

The value of collaboration: who, how, why

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Abstract

The qualitative analysis done on interviews to 20 teacher librarians, about their perceptions on factors that might impact students' educational success seems to reveal that collaborative work is one of the conditions for this success to exist and one of the biggest challenges to those teachers. The theme collaboration appears in the discourse of all interviewees and it was not found significant differences of opinion, in what refers to its importance, between teachers with and without specific training to perform their tasks in the school libraries belonging to schools with diverse characteristics and geographical location. Nevertheless, it was not identified any real collaboration practices between teachers but only cases of coordination and / or cooperation. Some of the conditions most referred by the interviewed teacher librarians as "against" to and "in favour" of collaborative work and educational success, where respectively, lack of time and the existence of a full time teacher librarian.

Some suggestions and / or recommendations are done to the responsible for the organisation and development of school libraries as to gather efforts to get the teacher librarian post institutionalised, and to the school management boards to implement and stimulate true collaborative work between teachers and teacher librarian, aiming at the students' educational success.

Key words: collaboration, collaborative work, educational success, teacher librarian, school libraries, qualitative analysis, interviews, Portugal.

1. Methodology

This paper results from the third and last but one phase of a research work belonging to a PhD program, focused on school libraries (SL) of Portuguese elementary integrated schools (EBIs), which were till 2005 already in the Portuguese school libraries network (RBE). In this third phase 20 semi-structured interviews to 20 selected teacher librarians (TL) were analysed. These interviews were done between October 2006 and January 2007 and all took place at the SL of the EBIs under research, on the day and time previously agreed with both the TL and the school management board. The

interview theme was about the impact that TL specific training might have on students' educational success, and to gather diverse opinions, TL with (WT) and with out (WOT) specific training, to perform their duties at the SL were interviewed.

The interviews were taped, with the interviewee's agreement, and their qualitative analysis was supported by the use of ATLAS.ti software.

2. Introduction

The interviews' text analysis seems to indicate the existence of collaborative work at various levels, as one of the necessary conditions for students' educational success. This collaborative work would happen both inside and outside the school, having TL as "fixed" partners and the other teachers, the school community, the school management board, other schools, the public library and other libraries as "mobile" partners.

The theme collaboration between TL and the other school teachers appears in all the interviewees discourse as one of the most important factors for the development of their work and with impact on students' educational success.

For me, success,s has not only to do with the kids, there has to be an involvement of all groups, of the teachers and other school staff. It can't be accepted the lack of partnership between curriculum group teachers, auxiliary school staff, with who ever it is, because [for TL] to be able to organise and implement activities, teachers must incentive pupils to attend SL activities'. (P8: L6 – WOT)

The need to exist collaborative work between teachers of various schooling levels, areas, subjects or even with other schools, between TL and teachers and between TL and the school management board seems to be for the interviewees under research, a central question and around which almost everything can be articulated.

Because if that complicity does not exist between the work we develop here

and the curriculum teacher and the pupils, the work just has half or even less, the objective to be accomplished; our work would stop having any importance or meaning. (P1: N5 – WOT)

There were no significant differences of opinion, in what refers to the importance of collaborative work, between TL with specific training (WT) and without training (WOT) to perform their duties in the SL.

3. Collaboration/collaborative work: what is it?

In today's society and in general terms, collaboration has turned into a norm inside the majority of organisations. Teams of different departments work in collaboration both in the presence of their members and virtually, in common projects aiming at the customer or user satisfaction and the organisation's benefit.

One can say that a collaborative work is not only a sum of personal contributions but also a true interaction between the involved actors on the activity. It is therefore desirable that all participants aim at common objectives, previously agreed by the whole group, as is pointed out by this TL,

In my case, I feel that if there is no inter-connection, respect, a very strong relationship, real sharing of what is happening or about to happen, or if the planning is not done in group or there are no common projects, the meaning of the work is totally perverted. There must be a big empathy. (P8: L6 – WOT)

The collaborative work has more conditions to happen if there is an interchange of knowledge and practices and as a consequence a speed up and ease of problems' solution and decisions' taking. Nevertheless, collaboration to succeed needs to be grounded on common objectives, shared visions and take place in a climate of trust and mutual respect (Muronaga and Harada, 1999).

People, to be motivated to collaboration, need to identify some personal attainment in collaborating and feel that have the necessary knowledge and competencies to be effective collaborators.

In the educational literature and pedagogical discourse, there are diverse situations or processes that can be labelled as collaboration. It is therefore fundamental that all involved have the same notion about what is and what is not collaboration to "avoid ambiguities, false conceptions and illusionary characterizations of teachers' practices" (Ferreira and Almeida, 2003, p. 5). In Himmelman's (1997) opinion,

the question is really about the non-definition or multi-definitions of the term collaboration and as the author states "It is wonderfully ironic that the term collaboration is not well understood because it is used to describe so many kinds of relationships and activities. In a way, it suffers not from a lack of meaning [...] but from too much meaning!" (para 13)

As Roldão (2007) says, for a really collaborative work, each individual must have something to contribute, something that has been individually built, in its own space and time, but which was thought and conceived to be integrated on the whole and confronted with others in a knowledge production perspective, a "new knowledge collaboration group work" (p. 28). The opinion of this TL expresses this thought very well,

[...]several heads are better than one and working collaboratively means that I do not have to tell what we are going to do; they make proposals and we go ahead with those proposals if they are considered interesting. (P10: L3 – WOT)

To Boavida and Ponte (2002), "the use of the term collaboration is adequate when several people work together, in a non hierarchical relationship, but in an equalitarian basis, for having mutual help and reaching objectives that benefits all involved" (p.3). The idea that the SL is structured in a hierarchical pyramid, on which the TL occupies the top, is still very common.

Because the only way of having collaboration, is to have that inter connection and help between all of us. That has been happening here and I try to get it stronger because I feel some difficulties in spreading that concept. I think that people are still very close to the idea that the TL is the boss, is who is in charge and I don't want to pass on that idea. I have already some experience from classes' supervision and it should be, much more, help and guidance, rather than an imposition. (P12: G3 – WT)

The opinion of Boavida and Ponte (2002) is that when the work is done in a group highly hierarchical, when posts and tasks of bosses and employees are distinct, it turns into a "non collaborative group activity" (idem), being then a cooperation work, defined by the authors as "the simple realisation of several tasks in group" (p. 4). These and other authors (Ferreira and Almeida, 2003), state that a collaboration project could, during its development, turn into a "non collaboration" one if certain conditions stop to exist. These conditions or the "four pillars" (Day, 1999, cf. Boavida and Ponte,

2002) are: *dialogue* between the intervenients to confront ideas and to open minds towards different perceptions that lead to mutual learning; *trust*, visible on shown personal and professional respect, in which all intervening have their own value while group members; careful *negotiation*, in what relates to the work objectives; *mutuality*, i.e. participants that equally give and received, without some being more relevant than others. The importance of these “four pillars” in day-to-day running of SL can be well illustrated with the following,

Since I came here and besides my lack of knowledge and experience, I took as essential the contact between people as I never considered very pertinent that the SL lived closed to the outside, creating its own activities and putting them available. I have always looked for an interchange and mainly after a particular situation that happened on the very first year. I had put all my efforts on an activity that for me was a very good and pertinent one but afterwards did not have the feedback I was expecting. I should have work with teachers of other departments, because if I had done so I would have seen that perhaps that was not the most important at that time. I had this experience on the very first year and so I think [true collaboration] is very important. (P11: L2 – WOT)

4. Collaborative work between teachers

Collaboration between teachers is for Santos (2007) one of the essential aspects of good teaching practices which ultimately aims at supporting students and teachers on acquiring and disseminating new knowledge. Identical opinions have other authors (Johnson, 1981, cf. Hiltz, 1998) when state that collaborative methods are more effective than traditional ones when promoting learning and students’ success. For many teachers, students and researchers, collaborative work is fundamental for the knowledge acquisition process (dialogue and interaction being essential for learning), and one of the factors that impacts student educational success more strongly.

At certain occasions, the development of collaborative work only needs someone being able to motivate teachers giving incentives as mentioned by some TL,

Some people say that teachers do not want to do [collaborative work] but I do not agree. I think that sometimes is lack of ideas. I go to the Teachers Room and talk to some of them and suggest things to do. I also attend the

Pedagogical board and the Project Area meetings and propose some ideas and people do collaborate. Sometimes an incentive is enough. (P5: L11 – WOT)

We have to know how to convince colleagues, how to motivate them and I think that everything is basically done this way. (P18: C4 – WT)

It is therefore fundamental to have an environment where people are willing to help each other so that teachers and other trainers can accomplish the “essential mission of assuring to students – all students – their right to learn” (Santos, 2007, Editorial). The existence of this environment is closely linked with teachers’ views towards the SL and its place inside the school community.

[...] if the teacher himself does not see the SL as something invaluable to the students [...] if the teachers know what the SL has to offer, what books and non book material is there, the kind of help they and the students can get from the SL team, if they are aware of all these, it is obvious the SL importance and the teachers will want to have that sharing and partnership. With this, we can all do a richer work which is much more grounded and valid. (P18: C4 – WT)

In theory, teachers and researchers seem to agree upon the advantages of these work methods, both inside and outside the classroom and between all teachers. Nevertheless, there are very few practices which are true collaborative ones, “a paradox situation” as it is labelled by Roldão (2007). The TL interviewed also share this opinion as it can be seen through the following,

[Collaboration] is what I miss most. It has been working with some teachers but it does not work with some departments. We all work aiming the same, which is to try to make students better persons, so if this is not a collaborative work it has no meaning. (P7: L9 – WOT)

Traditionally, teachers’ profession has been very lonely (Santos, 2007), individualised (Roldão, 2007), and “with the door closed” (Ferreira and Almeida, 2003). Teachers are responsible for their classes or curriculum subject areas and inside the classroom decide everything, assume all responsibilities and go through all difficulties. Changing from an organisation structured into small parts – teacher in his / her classroom – to a collaborative organisation, has been a slow and difficult task. It is true to say that it was the educational system itself that started and

maintained during almost two centuries this “low efficient teaching model” (Roldão, 2007). This author suggests that this lack of efficiency can be linked to the work being segmented, in blocks and very independent with short communication and sharing of experiences and best practices. The feelings of this TL express this idea very well,

It is very hard to me and I do not know of any more ways to solve this situation. As hard as I try, as hard as I fight it is difficult and the present Portuguese educational situation does not favours this. Teachers are not satisfied and it looks like that what matters is to complicate and do not collaborate as they spend already so many hours at school. I think that if we talked the same language everything would be easier. (P14: C10 – WT)

Nevertheless, and besides some difficulties to introduce these collaborative practices, there are already some firm steps towards this change, done both by schools and teachers willing to innovate, as it is well described by this TL,

It was difficult in the beginning of the year and during the first year I was here. People were not used to it because we tend to live in islands, each one in its own, but frankly I have managed to make some progress as teachers have been adhering to this way of working. I think we are doing very well; we are in the good track. (P9: L4 – WT)

Boavida and Ponte (2002) identified some “important advantages” of collaboration: putting together several people around a common project / objective, one can gather “more energy” which favours action; having more “personal resources” in a group promotes success; the appearance of “synergies” makes way to “reflection and mutual learning”. One of the big advantages, to these authors, is to “allow multiple feelings about the same reality, contributing to draw larger interpretative frames of that same reality” (p. 5). This idea is also shared by some of the interviewed TL,

Because there is no one that can do everything and with a distribution of tasks, things work better. In an isolated way, things do not work. (P6: L10 – WT)

I think that I cannot make miracles on my own. (P14: C10 – WT)

Some authors assume this working methods’ change as “a ‘revolution’ (in its best sense) to the way many teachers think and act and to the educational system” (Silva, 2002, p. 286), thought by others as the “appearance of a new

paradigm” (Ferreira and Almeida, 2003), a “a tough job” in Santos (2007) words or even called a “difficult rupture” by Roldão (2007).

5. Collaboration between teacher librarian and curriculum teachers

Collaborative work between teachers is often referred in the national and international educational literature. Some national authors ((Boavida e Ponte, 2002; Ferreira e Almeida, 2003; Roldão, 2007; Santos, 2007) and international ones (Leonard & Leonard, 2001, 2003; Pugach & Johnson, 1998; Fishbaugh, 1998; Hart, 1998; Houston, 1980, cf Montiel-Overall, 2005), have been reflecting on this issue, which is thought of being “in fashion”. Collaboration, for these authors, could be developed, most of times, between teachers aiming the implementation of curricula practices and extra-curricula activities; between teacher(s) and researcher(s); between teacher(s) and student(s); between teacher(s) and parents; between teacher(s) and assistant(s); between teacher(s) and school management board; between institutions.

It is nevertheless interesting to see that none of these authors include or mention the school librarian as a participant of the collaborative work. This could be linked to the lack of knowledge about TL duties and characteristics, his / her place in the school and in the SL or even to some uncertainty towards the definition of collaboration and the ways it can and / or should assume.

If all of us think the same way towards this place [SL], when a student comes into the SL in an inappropriate manner, we tell him / her “do not behave like this, you have to be more careful”. If by chance a teacher sees this and at the classroom reinforces that position, explaining how to behave properly, if we [teachers] all speak the same language, they [students] will understand it better and easily. Even on how to make a research work, how to use the materials, how to utilise this place the best way, if we all say the same, maybe in the future they [students] will understand. Sometimes we notice that the teachers themselves are the ones who don’t know and if we call them here to have a conversation, the ones that need guidance are who do not come. If there is a good relationship, if all of us work in collaboration, we will reach the SL objectives much easier. [P14: C10 – WT)

Research done in Portugal on the impact that schools, school libraries and schools librarians have on educational success is not very significant and there are no studies on the impact collaboration between TL and curriculum teachers might have on students' educational and academic success. Gonçalves (2007) refers the lack of research on Portuguese school librarianship and, as she recognises, besides some academic research aiming at an academic degree, there are few initiatives towards promoting research in this area: 26 titles were published between 1981 and 2006, including 17 Master dissertations and 1 PhD thesis.

International literature on Information and Library Science include a huge variety of studies, both quantitative and qualitative, on school libraries and teacher librarians, which conclude they improve students' learning and have an impact on their academic achievement. There is also a wide range of international literature on collaboration between TL and other school teachers.

The School Library Manifesto (IFLA, UNESCO, 1999) uses the term "school librarian" and refers to him / her as a member of the teaching staff that has specific training to perform its duties, work "together with all the school community members and the public library and others". It is equally mentioned in this Manifesto, the proven positive impact of collaborative work between TL and teachers at diverse levels, "students reach higher levels on literacy, reading, learning, problem solving and have better ICT competencies" (idem).

Keith Curry Lance (Library Research Service) has been researching the relationship between SL and academic achievement. This researcher was, till now, responsible for impact studies on 8 American states and supported by their quantitative results, has no doubts on the direct relationship between higher academic achievements and SL with a full time teacher librarian who works in collaboration with teachers, also training them on accessing information.

Montiel-Overall (2005, 2006) considers that collaboration work between TL and curriculum teachers is an essential factor to support changes in student population, complexity of educational matters and the exponential growth of information quality and quantity available to students. This author also argues that collaboration can be the determinant factor on students' academic achievement, but for this to happen all involved in collaboration should share high levels of interest, learning, innovation and integration. Based on a literature review and on Loertscher's Taxonomy (2000),

Montiel-Overall (idem) has developed four models of TL and teachers collaboration: Coordination (Model A), Cooperation (Model B), Integrated Instruction (Model C) and Integrated Curriculum (Model D). The degree of involvement among the participants in collaboration work grows from model to model till reaching its maximum (Model D), when TL and teachers, through shared efforts, including thinking, planning, implementing and evaluating in a close relationship, get together quite often to integrate information literacy and the curriculum. An example of this involvement, which can be placed at the beginning of Montiel-Overall models' scale and thus be called coordination or even cooperation, is this TL case,

If all the school teachers know what the SL has to offer, which are the resources available that could contribute to students learning, and I mean all the resources not only the manual and the classroom, and understand the SL dynamics, even that they can use the SL for teaching and learning inside the classroom, then students' success will be higher, for sure. Collaboration work is fundamental for this to happen. At the beginning of the academic year the SL makes available to all teachers information about what it has to offer and what was planned to happen so all of them can include the SL in their own teaching strategies. (P9: L4 – WT)

Coordination and cooperation, being two associated phenomena of collaboration, have been being used, as Himmelman (1997) and Montiel-Overall (2006) say, in an alternate way, being attributed to both the same degree of involvement. These two authors agree with the degree sequence of the involvement process between TL and teachers, giving to coordination a lesser degree. However, there are authors with different opinions (Dickinson, 2006), who begin the collaboration continuum with cooperation. In these initial phases, TL can develop isolated strategies to teach information competencies, hoping that students remember how to use them if necessary. The teacher can teach without the SL resources and either the students have or not acquired the necessary information literacy competencies. The work developed by this TL and the lack of collaborative work is a good example,

I had even done a research guide where I did a research on D'Zert, a pop group in fashion, and as they like them I was not going to talk about something they don't fancy. They really have enjoyed it. It was a great

happiness and I was very proud to see their faces showing a lot of joy while listening to what I had prepared but afterwards came a negative factor. There was no continuity inside the classrooms of the majority of teachers. If the job was done and was really successful, I think that it should have been a starting point for further learning. I did a bibliographic research guide, with all the phases and made it available. If the teachers were willing to collaborate, the work was done. (P14: C10 – WT)

The last level, the true collaboration, happens when time and place coincides. Collaboration has to be based on trust, understanding and sharing of common interests. True collaboration between TL and teachers takes place when the two share responsibilities in planning, teaching and evaluation of curriculum and information literacy learning processes. As Friend and Cook (1996) argue, this sharing can take different shapes according to what is being taught, curriculum or information competencies, and these roles can either alternate or being shared by dividing the class into two groups.

It is interesting to notice that after analysing the 20 TL interviews and based on the processes that end on collaboration (Dickinson, 2006 and Montiel-Overall, 2006), there are a wide variety of cooperation and coordination work examples. The fact that the work developed between TL and teachers could not be labelled as true collaboration, might be a consequence, as was already mentioned, of a lack of knowledge of collaboration's definition, teaching very much focused on the teacher and his / her class and possibility to some resistance towards recognising TL post which, also being teachers, has its own tasks and activities to develop inside the school.

Therefore, the cooperation or coordination work developed (depending on the various degrees of involvement set by different authors), and considered by all TL interviewed as "Important" or "Very important" to students' educational success and to the development of their duties, could have even more impact if there were favourable conditions to culminate it in true collaboration.

6. Lack of time: condition "against" collaboration

Some authors, like Bishop and Larimer (1999), Russel (2002) and Johnson (2004), refer the lack of time as being one of the bigger collaboration barriers'.

Equally, all but one TL interviewed highlighted the small amount of time they have to plan and

organise SL activities' mainly due to "the lot of work" involved, lack of collaboration and reduced human resources.

Nowadays, these hours are not enough especially due to the lack of human resources, mainly SL assistants. If I had these human resources, probably 8 hours would be enough for the SL management. While I was planning the work, students wouldn't always interrupt me because the assistant would help me with that. Sometimes the amount of time available depends on the teamwork and on the people involved.

The lack of time to perform duties in the SL was referred by almost all TL as one of the main difficulties they face everyday. Insufficiency of time was mentioned as an impediment to collaborative work and, as a consequence, with implications and negative impact on students' educational success. Some interviewees said that problems resulting from lack of time could be solved if collaboration was highly valued.

To organise a "story hour" or any other "hour", I need to have all teachers' timetables and to plan across all curriculum groups. We haven't been able to coordinate the curriculum groups with the SL, with the timetables; it's a big mess. I have done some work for the SL day and it was really complicated. I have to ask for the books where teachers register their classes, I have to ask for collaboration but I can't do anything because there are no coincident hours on our timetables. (P7: L9 – WOT)

The amount of work SL involves plus the lack of time, have direct consequences in some TL personal and family life. Apart from being in the SL many more hours than the ones set by law (Portugal, Ministério da Educação), some TL have to work at home.

When we have finally shelved everything, we started to redo the book check and count. We took a whole academic year but with a lot of hours spent working at home, introducing data because here was really impossible as we were always being interrupted by students. I had to take home all the work, fact that displeased my husband very much [...] working at home has its consequences and it is not so well done as if it was performed at school and especially in a team. (P1: N5 – WOT)

It was only one TL who has said that the time available was enough. Nevertheless, pointed out

that this was only possible due to some changes that have occurred since the previous academic year: time set to TL was raised from 8 to 11 hours; for the first time TL was not a school management board member which meant more effective time to the SL; SL team stopped having members with reduced teaching time; size of the team had been reduced from 15 to 7 members; members of this new team were all suggested by the TL and agreed by the school management board.

With this team I think I have everything to develop the SL [...] I think they [the hours] are enough with the team I have. They are not the ideal ones but are more than enough. (P8: L6 – WOT)

7. Full time teacher librarian: condition “for” collaboration

Quantitative studies, mainly the ones conducted in the USA by Keith Curry Lance (Library Research Service) in several states, are particularly interesting as they identify relationships and direct degrees of association between several variables. These studies, apart from differences in schools (with more or less students) and in student population (with diverse cultural and socio-economic levels), show a positive statistical correlation between students’ academic achievement and TL with specific training to perform their duties, working full time and who dedicate a considerable amount of time working in collaboration with teachers integrating information competencies and the curriculum.

In Portugal and during 2006/2007 academic year, time when interviews were conducted, there were only 7 full time TL. The following year (2007/2008) there were already 107 for the 2nd and 3rd schooling cycles and about 130 from the 1st cycle, and this academic year (2008/2009), the RBE board (Rede de Bibliotecas Escolares) was allowed to select 500 full time TL for the 1st, 2nd and 3rd elementary and secondary schooling cycles and highlighted the possibility for teachers to apply exclusively for this post during 2009. The raising number of full time TL and the chance they might have in the future of applying solely for this full time post, clearly reflects a significant investment in this area, adding value to SL and starting the TL institutionalisation process.

Only one of the TL interviewed was part of the initial “magnificent seven”, as they called themselves. This TL having had the opportunity to work full time and thus have more time to spend in the SL, says that time is not still enough as she had chosen to keep a class which is occupying much of her time.

This year I am working full time. I am one of the 7 TL who had the chance to work solely in the SL but I also decided to keep a Portuguese teaching class because I wanted to work a specific author with my students. So I have 35h, less 11 for teaching and preparing classes and exams, so I really just have 24h. When I had 13h I used to think that if I was working full time things would be much easier. Right now I think that the time I have is not enough because the work in the SL seems to keep growing everyday. Compared with what I used to have, the time I have now is much more, but I am regretful now because the time I spend with the class board, preparing classes, organising exams is a lot and there is no time left, on the contrary I work many more hours than the ones I was given. (P21: A/- WT)

The remaining 19 TL, being full time teachers, have to distribute the time set to work in the SL according to their classes’ timetable which sometimes means a great effort.

The SL is a space that requires a lot of work to be organised and a lot of availability from us. I am here 7h and the remaining I teach. I even have the last mandatory schooling level with a Portuguese language national exam. I am a Portuguese/French teacher and I teach two last years of the 3rd cycle that have to be prepared the best way possible. I also have two more classes of different levels. So I have three levels of Portuguese and French language that I have to plan which implies a lot of work. The work in the SL gives me much pleasure and I had enjoyed last year’s experience very much but it is very time consuming as I always have to research a lot in the Internet, be constantly aware of what other SL are doing and suggestions from RBE, to help me with more ideas. To turn these ideas into activities takes a lot of time and sometimes I spend more time in the SL than with my students. (P1: N5 – WOT)

These TL have also referred that being full time teachers and TL implied lack of “continuity” on their work. Going in and out of the SL to teach in a classroom does not allow for a solid work with real knowledge about specific needs of that school community, as it is expressed by this TL, [...].

I felt I needed more continuity because coming here 90 minutes and going out to teach afterwards and

returning again to the SL, is not so productive as if I was here two full mornings or one full morning and one full afternoon. One loses the notion of what is going on here. If I am here just in the mornings, which is what is happening now, and do not come everyday just because I want and outside my timetable, I do not understand the way this works or students' needs. I end up with just SL assistant's feedback. The kind of students that come to the SL in the mornings is different from the one in the afternoons and I like to know the whole SL users. (P14: C10 – WT)

It is interesting to perceive some mixed feelings and differences of opinions among TL with and without specific training when faced with the chance of working full time. TL with training view this possibility with openness and even some enthusiasm, considering it as a benefit to their work which also would give them time to work in collaboration with teachers, fact seen as very important to student's educational success. The integration of information competencies and the curriculum, and organising and managing all SL resources would then be done with greater intensity and quality.

[Being full time TL] is the ideal situation to be 100%. [...] When my colleagues, alone in the classrooms, need support to organise and manage information, something that students don't know how to do it, as they only know how to get it from the Internet but not how to deal with it, I made myself available to go to classes whenever my colleagues ask for. But when I go to their classes it's always outside my timetable because I also teach and it is difficult to conciliate things. (P9: L4 – WT)

There should always be a full time TL in order for things to be more organised, for a more detailed and professional SL resources management, for giving sequence to all developed work without so many breaks. (P18: C4 – WT)

On their turn, TL without any training, even facing time management difficulties but considering full time TL an important asset, show some reluctance on choosing working full time because they really enjoy being teachers in a classroom environment. Therefore, they would always prefer to keep one class at least, for not getting away from certain realities, or rather having more time set to the SL, meaning more hours to the TL or to the team. For some of

these teachers, being a full time TL would mean stop working with students, breaking the direct relationship built inside a classroom and for these reasons they have stressed the need to keep a students' class.

[...] Because full time would mean doing just this, and so I would stop working with the kids. I think that one thing helps the other and so part time would be the ideal situation. (P7: L9 – WOT)

I think that it [a full time TL] may be important, but it is also important to have some relationship with students inside the classroom. I think that if we lose it we lose that relationship, the perception of how things work inside, we are put aside [...] it would be important but always keeping a link with at least one class. (P13: G1 – WOT)

For these TL, working full time means losing something and what they can get with more time does not compensate less direct relationship inside the classrooms. For some of these TL, if they would be able to interiorise the TL well distinct and defined role and tasks, have a good team support, work in true collaboration with teachers and the school management board, then, as a consequence, they could go through a change of attitudes, starting to focus attention on what students could get in terms of their educational success rather than on their feeling of looseness.

8. Some conclusions

The existence of collaborative work is referred by all interviewed TL as one of the conditions for students' educational success. Collaboration is seen as a factor that most influences the development of these TL's work, both inside and outside the SL. It was not found any significant differences of opinion among the interviewees either with or without specific training.

Although there is some consensus towards the benefits of collaboration, there are very few teachers who adopt this method of working. Nevertheless, there have been some changes in practices to accommodate all collaboration implications.

In Portugal, literature on collaborative work does not include or mention the TL as an active participant. This fact could be related to the inexistence of this post's institutionalisation, some ignorance about his / her role and personal / professional characteristics or even to some teachers' doubts on how to define collaboration and the reasons for it to take place.

The qualitative analysis done on the 20 interviews, offers examples of coordination and cooperation work and no true collaborative work was identified. This situation could be linked to teaching practices very much-focused on teachers and their classes or to the way this post, with objectives and timings very well defined, is still looked at inside the schools. The work developed by all TL, who see it as “Important” or “Very important” to students’ educational success, could probably have more impact if from coordination or cooperation could go further till reaching true collaboration.

Two of the factors most referred by the TL as “pro and count” of collaboration were, respectively, a full time TL and the lack of time. They have also mentioned that their private and family life was being directly affected by the lack of time to develop work in the SL.

Since 2006/2007, the number of TL working full time has been increasing and most probably there will be, in a near future, the chance for teachers to apply exclusively to that post. These changes are undoubtedly a reflex of efforts carried out, placing SL on educational top priorities, and a sign that the TL post and role will soon be recognised.

Some differences of opinion were perceived between the TL with and without specific training when faced with the perspective of starting working full time. In general, the ones with training shown their enthusiasm and said that working full time would give them more time and availability to work collaboratively and therefore make a bigger impact on students’ educational success. Some of the TL without training were some how unwilling to be full time TL because, as they stressed, would stop being teachers which is something they are not comfortable with. These different points of view are due, most likely, to the way these TL see their characteristics and role in the SL and in the school community and to the range of diverse collaboration perspectives, which can be considered.

9. Suggestions and/or recommendations

The existence of challenges, present and future, to TL in their formative and informative activities, is undeniable. For them to develop, with more efficacy, their role as teachers and TL, it would be desirable that all schools, through their management boards, fully recognised school libraries and TL as fundamental and precious resources and elements to students’ educational success. School management boards should also implement and promote collaboration between TL and teachers, showing evidence of its

advantages, value and impact in students’ learning.

The ones responsible for the support and development of SL in schools, Portuguese Ministry of Education, Regional Educational Authorities and the RBE, would need to work together to set the TL post as one of the educational priorities, giving to the teachers with specific training to perform their roles and tasks in the SL and willing to work full time, the means to apply solely to a full time TL post.

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