



In-Service Teacher Training in a Professional Development Perspective: Logics of Participation

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Abstract

The main purpose of this study is to understand the reasons why teachers undertake in-service teachers training as a factor of professional development (PD). It is an interpretative study belonging to the category of educational case studies and ethnographic studies. The study was made in five schools which are associated to the Marco de Canaveses and Cinfães In-service Teachers Training Centre (ISTTC). The data in this study was collected in two different ways: by applying an enquiry to 450 teachers (N=450) in the five schools selected and by analysing the data previously collected within the process of asking teachers to evaluate teachers training courses organized by the ISTTC (218 enquiries analysed) (n=218). The main conclusion drawn from the study is that professional development is designated by almost all teachers enquired as the main motivating factor for joining teachers training courses.

Keywords: Professional development, teachers' in-service training, teachers working conditions

Introduction

In recent years, the issue teachers' professional development (PD) has been gaining a growing importance both at an international and at a national level for various reasons. These reasons are both social and sociological, economic and professional, pedagogical and didactic, legal and academic.

Rodrigues (2007) lists four reasons for the recent focus on this subject. The first one, arising from the field of psychology, is rooted on the developmental theories of Piaget (1983), who rejected unidirectional influences on the individual and emphasized the importance of the interaction between his internal dynamics, his self-regulating and adaptive processes and the environment that surrounds him. These theories, which were initially applied to the childhood development stages, expanded rapidly to the adult life stages and to his professional life, thus becoming a framework for the concept of "life span development" (Lerner & Hultsch, 1983).

Together with this concept, one can find the globalization, the technological advances, the constant changes in the means of production, in the entertainment industry, in personal relationships (Lerner & Hultsch, quoted by Rodrigues, 2007, p. 25). All these changes, which can be more obvious for some people than others, forces teaching, just as any other professional activity, to a need of permanent self-questioning and updating, in order to be able to correspond to the demands of consumers.

The third reason that Rodrigues points out is the need to break myths which associate bad teaching practices either to very early career stages or to more advanced ones. There are studies which include teachers' professional development models, referring to the vision those teachers have of the whole school system, the kind of relationship they establish with its rules, the priorities they set for their action, among other factors. Some examples are the "Berliner expertise model (1988)", the "Dreyfus skills acquisition model (quoted by Éraut, 1994, p. 124) and the "Huberman model (1992, quoted by Flores, 2012, p. 75).

The fourth and last reason given by Rodrigues for this growing interest on the subject of teachers' PD is the existence of a tendency to believe that it is only through practice that a teacher achieves his or her real training, which would bring the academic component of the training to a second plan. This position is based on principles



such as the teachers' implicit professional knowledge (Doyle, 1979, quoted by Rodrigues, 2007, p. 27), the possibility of describing the teachers' professional knowledge through the explanation of their tacit knowledge (Elbaz, 1983, quoted by Rodrigues, 2007, p. 26) and the use of that knowledge as a guide for the listing of the principles of a good practice (Carter et al, 1998, quoted by Rodrigues, 2007, p. 26).

As far as teachers' professional development is concerned, this is a concept that together with "teachers' identity" is not yet clearly defined in most teachers' conceptual framework and it is frequently mistaken for in-service training. Similarly, "teachers' identity" runs the risk of being mistaken for teachers' rights and duties. Day considers that PD involves all the spontaneous learning experiences and all the consciously planned activities, which are carried out aiming at the direct or indirect benefit of the individual, the group or the school and contribute through them for the quality of the education in the classroom (Day, quoted by Flores et al., 2009, p.75).

This very direct involvement of teachers in their task, this attitude of commitment, a word Day uses very often (2007; 2014), can also be found in Fullan, although in a less emphasized way. The latter defines PD as follows: any activity or process which seeks to improve skills, attitudes, understanding or performance in current or future roles (Fullan, 1995, quoted by Flores et al., 2011).

In fact, the speed at which social changes and the changes in the educational system take place lead to a situation where teachers are constantly assigned new roles and new functions. Many of these roles and functions go far beyond the field of their subject areas and of Education Sciences (Rodrigues, 2011, p.136).

In this context, teachers' training has to be looked at from the point of view of a set of competencies that teachers have to reveal while performing their professional activity. In this case, "competency" should be understood as the effective mobilization in specific situations of previously acquired knowledge, capacities and values (Rodrigues, 2011, p.137).

In the "Communication from the Commission to the European Council and Parliament - Improve the quality of teachers' academic and professional training" from 2006 (quoted by Rodrigues, 2011), the European Union issued a set of general competencies for the European teachers, among which three can be selected:

- To work in multicultural contexts (in order to understand the value of diversity and respect for what is different);
- To work in close collaboration with colleagues, parents and with the community in general;
- And (...) it would also be a big advantage if teachers had the opportunity of acquiring, developing and using leadership competencies.

If this set of skills are aimed at in the in-service teachers training in Portugal they will meet one of the areas that has been more questioned at least since the implementation of the In-Service Teachers Training Centres (ISTTC) in Portugal, which has already conquered an iconic value in the field of change induced by training and can be conveyed through the following question: to what extent can in-service training promote the transformation and improvement of teachers' practice?

In the opinion of Formosinho, Machado e Mesquita (2014) the Portuguese teachers' in-service training model is open to "training focused on school as a social and organizational unit" that ensures "the political-administrative and territorial feed-back of training". It has to be remarked, however, that from 2003 onwards, with the arising of some restraints on teachers training financing, the ISTTC became a kind of central management "agencies", putting into practice training plans designed at a central level.



Formosinho *et al.* points out that the effectiveness and efficiency of the ISTTC action continues to legitimize itself within the field of in-service training, focusing currently on the satisfaction of teachers and schools' demands for the constant requirements arising from the educational policies of the various governments (2014, p. 126).

The National Council for Education (NCE) issued a "Recommendation on In-Service Training for kindergarten, primary and secondary level teachers" in 2013. The opinion contained in this document suggests a balance between the training that teachers should get at school and the one that results from national training plans, based on the good results achieved through that experience on previous occasions.

The component of the training plan which is more focused on school should be adequate to the specific circumstances in which it is held and it is not necessarily effective in all contexts. This component should be designed with a broad participation of teachers in order to prevent, among other things, a unilateral conditioning of contents by the school director, who is the main leadership of Portuguese schools currently, or by the middle leaderships.

Vieira believes that the educational practices and training can be frequently labelled either as reproductive or as transformative. It is important at each moment to understand where we are and to learn how to work in the space between what is real and is ideal, building re(ide)alistic practices. It is in the middle space, one with a hybrid nature and undefined borders, that we can find the possibility of exploiting more humanistic and democratic practices, assuming that the lack of humanism and democracy is the main reason for that effort (2015, p. 218).

The issue of participation of teachers in in-service training plans is one of great importance since it allows not only the measurement of the PD process itself but also of the identity issues that have an impact on teachers' work. We believe that the logics of participation of teachers is a crucial sign of teachers' current professionalism, between "reproduction" and "transformation".

Method

This article gives an account of the results obtained in research whose main purpose was to understand the logics of participation of Portuguese teachers in in-service training as a factor of DP.

The research questions were stated following the literature review and the empirical data collected as follows: Hypothesis 1 –

The majority of teachers recognize that in-service training plays a positive role in the transformation of their practice, but they don't associate it with their PD.

Hypothesis 2 – The majority of teachers take part in in-service training, but are rarely available to play an active role in its planning and implementation.

Hypothesis 3 – The majority of teachers take part in in-service training regardless of adverse work conditions.

Hypothesis 4 – The majority of teachers and educators believe that the in-service training courses they take are not valued by the leadership of their schools.

The research which was made may be included in the large category of educational case studies for its empirical nature, for its object, which may be considered important material for the educational system, for its purpose, which is to allow an intervention on that same system and for the data collection methodology, which, by ensuring the reliability of the data, makes that intervention possible.

Simultaneously, it has characteristics of an ethnographic study: the researchers stayed at the research site for a long period of time, thus gaining the status of participant observers, which gave them the possibility of making an in-depth analysis of the problem to be studied and an overview of the factors that constituted influence on the behaviour of all the participants.



As data collection techniques are concerned, two surveys by questionnaire were used: in the first case the questionnaire was applied to a sample of teachers selected among those working in the schools which are associated to the MarcoCinfães ISTTC (Table 1); in the second case, the questionnaire was applied to teachers who attended in-service training courses at MarcoCinfães ISTTC between 2012 and 2015 (Table 2).

Table 1. Characteristics of the schools associated to MarcoCinfães ISTTC in which the questionnaire was applied

Schools and Schools Units	Number of questionnaires distributed	Number of questionnaires returned	Response Rate
Marco de Canaveses Schools Unit	175	123	70.26%
Alpendorada Schools Unit	125	56	44.8%
Cinfães Schools Unit	50	50	100%
Secondary School of Cinfães	50	24	48%
Vocational School of Agriculture and Rural Development of Marco de Canaveses	50	25	50%
TOTAL	450	278	61.78%

Table 2. In-service training courses in MarcoCinfães ISTTC between 2012 and 2015 whose evaluation by teachers was analysed

Typology of action	Number of hours	Year of assessment	Area of Training	Number of trainees who attended the action
A1	25H	2014	Early	29
A2	25H	2014	Intervention Sex Education in Schools	32
A3	25H	2013	Pedagogical	28
A4	25H + 25h)	2013	Practice Specific	10
A5	15H + 15h)	2013	Didactics Interactive White Boards	18
A6	25H + 25h)	2012	Special Needs Education	22
A7	25H + 50h)	2013	School Self-assessment	19
A8	25H + 50h)	2014	Teaching Performance Evaluation	21
A9	25H + 50h)	2013	Pedagogical Supervision	49
			Total	218



In what concerns data analysis, the software programs used were the SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences), version 18, and MS Excel 2016 Preview. The analysis of the answers to the open-form item was made using the content analysis technique.

Findings

Findings from the survey by questionnaire (table 1)

The participants in this research who answered the questionnaire are mostly women, aged between 40 and 50, permanent teachers, with a time in service between 9 and 12 years or above 20. There is also a significant participation of contract teachers, who, if we take into account the characteristics of the schools, may be skilled technicians.

Although there is a participation of teachers of all levels of education, the percentage of primary school respondents stands out.

As regards the attendance of in-service training, it is noted that the vast majority of the participants (91.4%) have attended credited training, particularly long-term one, over the last three years, in spite of the fact that their careers are “frozen”. Most among them choose training courses and attend them at the MarcoCinfães ISTTC (64.6%). A significant number of participants (36.6%) are willing to pay in order to attend in-service training even when that implies travelling to other places.

In what concerns participating in the school training planning it is noted that 45.7% of the participants agree with the statement that they actively do it; 27% neither agree nor disagree; 15% agree completely and 6.5% disagree totally.

Regarding the participation on the needs analysis stage, data show that the percentage of more than a half of the participants (54.3%) agree with the statement presented to them (“I participate actively in the needs analysis stage of the in-service training plan of my school”) and 18.3% agree totally. The teachers who neither agree nor disagree account for 20.9% of the whole of the participants and only 6.5% of the participants disagree completely.

Concerning the role of the ISTTC, the highest percentage of participants disagree partly with the statement that it should be the full responsibility of Centre to organize and implement all the in-service training, while 28.4% disagree totally. The percentage of those who agree partially or totally is 19%.

As regards the importance of in-service training for the quality of professional practice, 88.1% of the participants agree totally with the statement that that importance is very high. Only 6.8% neither agree or disagree and 5.1% disagree partly.

Finally, 81.6% of the respondents agree or agree totally that their main motivation to attend in-service training actions is their professional development.

Findings from the survey by questionnaire applied at the end of the training courses (table 2)

In what concerns the open-term item in the questionnaire which was applied at the end of the last session of all actions that took place at the MarcoCinfães ISTTC in 2012 and 2015, the data obtained lead us to the conclusion that, generally, the teachers that attended the three types of training actions consider that the objectives of those actions had been achieved almost totally. The score of their answers ranged between 4.2 and 4.9. Moreover, the medium score of 4.64 is the highest among the four items which were analysed. It is worth noting, however, that the highest scores (4.8 and 4.9) can be found in training actions of more practical nature.



Regarding the satisfaction of training needs, the average score obtained in this item is also high (4.48) and the training action that stands out this time is A4 – “Mathematics Curricular Targets” (4.8).

The second highest score in this set of items that were selected among all in the opinion survey belongs to the item referring to the impact that the competencies acquired during the training actions will have on the teachers’ professional activity: 4.57. It is noteworthy that the action A8 – The Internal Component of Teachers’ Evaluation, which registers the highest score in this item (4.9) was the one with the lowest score in the item concerning training needs.

The item “After this in-service training action I feel more prepared to work in this specific area” presents the lowest average score among the four items (4.38) and, within it, all the scores are lower than the ones in the items considered previously.

On the other hand, the analysis and interpretation of the data contained in the replies to the open-term items allow us to infer the following conclusions:

- A) Teachers/trainees articulate the training actions they attend with their training needs;
- B) Teachers/trainees prepare structured proposals of new training actions, particularly following others they have just attended;
- C) Teachers/trainees establish a cause effect relationship between the training actions they attend and a better professional performance in the classroom and in school in general;
- D) Teachers/trainees recognize the in-service training as a means of knowledge acquisition and promotion of a reflexive posture;
- E) Teachers/trainees recognize the training as an emancipatory activity;
- F) Teachers/trainees assign a central role to the trainer in the success of the training action, emphasizing relational skills, availability, knowledge, domain of adequate strategies and methodologies and the ability to promote a good atmosphere in the group as essential abilities in the profile of that trainer.
- G) Teachers/trainees do not often use the term “professional development” but recognize practices that promote it, such as self-training, consolidation and acquisition of knowledge and the promotion of a reflexive posture.

Results, Conclusions and Recommendations

The main purpose of this study was to understand the logics of teachers’ participation in in-service training from the point of view of Professional Development.

As emergent purposes there were the one of assessing (1) the impact of current teachers’ working conditions on their adhesion to in-service training and (2) the role that the school leaders play on that same adhesion procession.

The collected data allowed us to obtain valid information to be compared with the working hypothesis stated at the research, which were the following:

Hypothesis 1 – The majority of teachers recognize that in-service training plays a positive role in the transformation of their practice, but they don’t associate it with their PD.

Hypothesis 2 – The majority of teachers take part in in-service training, but are rarely available to play an active role in its planning and implementation.

Hypothesis 3 – The majority of teachers take part in in-service training regardless of adverse work conditions.

Hypothesis 4 – The majority of teachers and educators believe that the in-service training courses they take are not valued by the leadership of their schools.



The in-service training and the professional development

Regarding the first research hypothesis, “The majority of teachers recognize that in-service training plays a positive role in the transformation of their practice, but they don’t associate it with their PD”, we came to the conclusion that the term “professional development” is not frequently used by teachers in occasions when they are asked to express their opinion on in-service training, nor is it much valued when they have to place it on a scale that includes commonly used concepts, such as “teaching practice”.

However, they recognize the value of teachers’ practices which are involved in training and promote PD, such as the consolidation and acquisition of theoretical knowledge, self-training and innovation.

We also came to the conclusion that the majority of teachers establishes a cause-effect relationship between the training courses attended and a better professional performance in the classroom and in school in general, particularly when that training is done in the specific subject areas they teach or in comprehensive areas of the education system, such as “assessment”.

Interestingly, a large majority of teachers considers their PD their main motivation to attend in-service training actions.

The in-service training and the participation of teachers in its structuring and implementation

In what concerns the second research hypothesis, “The majority of teachers take part in in-service training, but are rarely available to play an active role in its planning and implementation”, we draw the conclusion that more than a half of the inquired teachers consider that they participate actively in the process of needs analysis and structuring of the in-service training in their schools.

However, the data obtained show that teachers develop reasonably structured proposals for new training actions, particularly just following the attendance of others.

Moreover, this initiative comes together with another data, which shows that teachers recognize in the training a space of knowledge and promotion of a reflexive posture. These two sets of data together, i.e., the knowledge and the reflexive posture and the initiative to propose new in-service training actions constitute very important conditions to allow teachers to get themselves effectively involved in the structuring of the in-service training plans of their schools since the needs analysis stage.

Another data that should be noted is that teachers sometimes don’t identify certain subject areas as training needs but, after attending courses in those areas, consider them important for their professional performance.

The in-service training and the teachers’ working conditions

Regarding the research hypothesis number three, “The majority of teachers take part in in-service training regardless of adverse work conditions”, the collected data allow us to conclude that a very high percentage of teachers still attends in-service training in spite of adverse working conditions and the current situation of “frozen careers”.

A significant number of teachers is also available to spend money, time and energy to obtain that training. A significant number of teachers attend the training actions at the ISTTC to which their school is associated, which may imply travelling to a different school from their own after classes or from home on Saturdays. A similarly high number of teachers attend training actions at other ISTTC and other institutions, paying for the courses in some of them.



In parallel with this situation, one where the working conditions include work overload, excessive stress, loss of confidence, feelings of incompetence, resistance to change, economic and social crisis, austerity measures, teachers' impoverishment, the majority of teachers who participate in the research characterize a good training action as the one which has a good training atmosphere, a good connection with teaching practice and other activities in the school, which constitutes an opportunity to exchange experiences among teachers and institutions and has an appropriate length of time taking into account the contents to be discussed.

Simultaneously, they consider a good teachers' trainer the one who articulates the contents with the best strategies and methodologies, who can interact well with the teacher, who promotes their autonomy, who is always available and creates a good atmosphere in the training space and group.

Taking into account the data which were collected, the in-service training becomes therefore, not only a space and time for reflexion, for knowledge structuring and a means of support for teachers' work, but also a stronghold of pleasant and proficuous social intercourse among peers, which can potentially generate the necessary energy that may, in some way, help to overcome some of the exhaustion caused by the daily routine.

The in-service training and the school leaderships

In what concerns the research question number four, "The majority of teachers and educators believe that the in-service training courses they take are not valued by the leadership of their schools", the collected data allow us to conclude that the vast majority of teachers are of the opinion that the leaders of their schools recognize the training actions they attend, which contradicts the initially stated hypothesis.

The authors consider that the methodology which was used to test this hypothesis (questionnaire containing only closed items) was not the most appropriate for the clarification of the concept "recognition", which would be important in a perspective of professional development.

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