrovic & Jerkovic, 2007; Forte and Flores, in press).

Issues: teacher leadership and the conditions that support it

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

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

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

Another interesting finding is associated with the conditions for teachers to exercise leadership, and in particular to issues related to school culture. Most of the participants state that there is collaboration amongst teachers at school, at the department level and at subject matter level. Teachers also claim that they are involved in projects at school and that in general they share ideas and materials and reflect on their practice. Also, they identify “collaborating with colleagues” as the most important dimension of their work. However, and

interestingly, they also agree that over the last three years there has been an increase in teacher individualism. In addition, “developing teamwork” and “participating in the decision making process” are amongst the least valued dimensions of teachers’ work. Also, ambiguity emerged from the data when teachers talk about the encouragement they get to make decisions and to be involved in projects at school as well as to exercise leadership at the department level. These findings suggest the need to explore further teachers’ conceptions and experiences of collaboration at school. Issues of structural and comfortable collaboration (in many cases drawn from top down initiatives) and authentic collaboration (initiated and fostered by teachers themselves at school) might explain some of the findings. Similarly, the association of leadership with designated roles and responsibilities within the structures existing at school might also explain the ambiguity and, in some way, contradictory views of the participating teachers.

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

By and large, ambiguity and ambivalence in teachers’ views and perceptions of leadership emerged from the data. One might ask therefore about the effective existing conditions for a culture of leadership to be developed, which is to be related to teachers’ own understandings of leadership and their professional values. These findings lend support to earlier work by Fairman and Mackenzie (2012) who state the following.

Labelling the work teachers do as ‘leadership’ may, in fact, discourage teacher involvement in leadership activity because teachers’ conception of leadership comes from a more traditional model of formally designated roles and specific responsibilities and because of the persistence of egalitarian norms in teaching. (p.244)

Indeed, existing literature highlights the dynamic and context-dependent nature of teacher leadership (Fairman and Mackenzie, 2012) and suggests a number of conditions for teacher leadership to be successful: a culture of trust and support, structures that support teacher leadership, clear and transparent, strong leadership and engagement in innovative forms of professional development (Muijs & Harris, 2006). Also, according to Durrant (2004:27) it is

important that “teachers’ vision and values are articulated and then that they are involved both in setting the agenda for change and in exercising leadership to make it happen”.

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

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