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Effect(s) of teacher evaluation on collaborative practices: induction or inhibition?

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Abstract

This article deals with collaborative practices of teachers in the context of teacher evaluation. For this purpose and following a theoretical framework that is previously explained, we proceed to the presentation of partial results obtained in the framework of an ongoing study. In conclusion, and based on the available empirical evidence, we discuss the effect(s) of the teacher evaluation, assessing in particular, its role as a factor of induction or inhibition of collaborative practices.

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1. Introduction

Inserting itself within the more general framework of evaluation and of the promotion of "quality" of education systems, teacher evaluation (TE) has been one of the central concerns in Portugal and also in European education policies (Alves & Machado, 2010; Flores, 2010 ; Tardif & Lessard, 2005; Paquay, 2004, Day, 2001). TE

has as its main objective to contribute to the professional development (Day, 2001), on the assumption that supervision or mentoring is an ideal instrument for the improvement of teaching practices (Alarcão, 2000; Vieira, 2009).

The system of TE regulated by the XVIII Constitutional Government and embodied in Decree-Law n° 2/2008 of 7 January, brought about a genuine paradigm shift, resulting in a seismic effect on the lives of schools and teachers, reinforcing the importance of practices of collaboration. The current Government has continued this development and has published the decree-law n° 41/2012 of 21 February 2013. In this decree it underlines the importance of collaborative practices, with its purpose of "encouraging the professional development, recognizing and rewarding merit and good practices, as essential conditions of the dignity of the teaching profession and the promotion of motivation of teachers" (p.830).

Never before has so much been heard about collaboration and collegiality. These notions have been widely present both in political speeches on education and in legal regulations. Collaboration is seen as the ideal way for the teachers to develop personally and professionally throughout their career (Hernández, 2007; Horn, 2005; Sawyer & Rimm-Kaufman, 2007). Furthermore, it is considered for students and for schools as a way of transforming them into authentic "learning communities" (Lima, 2002, p. 42).

The benefits of collegiality are therefore recognized by all, being lauded in almost all sectors of the educational community. Many understand that collegiality is the secret to creating a good school (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2001; Hernández, 2007; Lima, 2002). It is believed that when all educational stakeholders are imbued with a culture of collegiality, everything will work better, there will be more educational success (Bush, 2003; Sergiovanni, 2004) and it will promote good and effective professional development (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2001). Collaborative practice is, in effect, a process that enables the growth and transformation of the teaching profession. In the relationship and interaction with peers, the teacher models a process of building their professionalism through actions that will inevitably reflect on teaching practices and at the same time initiate personal and professional development. It is for this reason that Bolzan (2002) gives a crucial role to the dimension of collaboration stating that, without a relationship of an active and collaborative nature, the teacher can't develop professionally.

Alarcão and Roldão (2009) advocate the idea that the first collaboration aims to support, guide and regulate a process of training, valuing the work done jointly by peers, which, in turn, should stimulate individual work later to be shared in a group. In this case, supervision it's a way of getting great prominence to the importance of collaborative work, which is assumed as the most vivid manifestation of articulation within a given context.

However, the existence of official pressure to adopt behaviors that facilitate collaboration should not be concealed. Currently we could speak of a strong normative bias in the form of a "compulsive collegiality" which facilitates the way for a morale technical interpretation of professional behavior. Little and McLaughlin (1993) draw attention to the fact that collaboration among teachers may be the perverse result of competition. Following this logic, Little and McLaughlin are right when they say "not always professional communities, themselves, are a good thing" (p.95).

According to Flores and Ferreira (2012), current trends in education have generated a culture of competitive individualism in schools, consuming the teaching time of teachers, intensifying their work to cut costs and burdening them with the need to comply with short-term performance goals. Thus, "the competitive individualism becomes, then, a corrosive individualism that causes the depletion of teachers and destroying little by little, their sense of community" (Hargreaves, 2003, cit. by Flores & Ferreira, 2012, p. 226).

In this context, if we want schools to be true communities of learning for all students, teaching has to be turned into learning for all teachers. Retallick (1999, cit. by Flores & Ferreira, 2012, p.232) also supports this idea, since the school as an educational space also implies considerable reflection on the work of teachers. Learning that develops in school is an essential component of their professional development.

As to whether or not the teachers develop a culture of collaboration with peers, Lima (2002, p.181) points out that the central issue is not, therefore, to know what is missing for teachers to collaborate more but what can be done, in a way that is professionally rewarding and with more positive effects for their students. The evidence is obvious that attempts to reform schools while ignoring the culture of teachers are doomed to failure. The way teachers interact professionally is certainly one of the most powerful factors that influence how the proposed educational reforms are interpreted and applied in schools.

2. Methodology

From the methodological point of view, the study presented here was based on a descriptive and interpretive approach, with the purpose of interpreting a certain reality (Tuckman, 2005) exploring personal meanings, strategies and forms of thinking in action.

The methods and tools have been built based on methodological guidance that combined qualitative and quantitative approaches, predominantly in an interpretive perspective in order to achieve a holistic view of the object under study.

As the main techniques for data collection, in a first stage, we used semi directive interviews with twelve teachers (n = 12), six of them were evaluators and the other six were evaluated teachers.

The data collected and analyzed in the first phase later allowed the development of a questionnaire survey. This was applied to a sample of 1000 teachers of northern Portugal out of a total of 54,781. Of the 1000 questionnaires distributed we had a return of 396 (n = 396), whose data were entered and analyzed using SPSS software, version 17.0.

The sample has the following sociodemographic characteristics:

- 78.8% of respondents were female and 20.7% were male;
- The average age of teachers who responded to this question was 44.23 years, with a minimum of 25 years and a maximum of 61. We also verified that 25% of teachers were 38 years old or under, and 50% were 45 years or under, while 25% of teachers were 50 years or older;

Regarding the academic qualification of the surveyed teachers, there is a predominance of degree holders (58.6% of responses), followed by holders of Masters, with 21.2% of valid responses. 16.7% of the responses indicated the highest degree of training (Post – Graduate). The remaining are holders of a Bachelor degree (only 7, corresponding to 1.8% of the valid responses) and a PhD (5, referring to 1.3% of valid responses);

Regarding the employment status at the time of the survey, we found that 20.2% of respondents are hired teachers, 5.8% of teachers are in the Pedagogic Framework Zone, 24% of teachers are in Clustering Framework, and 49.5% are teachers of the School Board;

It turns out that many teachers teach more than one grade level. Analyzed by total, the most represented level of education is the Secondary level (36.9% of responses), followed very closely by the 3rd cycle of basic education (35.6% of responses). Then we have the 2nd cycle of basic education, with 13.9% of responses, Special Education, with 12.9% of responses and the 1st cycle of basic education, with 12.4% of responses. Finally, the teachers of Preschool, with 7.3% of the responses;

Almost half of the respondents claimed to have been teaching for over 20 years, (47.2% of respondents). Of the remaining, 9.1% are teachers who have been teaching for up to 5 years, 24.7% from 6 to 15 years and 17.9% between 16 and 20 years;

The overwhelming majority of teachers is or has been assessed. (of the 396 respondents evaluated a total of 343, corresponding to 86.6%. 92 respondents identify themselves as evaluators, representing 23.2% of the total. Members of the Scientific Assessment of Teaching Performance (SATP) represent 28 respondents (7.1% of the total) and only 3 respondents with the role of Director (0.8% of the total);

Most teachers chose to request of class observation, including 56.1% of respondents, with 39.1% of the total chose not to do so;

- Finally, nearly three quarters of respondents (74.7% of the total) had no training in the process of TE.

3. Results

For purposes of analyzing collaborative practices in the context of TE, the following statements were listed in the questionnaire and participants were asked to express their views according to a "rating scale" ("never," "rarely," "sometimes," "many times ", " always "):

- 1 - The evaluator collaborated with the preparation of the pedagogical activities.
- 2 - TE entailed significant changes in the collaborative work among teachers of the school.
- 3 - The evaluator evaluated and shared materials, experiences, documents and other materials to support teaching activities.
- 4 - The process of TE encouraged the sharing of teaching experiences among school teachers.
- 5 - The teachers cooperate in the group or within the school in general.
- 6 - The assessor has implemented, through the process of TE, a culture of constant dialogue with the evaluated teachers.

Regarding the assertion 1 (Table 1), the percentage of teachers who answer "never" is 41.2%, followed by those who answer "sometimes" (22.0 %) and ex-aequo, "rarely" and "many times"(13.4%). The results of this question indicate a clear notion of lack of collaboration between the evaluator and evaluated

Table 1
The evaluator collaborated with the preparation of the pedagogical activities.

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Never	163	41,2
	Rarely	53	13,4
	Sometimes	87	22,0
	Many times	53	13,4
	Always	20	5,1
	Total	376	94,9
Missing	System	20	5,1
Total		396	100,0

Regarding the assertion of table 2, the percentage of teachers who say "never" is 30,8 %, followed by those who respond "rarely" (23.7%) and "sometimes" (20,5). As can be seen, we have a significant amount of respondents who concentrate their responses in the "never", with 30,8% and "rarely", with 23,7, a total of almost 60%. Thus, we consider that more than half of respondents believe that the evaluating teachers performance did not involve significant changes in the collaborative work among teachers of the school.

Table 2
TE entailed significant changes in the collaborative work among teachers of the school.

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Never	122	30,8
	Rarely	94	23,7
	Sometimes	81	20,5
	Many times	64	16,2
	Always	25	6,3
	Total	386	97,5
Missing	System	10	2,5
Total		396	100,0

As referenced in table 3, the percentage of teachers who say "never" is 29,3%, followed by those who answer "sometimes" (23,0%) and "rarely" (18,4%). As can be seen in the table, once again, we see that if we add those who answer "never" to those who respond "rarely", we have a total of almost 50%. We may conclude that nearly half of respondents did not share materials, experiences, and other media to support teaching activities.

Table 3

The evaluator evaluated and shared materials, experiences, documents and other materials to support teaching activities

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Never	116	29,3
	Rarely	73	18,4
	Sometimes	91	23,0
	Many times	72	18,2
	Always	33	8,3
	Total	385	97,2
Missing	System	11	2,8
Total		396	100,0

We can observe from table 4 that, the percentage of teachers who say "never" is 28, 8%, followed by those who answer "sometimes" (26, 3%) and "rarely" (23, 2%). According to that information, we found that more than half of respondents believe that the TE does not allow the sharing of teaching experience among teachers of the school, which means that only about 19% of respondents believe that the sharing and exchange of experiences pedagogical happened frequently.

Table 4

The process of TE encouraged the sharing of teaching experiences among school teachers

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Never	114	28,8
	Rarely	92	23,2
	Sometimes	104	26,3
	Many times	58	14,6
	Always	17	4,3
	Total	385	97,2
Missing	System	11	2,8
Total		396	100,0

As to the statement of table 5, the percentage of teachers responding "sometimes" is 32.1%, followed by those who answer "never" (22, 5%) and "rarely" (22, 0%). So, we have a very small number of participants, only 20.2% who believe that the process of performance evaluation cooperating teachers, works in the group or in the school in general.

Table 5

The teachers cooperate in the group or within the school in general.

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Never	89	22,5

	Rarely	87	22,0
	Sometimes	127	32,1
	Many times	61	15,4
	Always	19	4,8
	Total	383	96,7
Missing	System	13	3,3
	Total	396	100,0

Finally, is clearly express in table 6, that the percentage of teachers who answer "many times" is 26, 0 %, followed by those who answer "sometimes" (22, 2%) and "always" (18, 2 %). There is a significant concentration of responses in the "many times", "sometimes" and "always", as shown in table 6, which means that there is a deemed value of respondents who say that the evaluator has implemented, through the process of TE, a culture of constant dialogue with the evaluated teachers.

Table 6

The evaluator has implemented, through the process of TE, a culture of constant dialogue with the evaluated teachers.

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Never	54	13,6
	Rarely	66	16,7
	Sometimes	88	22,2
	Many times	103	26,0
	Always	72	18,2
	Total	383	96,7
Missing	System	13	3,3
Total		396	100,0

4. Conclusion

Looking at the results, we can infer an unsatisfactory interpretation of collaborative practices developed by teachers in the TE in the context of implementing the legislative framework since 2008. Indeed, the process of TE did not facilitate practices that promote collegiality necessary for the development of collaborative work. Thus, there is a clear lack of collaboration between evaluator and evaluated regarding the involvement in educational activities, particularly with regard to the sharing of materials, experiences, and other media to support teaching activities.

We can also note that, according to the results obtained in this study, the TE did not involve significant changes in the collaborative work among teachers of the school. According to the respondents, they did not develop practices consistent with systematic and intentional collaboration and no change from individualistic action to collaborative practices could be observed.

According to the participants, the process of TE induced the development of highly individualistic practices, often with competitive intentions, generating solitary behaviors, in addition to a lack of dialogue and communication between the pairs involved. As some teachers said the practice of evaluating colleagues, sometimes with more experience and higher qualifications, promoted unhealthy relational practices instead of a shared collegiality.

In short, the results in this article point unequivocally towards an inhibitory effect of TE on collaborative practices and it can be said as a legitimate hypothesis that, in some cases, it has catalyzed dynamic isolation and competitiveness. Although the literature acknowledges the role of evaluation in the professional development of teachers, the Portuguese experience in the last four years demonstrates, however, that the system(s) applied for TE caused unintended, and in some sense, perverse effects, misrepresenting their expressed and rhetorical goals, particularly with regard to collaborative practices in schools.

If you want to effectively dignify the teaching profession and promote the motivation of teachers, as is assumed in the discourse of political legitimacy, which encourages professional development through TE, it is clear that it is necessary to create processes of collaborative work that can be operationalized based on reflexive and dialogical ~~in~~ supervision strategies. Otherwise, the TP is likely to become the nemesis of the teaching profession as the main obstacle to professional development, inhibiting or even eliminating collaborative practices which are not only indispensable for urgent reinterpretation of teacher identity, but also for the successful resolution of the complex problems within our education systems.

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ⁱ Translate by the authors

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