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Seabra, Filipa; Abelha, Marta; Henriques, Susana; Mouraz, Ana  
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# Policies and practices of external evaluation of schools: spaces for teacher collaboration?\*

Filipa Seabra <sup>a</sup>

Marta Abelha <sup>b</sup>

Susana Henriques <sup>c</sup>

Ana Mouraz <sup>d</sup>

## Abstract

Teaching has traditionally been a solitary profession. However, both because of the growing awareness of the complexity of teaching and the emergence of a notion of curriculum based on transversal competences, teachers' collaborative work is currently the focus of increased attention and research. Teacher collaboration has a paradoxical status in schools, as desired by educational policies and by teachers' and schools' discourses, but there is little evidence of authentic teacher collaboration practices. The present article intends to identify how teacher collaboration is at stake in schools. The perspective considered here is that of the frame of reference and reports of the third cycle of External Evaluation of Schools, conducted by the General Inspectorate of Education and Science in Portugal. The study uses document analysis as a data-gathering technique and content analysis for data analysis. The results point to the transversal valuing of teacher collaborative work in order to promote the improvement of teachers' practices related to supervision.

**Keywords:** Teacher Collaboration. External Evaluation of Schools. Institutional Evaluation Policies. Document analysis.

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<sup>a</sup> Universidade Aberta, Lisboa, Portugal.

<sup>b</sup> Universidade Aberta, Lisboa, Portugal.

<sup>c</sup> Universidade Aberta, Lisboa, Portugal.

<sup>d</sup> Universidade Aberta, Lisboa, Portugal.

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# 1 Introduction

Teacher collaboration has generally been desired, more than experienced, by teachers, as there is limited evidence reflecting authentic teacher collaborative work (ROLDÃO, 2007; TARDIF; LESSARD, 2005; VANGRIEKEN *et al.*, 2015). Several studies (ABELHA, 2011; ABELHA; MACHADO, 2018; COSTA-LOBO; ABELHA; CARVALHO, 2017; FORTE; FLORES, 2014; MCLAUGHLIN; TALBERT, 2001; SAWYER; RIMM-KAUFMAN, 2007) have demonstrated that teachers' work is usually conducted isolated and behind closed doors, which means it is essentially individual (TARDIF; LESSARD, 2005). Regarding this matter, Thurler (1994) warns that this solitary work, which may appear to "protect" teachers from each other, also prevents them from seeing, reflecting on, and understanding what colleagues are doing inside their classrooms with their students.

The aim of this study is to analyze and discuss teacher collaboration within the context of External Evaluation of Schools (EES) in Portugal. To achieve this objective, the following research questions were defined:

- What conceptions of teacher collaboration have been present in the frames of reference that guide EES in Portugal?
- What references to teacher collaboration are present in the EES reports of the third cycle (2018-present)?
- What influence may the conceptions of collaboration expressed in these documents have on inducing school practices?

This paper reviews the theoretical background, discussing teacher collaboration and EES. Afterward, it presents the research methods, followed by the results and discussion of the findings. Finally, a conclusion section ends this paper.

## 2 Theoretical background

### 2.1 Teacher collaboration

The essential theoretical foundations for teacher collaboration lie in interdependence. Kuper and Kapelle (2012) state that "collaboration is a process in which individuals work together to improve total output compared to what they could have accomplished on their own" (BUSH; GROTHJANN, 2020, p. 1). Along the same lines, we may defend that "collaboration is definitionally concerned

with giving something up for the greater good in order to achieve something that is not possible individually” (BRADBEER, 2021, p. 49).

From Day’s perspective (2004), teacher collaboration requires that teachers observe each other in their daily practices, talk and reflect together about those practices, and work collectively to plan and evaluate their work, culminating in the joint investigation of teaching and learning processes. From this perspective, teacher collaboration implies intentional and communicative activity (BUSH; GROTHJANN, 2020).

In sum, teacher collaboration aims to achieve common goals, which are previously collectively negotiated (shared need), is carried out in a context where teachers relate to each other as equal (distributed leadership), does not rely on pre-established hierarchy but instead on co-responsibility among team members; implies continuous negotiation and joint decision-making, and ultimately conducts to mutual learning (ALARCÃO; CANHA, 2013).

According to Little, the concept of collaboration has remained “conceptually amorphous and ideologically sanguine” (1990, p. 509). In this regard, the author calls for a conception of teacher collaboration that goes beyond “getting along and working well together” (1990, p. 511), or the simple sharing of experiences and materials, and considers it may encompass different types of activities, such as i) storytelling and scanning, ii) sharing, iii) help and assistance, and iv) joint work. If teacher collaboration is limited to sharing of anecdotes, providing support only when solicited, and sharing ideas without proper analysis and discussion, we are faced with weak teacher collaboration relations, not deep and effective teacher collaboration. The author considers joint work to be a strong kind of teacher collaboration, which is more likely to lead to significant progress since it requires shared responsibility and reflection on teacher practice, collective commitment, and availability, and a critical stance regarding the work carried out.

Still on this subject, studies developed by Lima (2004), McLaughlin and Talbert (2001) consider that situations such as sharing and joint elaboration of pedagogical materials are not yet as frequent as would be desirable and are mostly circumscribed to teachers who teach the same subject and the same grade (HARGREAVES, 1994; LIMA, 2004; TARDIF; LESSARD, 2005).

The Teaching and Learning International Survey (Talis) 2013 (OECD, 2016) examined, among other aspects, teachers’ perceptions about their practices

and working conditions, demonstrating that the most frequent ‘collaborative’ practices reported by the participants were discussing individual students, and sharing resources. Less frequently, they reported team teaching and collaborative professional development. The least frequently reported collaborative practices were joint activities and classroom observations.

Considering “not all forms of collaboration are equally strong, desirable, or impactful” (HARGREAVES; O’CONNER, 2017, p. 77), we may conclude that there still seems to be a long way to go before effective teacher collaboration is in practice more widely.

## 2.2 Positive outcomes and facilitating factors for teacher collaboration

The teacher collaboration paradigm is presented as one of the strategies that may help teachers respond to educational change. Much of the success attributed to collaboration is translated, among other aspects, in reduction of teacher isolation (VANGRIEKEN *et al.*, 2015; REEVES; PUN; CHUNG, 2017; RIDGE; LAVIGNE, 2020); increased motivation (VANGRIEKEN *et al.*, 2015); increased moral support (HARGREAVES, 1994; JOHNSON, 2010; VANGRIEKEN *et al.*, 2015); increased teacher job satisfaction (REEVES; PUN; CHUNG, 2017); teacher professional development reflected on the improvement of teachers’ work and therefore of students’ learning (HARGREAVES, 1994; HERNÁNDEZ, 2007; JOHNSON, 2010; SAWYER; RIMMKAUFGMAN, 2007); increased teacher confidence concerning their work (FULLAN; HARGREAVES, 2001; HARGREAVES, 1994; HERNÁNDEZ, 2007; REEVES; PUN; CHUNG, 2017); increased communication (EGODAWATTE; MCDUGALL; STOILESCU, 2011); improved effectiveness (HARGREAVES, 1994); promoting teacher reflection (HARGREAVES, 1994), among other aspects.

Despite being aware of the benefits of teacher collaboration, we also agree that attention must be given to teachers’ autonomy, so they may retain individual identity for the benefit of the community (BRADBEER, 2021). Teacher collaboration can be promoted in an environment that fosters diversity while encouraging interdependence as teachers learn from each other, share their unique strengths with the group, identify common concerns, and work collaboratively to solve their problems.

Shortly, creating collaborative relationships among teachers is an essential condition for effective curricular development and teachers’ professional development in the face of educational change (HARGREAVES, 1994).

Where collaboration is at play, uncertainty and failure are not hidden, but are shared and discussed for support. Teachers do not waste time and energy protecting their image when involved in teacher collaboration networks (ABELHA, 2011).

## 2.3 Adverse outcomes and hindering factors of teacher collaboration

However, “collaboration is not always beneficial, even if its effects are generally positive” (HARGREAVES, 2019, p. 608). While considering the benefits of teacher collaboration, we must point out that while it is an essential factor in restructuring Education, it is not synonymous with change and innovation. Hargreaves (1994) cautions against an acritical acceptance of the advantages of teacher collaboration, as it risks becoming an orthodox means of dealing with educational issues. Vangrieken *et al.* go even further, highlighting it may have detrimental effects as well: “teacher collaboration is not a panacea that solves all problems and attention should be given to possible negative consequences of collaboration” (2015, p. 29).

Several factors have been noted to restrict the development of teacher collaboration: collaboration as a threat to teacher autonomy (JOHNSON, 2010); competitiveness (JOHNSON, 2010); increased workload (FULLAN; HARGREAVES, 2000; JOHNSON, 2010); drive towards conformity with the majority (FULLAN, 1993; JOHNSON, 2010); teacher professional socialization promoting isolation (FULLAN; HARGREAVES, 2000; THURLER, 1994; PERRENOUD, 2002; ROLDÃO, 2007); schools’ cellular structure (FULLAN; HARGREAVES, 2000; HARGREAVES, 1994; HERNÁNDEZ, 2007; ROLDÃO, 2007); weak or overly controlling leaderships (FULLAN; HARGREAVES, 2001; HARGREAVES, 2019).

Lack of time, associated with the incompatibility among teachers’ schedules, is one of the most reported constraints (HARGREAVES, 1994, 2019; FULLAN; HARGREAVES, 2000; HERNÁNDEZ, 2007). Hargreaves questions this state of affairs with two thought-provoking interrogations: “Would more time outside the classroom give teachers more time to collaborate, or, busy as they were, would they continue to use the time individually? Would ameliorating presentism help reduce individualism?” (2019, p. 607).

One of the constraints pointed out by Roldão (2007) is the way teachers’ work is organized, which is ineffective in promoting broader practices of collaboration among teachers. Teaching is segmented into disciplines mostly thought of as

independent, and teachers rarely observe each other's practices to communicate and discuss them, seeking their improvement.

We can verify that several factors inhibit deeper levels of teacher collaboration. The constraints reported are generally rooted in organizational, technical, and administrative issues, lack of specific teacher training for teacher collaboration, and difficulties with the appropriation, implication, and application of the concept of teacher collaboration (ABELHA, 2011).

## 2.4 Preconditions for teacher collaboration

The difficulty in establishing teacher collaboration practices aimed at the improvement of students' learning and teachers' professional development is a complex reality, rooted in the organizational and professional cultures of schools and teachers (ROLDÃO, 2007).

Therefore, facilitating the development of better teacher collaboration practices is one of the main challenges faced by educational policymakers, schools, Higher Education Institutions (HEI), and other educational stakeholders. Some features that may contribute to teacher collaboration are:

- i. the development of shared leadership, promoting a climate of mutual respect where everyone can share knowledge and experiences (ALARCÃO; CANHA, 2013; EUROPEAN COMMISSION, 2015) and promoting interactive professionalism (FULLAN; HARGREAVES, 2001);
- ii. effective, structural, informational, and instructional support from the school principal (SLAVIT *et al.*, 2011);
- iii. creation of collaborative learning communities (through synergies between schools and HEI);
- iv. definition of clear and attainable common goals for the team (ALARCÃO; CANHA, 2013);
- v. learning environment where there is a place for error, which constitutes a space for sharing practices (EUROPEAN COMMISSION, 2015);
- vi. regular, open and honest communication among team members (SLAVIT *et al.*, 2011);

- vii. attention to collaboration in teachers' initial and lifelong training, including strategies for collaborative work in curricula (EUROPEAN COMMISSION, 2015);
- viii. consideration and effective managing of resources (spaces and times) and logistical conditions for teacher collaboration (COSME, 2018);
- ix. creating opportunities for collaborative observation and feedback, allowing teachers to reflect upon their practices and move beyond the descriptive level (what happened) to the explicate level (how and why) (EUROPEAN COMMISSION, 2015).

Schools are increasingly confronted with such complex issues that teachers' work requires them to develop collaborative practices that contribute to a more effective and efficient regulation of teaching practices (ABELHA; MACHADO, 2018). The time for collaboration is now urgent.

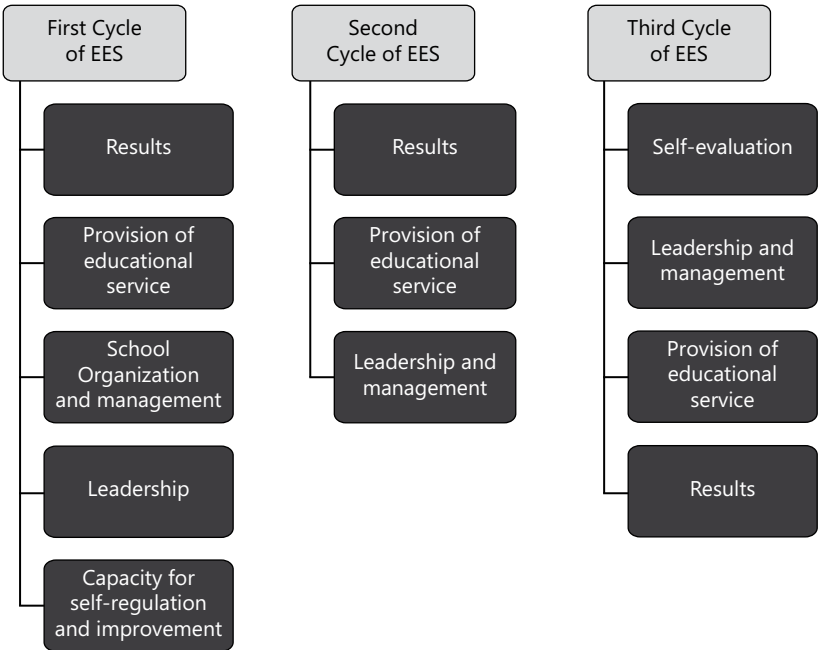
## 2.5 External Evaluation of Schools and teacher collaboration

Portugal has been reflecting the international tendency towards accountability in educational systems, with implications for institutional evaluation processes (SOUSA; PACHECO, 2019). Aiming at quality through a continuous improvement of educational processes, the public policies of EES have evolved throughout three cycles of application. The first cycle of EES occurred between 2006 and 2011 (PORTUGAL, 2006), the second between 2012 and 2017 (PORTUGAL, 2016), and finally, in 2018, the frame of reference for the third cycle of EES was published (PORTUGAL, 2018). During each of the cycles of EES, all the public school clusters of the Portuguese continent were subject to external evaluation. This evaluation follows a common frame of reference and results in a classification for each of the domains under analysis and a public report, which describes the main findings, strengths, and areas for improvement.

The EES has been revised throughout its application, incorporating changes in methodology and differences to the frames of reference that guide the analysis in each application cycle, as expressed in Figure 1.



**Figure 1** - Domains of analysis of each of the frames of reference for the three cycles of EES, in Portugal



Source: Authors' elaboration (2021) with information from PORTUGAL, 2006, 2016, 2019

The domains of analysis for each frame of reference are subdivided into more specific fields of analysis and indicators. They guide the assessment performed by the EES teams and form the structure of the reports that result from the evaluation process, and which will be the main focus of our analysis, in the current article.

The frame of reference for the third cycle of EES presents unique features compared to the previous two concerning the domains and indicators of evaluation, where self-evaluation assumes a central role. This cycle of EES is also unique because it includes other types of schools (such as professional and artistic schools, private and cooperative institutions, in addition to the public schools that have been the subject of the two previous cycles). Its methodology has changed to include observation of teaching practice, visits to schools by the EES teams are now longer, and EES teams now include four elements – two from the General Inspectorate of Education, and two external elements, usually from academia, instead of only three as in the previous cycles of evaluation. This contributes to greater appreciation of the procedural and practical aspects, particularly

curriculum and pedagogy, which have gained importance in the third cycle of EES (FIALHO *et al.*, 2020; HOLLOWAY, 2020).

The resulting EES reports are a reflection of the EES team's appraisal of the aspects included in the EES frame of reference, following analysis of each school's internal documents, academic results indicators, questionnaires for the educational community, and schools visits, including panel interviews with representatives of each of the stakeholders groups involved in the school, and classroom observation. The EES reports, therefore, provide the public, as well as educational researchers, with a complex perspective of the work developed in schools.

Taking a closer look at the frame of reference guiding this cycle of EES, we highlight the central role attributed to teachers' practices, including teacher collaboration, which we will highlight in the results section. This was the motto for the present article: considering the importance recognized by the Portuguese EES frame of reference for collaborative teaching practices, how do the reports produced in this cycle portray the collaboration practices taking place in schools?

### 3 Research method

The study presented here is descriptive and interpretative, inserted in a qualitative matrix, and assuming document analysis as a data-gathering technique and content analysis for data analysis (GUERRA, 2006; TUCKMAN, 2012).

From this perspective, we took the following questions as axes of analysis: What conceptions of teacher collaboration have been present in the frames of reference guiding EES in Portugal? What references to teacher collaboration are present in the EES reports of the third cycle? What influence might the conceptions of collaboration expressed in these documents have on the induction of school practices?

The main *corpus* of analysis includes all the EES reports concerning the third cycle, which were available at the moment of data gathering (April 2020). The reports were obtained through the website of the General Inspectorate of Education and Science, since they are public documents and include nine reports from the pilot phase (identified by codes P1 to P9), and six reports from schools evaluated in the year 2018/2019 (identified by codes S1 to S6). The frames of reference of the three cycles of EES were considered complementary documents.

To answer the first question, in the first stage of analysis, we considered the frames of reference of the three cycles of EES, aiming to identify how they presented ideas related to teacher collaboration.

The core of the empirical work presented concerns the analysis of the reports from the third cycle of EES, analyzed in the second and third stages of analysis. Specifically, in the second stage of analysis, we quantified the references to collaboration present in these reports. In contrast, in the third stage, we considered the contents of these references in a qualitative and descriptive way. The categories organizing the presentation of data in the second stage were defined *a priori*, corresponding to the sections comprising the reports: the four domains of EES and the sections relating to strengths and areas for improvement. References to collaboration were quantified and classified as positive (mentioned as an accomplishment of the school) or negative (referring to the absence or insufficiency of those practices).

This work followed ethical guidelines and concerns, namely the anonymity of the schools under analysis in each of the reports. Although these are public documents, they have been codified and therefore anonymized (ASHA, 2018; DOOLY; MOORE; VALLEJO, 2017).

## 4 Presentation and discussion of results

### 4.1 First stage – the analysis of the frames of reference for EES

The frame of reference guiding the first cycle of EES (PORTUGAL, 2006) did not include any direct mention of the word collaboration (or its derivatives), but rather the word cooperation<sup>1</sup>. It included references that presupposed the existence of collegial work among teachers, predominantly in the domain “Provision of educational service”, including the factors 2.1. articulation and sequence, 2.2. accompanying teachers’ practice in the classroom, and 2.3. differentiation and support. Curricular work stands out as the foundation of these collaborative practices, as well as its close relation to supervision practices and the role of intermediate leaders in promoting the desired articulation among teachers.

The frame of reference considers different forms of interaction among teachers. However, it emphasizes practices that require low interdependence among teachers (LITTLE, 1990) regarding classroom work: joint development of planning, evaluation instruments, class curricular projects, and pedagogical materials. The core of teachers’ work – the classroom (TARDIF; LESSARD, 2005) – is omitted.

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<sup>1</sup> In the literature, the terms collaboration and cooperation are often used indistinctly, and we assume them, in this article, as synonyms.

There is also a reference to teacher cooperation in the “Leadership” domain, concerning the promotion of cooperation with other schools or HEI, which is in line with the European Commission’s (2015) recommendation about collaborative learning communities going beyond school walls and encompassing other schools and HEI.

In the frame of reference for the second cycle of EES (PORTUGAL, 2016), the word collaboration is again absent, and there is one reference to the word cooperation. This frame of reference was substantially simplified compared to the previous one and is organized into three domains, specified by fields of analysis and referents. A shift in focus has been recognized in this frame of reference, moving away from processes, and conferring centrality to results (FIALHO *et al.*, 2020). Thus, we identify a smaller number of references to collaboration, some of which are not explicit and all of which are related to curricular work. We stress the direct mention of “cooperative work among teachers” as a referent in the field of analysis planning and articulation. At the same time, as collaboration gains visibility in the sense that it is directly mentioned, it also seems to be portrayed in a more restricted sense, which may reflect the less descriptive nature of this document.

We finalize this first stage of analysis by considering the frame of reference for the third cycle of EES (PORTUGAL, 2018), which underpins the elaboration of the reports that constitute the core subject of our analysis. This frame of reference comprises four domains, elucidated by fields of analysis, referents, and indicators. About specificity and extent, this document is in an intermediate position, between the first’s descriptive richness and the second’s slimness. This frame of reference includes two mentions of the word collaboration (or its derivatives), at the expense of the now absent word cooperation. The references to collaborative work remain centered on curricular work and collaborative supervision under the designation of “peer regulation”.

In sum, we highlight the presence of references implying teachers’ collaborative work across all three EES frames of reference, although more so in the first (PORTUGAL, 2006), where it goes beyond the domain of educational service and is also considered in connection with leadership and partnerships with other schools and HEI; and in the third (PORTUGAL, 2018), where it is made explicit as an indicator and is more strongly linked to the supervision of teaching practices. In this case, we are moving towards valuing deeper interdependence (LITTLE, 1990) and more transformative collaboration practices (HARGREAVES; O’CONNER, 2017).

## 4.2 Second stage – quantitative content analysis of the EES reports

In this second stage of analysis, which initiates the core of the empirical study presented, we have quantified the references to collaborative practices present in the third cycle of EES reports.

In this analysis, we used the sections included in the reports (the four assessment domains and the strengths and areas for improvement) as organizing categories. We quantified the positive and negative references to the notion of teacher collaboration. These results are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1** - Negative and positive references to teacher collaboration, by section of the report

Schools	Self-evaluation	Leadership	Provision of educational service	Results	Strengths	Areas for improvement	Total
P1	-	-	1 (-1)	-	-	-2	1(-3)
P2	-	-	1 (-1)	-	-	-	1(-1)
P3	-	-	1 (-1)	-	-	-	1(-1)
P4	1	-	2 (-1)	-	1	-	4(-1)
P5	-	-1	-1	-	-	-1	-3
P6	-	-	1	1	-	-	2
P7	-	-	2	-	-	-	2
P8	-	-	2	-	-	-	2
P9	-	-1	1 (-1)	-	-	-1	1(-3)
S1	-	1	1 (-1)	-	1	-	3(-1)
S2	-	-	1 (-1)	-	-	-1	1(-2)
S3	-1	-	-	-	-	-	-1
S4	-	-	-	-	-	-	0
S5	-	-	-1	-	-	-	-1
S6	-	1	2(-1)	-	-	-	3(-1)
TOTAL	1(-1)	2(-2)	15(-10)	1	2	-5	21 (-18)

Source: Authors' elaboration (2021)

Looking first at the total of references, we highlight the close numbers of positive and negative references to teacher collaboration. The picture depicted by the EES teams of these 15 schools mentions, 21 positive instances of teacher collaboration, along with 18 aspects reported as negative. Only one report (S4) did not include any explicit reference to this dimension of teachers' work, which leads us to conclude that collaboration is an aspect transversally valued across the board by the EES teams.

Analyzing each of the sections of the reports, we verify that references to teacher collaboration are most frequent in the domain "provision of educational service" (25), which is not surprising considering that this is what the frame of reference (PORTUGAL, 2018) suggests. Next is the section "areas for improvement" (five references from four reports), which highlights the critical dimension of the appraisals made by the EES teams concerning teacher collaboration, especially when compared with only two mentions of collaboration as a strength of the schools under evaluation.

More surprisingly, we found that the references to teacher collaboration, unlike what happens in the frame of reference, are not limited to these sections. All the remaining domains were included, although with lower frequencies: four references in the "leadership" domain, two references in the domain of "self-evaluation" and one reference in the domain of "results". This finding supports the perception that EES teams interpret and apply the EES frame of reference in a way that recognizes the pervasive importance of teacher collaboration.

### 4.3 Third stage – the content of EES reports

Looking more closely at the contents of the appraisals of collaborative work expressed in the reports, we sought to analyze the aspects valued by the EES teams and those found to be weaker in the schools under evaluation. We will present the results according to the report sections.

Strengths and areas for improvement: these sections condense the elements that the EES teams considered more noteworthy in assessing each school, whether by their frailty or by their success. Therefore, we contend these two sections of the reports may be particularly influential in the projected image of the school, permeating the general appreciation that is made and, consequently, may be particularly prone to induce changes in schools. This may happen because they validate and acknowledge instituted practices, which may then be maintained and amplified, or because they emphasize elements that require particular investment by the school.

The reports include strengths related to teacher collaboration in two schools. In P4, this strength concerns educational service, particularly the impact of teachers' collaborative practices on curricular management. This may reflect on the improvement of teachers' work and, consequently, of the teaching and learning processes (HARGREAVES, 1994; HERNÁNDEZ, 2007; JOHNSON, 2010; SAWYER; RIMMKAUFMAN, 2007). In S1, the strength pointed out concerns leadership and management, highlighting the role of intermediate leaderships in potentiating teachers' collaborative work, in agreement with what several authors (including ALARCÃO; CANHA, 2013; EUROPEAN COMMISSION, 2015) have defended. We also consider it equally pertinent to reorganize the internal dynamics of schools by involving leaderships in the creation and management of times and spaces which enable collaborative work.

There are five references to teacher collaboration as an area for improvement in four reports. Among these, four (in P1, P9, S2) concern the domain of "educational service" and refer to the need to deepen collaborative work, whether relating to the supervision and observation of teaching practice (P1, S2), or aiming to promote shared moments to reflect on practice (S2), to articulate (P9), and to improve the quality of the educational service (P1, P9). There is also a reference to promoting a collaborative culture (P9), which may relate to the domain of "leadership", as it seems to imply creating conditions at a broader level to potentiate collaboration.

One area for improvement (P5) is focused on the domain of "leadership and management", referring to the actions of the intermediate leaders to enable this practice, contextualized in the scope of curricular management.

As we have noted earlier, teacher collaboration can be promoted or inhibited by school leaderships as they contribute (or not) to the affirmation of a professional and institutional collaborative culture (COSME, 2018, p. 109). Whether on strengths or areas for improvement, the focus of the reports on collaborative work was not restricted to educational service, encompassing the need to create institutional conditions to foster collaboration at the school level. Still, there is many references concerning educational service, more frequently critical than positive, which emphasize the links between collaboration and curriculum management, as well as with (collaborative) supervision.

We have found two references to collaboration in the domain of "self-assessment", one of which is positive (P4) and one negative (S3). In both, the identification of needs related to collaborative work through the schools' self-assessment

is considered. Again, these references highlight the importance of promoting institutional conditions for collaboration.

In the domain “leadership and management”, we identified two negative references (P5, P9) and two positive references (S1, S6) to teachers’ collaborative work. The two negative references are divided between the fields of analysis “leadership” (P5), considering the need for leaders to stimulate collaborative work regarding curriculum planning and management; and “management” (P9), stressing the need to create conditions that make collaborative work possible, namely concerning teachers’ timetables. Regarding the existence of shared times in teachers’ timetables, we corroborate Hargreaves’ (2019) perspective when considering that teachers should be allowed flexibility in the use of preparation times, such that they serve the intention of enabling collaboration rather than the goal of controlling it.

In the domain “provision of educational service”, 14 positive mentions (P2, P3, P4, P6, P7, P8, P9, S1, S2, S6 reports) and ten negative mentions (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P9, S1, S2, S5, S6) to collaborative work were considered.

Several of these pertain to “teaching, learning, and evaluation” (P1, P2, P3, P4, P8 e P9), highlighting the existence of effective collaborative practices among teachers (and one stressing their insufficiency, P5). However, this point frequently includes references, which contain both positive and negative elements. Only in P4 is there an unequivocal affirmation of a strength without pointing to any limitations or constraints. In the remaining reports, positive aspects are presented, while at the same time mentioning more or less explicitly that those practices are circumscribed to specific contexts - events, curricular enrichment activities (P2), projects (P3, P8), teachers of the same subject and grade (P8), teacher subject groups (P9) – thus recognizing they are not generalized to the school. In other cases, constraints are identified (P2), such as the need to create conditions to foster collaboration, namely considering shared times (P1, P3), the need to strengthen and formalize the collaboration culture (P9), and consider practices so that they become systematic (P1).

The confinement of teachers’ collaborative practices to teachers of the same subject and age group is presented more as an obstacle to communication and intra-organizational communication than as a facilitator of collaboration (NETO-MENDES, 2004). Moreover, the expression of teacher collaboration in the preparation of extra-classroom activities (events, projects, extracurricular activities) is what Hargreaves (1994) calls to a limited form of collaboration. The collaboration should move towards systematic practices, comprising



co-responsibility and co-reflection on teachers' practices, collective commitment and improvement, overcoming the barriers of informal teacher collaboration and making it intentional (LITTLE, 1990).

Another point in the domain of educational service where multiple references to teacher collaboration are present pertains to the "accompaniment and supervision of educational practices" (P4, P6, P8, S1, S2, S5, S6). References to practices of supervision, observation, sharing, debate, and joint teaching are prevalent here, portrayed as promoting or as outcomes of teacher collaboration. There are also references to impacts on teachers' curricular work.

As in the previous case, only one report includes a clearly positive, unmuted reference to collaboration (P6), and another an entirely negative comment (S5). In most cases, negative aspects are recognized, even when relevant practices are also acknowledged. Again, the circumscription of practices to specific contexts or groups (P4, S1, S6), practices that are not considered systematic (S2), or the fact that projects in this scope have been abandoned (P8). "Practices of collaborative work among teachers are registered. Teachers plan activities as a team, prepare evaluation instruments, or define guidelines for their construction, among others. These actions, however, lack systematicity" (S2).

Finally, in the domain of "results", there is one positive mention of collaborative work among teachers, in P6, on the field of analysis, "recognition by the community".

The content analysis of the reports of the third cycle of EES allows us to highlight: a) the existence of references to teacher collaboration across all the reports' sections; b) a slight predominance of positive references, accompanied by a high number of negative references; we frequently find that relevant practices are acknowledged, while at the same point identifying limitations and restrictions to these practices; c) self-assessment, when mentioned, refers to the identification of needs related to the promotion of collaborative practices; d) collaborative work is depicted in the reports as a tool in the service of teachers' curriculum management and the improvement of teaching practices, in a way that strongly interrelates with supervision; e) leadership and management receive substantial attention, as the reports emphasize the need to create conditions allow collaboration among teachers to flourish, the creation of an adequate climate, and the stimulation of leaderships to promote collaboration; f) results are the least highlighted domain in the analysis, considered only in one report, referring to teachers' satisfaction with the collaborative work practices they encounter.

## 5 Conclusions

Although this is a national study referring to the Portuguese educational reality, we believe it may be relevant to readers from other areas of the globe. The importance of the EES is not unique to the Portuguese context. Evaluation is – as always – at the center of educational policies (MORGADO, 2020) – and can be understood in its dual role of control and of improvement (MOURAZ; LEITE; FERNANDES; 2019; SEABRA *et al.*, 2021). Furthermore, despite the diversity regarding educational systems and schools' operation, European Inspectorates work together to develop and discuss practices concerning the external evaluation of schools within the Standing International Conference of Inspectorates (Sici) (GRAY, 2014) leading to a convergence of aims and practices. From this perspective, understanding how EES reports in a specific national context are reflecting the importance of teacher collaboration, and how they may have an impact on school practices in that domain, may be relevant to decision-making in other countries, particularly in Europe.

We understand teacher collaboration as a key element for successful Education in the face of complex challenges (HARGREAVES, 1994), and are therefore interested in identifying policies and practices directed to its promotion, particularly since, as we have mentioned before, collaboration still does not seem to be the norm. This is a generalized concern, and we believe understanding the Portuguese case may be useful to that analysis.

In times of uncertainty, considering the multiple challenges and issues facing teachers and schools, it is fundamental for teachers to collaborate effectively with each other, sharing dilemmas, reflecting together, and developing projects that derive from problems they identified, seeking their resolution in a collective logic (HENRIQUES *et al.*, 2020). That is also the understanding of the need for teacher collaboration in the EES frames of reference, from an evolutionary perspective. In the EES frame of reference, we recognize the notion that teacher collaboration can provide a better adjustment to the complex demands placed on these relational professionals (EUROPEAN COMMISSION, 2015). In this evolutionary analysis of the EES frames of reference, the results point to a transversal valuing of collaborative work as a desired target to promote the improvement of pedagogical practices and closely related to the notion and practice of (collaborative) supervision. The role of schools' leadership and management in creating conditions that foster teachers' collaborative work is also recognized, with impacts on teachers' curriculum management work.

Concomitantly, references to teacher collaboration present in the EES reports value leadership's actions as an essential condition for teachers' collaborative

work. Leaderships that promote cultures that foster teacher collaboration are those that i) encourage the sharing of ideas and expectations; ii) provide the resources necessary to the development of teacher collaboration; iii) make teachers feel like members of a team; iv) assist in identifying and solving of problems together; v) promote critical reflection among teachers, guiding them towards intervention; vi) foster joint decision-making; vii) understand the culture of the school they lead, communicating with teachers in order to understand what they are doing, what they value, what makes them proud and what is a concern to them; and viii) use bureaucracy to enable rather than constrain (FULLAN; HARGREAVES, 2001). When analyzing the reports, these tasks of the leaderships emerge, whether by acknowledging their presence in the evaluated schools or by being included as suggestions for improvement, regardless of whether they are included in the domain of “educational service” or that of “leadership and management” or even “self-evaluation”.

We can also infer in this clash between the recognition of the power of collaboration and its (relative) absence, the facilitating role that organizational policies (HARGREAVES, 1994) may have concerning the promotion of increasingly impactful teacher collaboration. Thus, we believe, along with Roldão, that it is imperative to “transform merely hierarchical leaderships into assumed and responsible leaderships, assuming options about teaching and answering for them to their peers, in a posture of leading towards desired outcomes, and monitoring participated processes” (2009, p. 91), which is essential to the effects EES may have in the transformation of educational practices. We conclude that in the reading and portrayal of the schools assessed by EES, collaborative work is recognized as an essential dimension, and its recommendations seek profound and impactful collaboration practices.

The results of this study demonstrate the need to develop policies that converge for the un-privatization of teachers practices in the classroom context, but also contribute to a sense of communality (NETO-MENDES, 2004; VIEIRA, 2009), which may enable finding joint answers to better respond to the challenges left by the EES. This answers the last question: the conceptions of collaboration portrayed in the reports have the potential of inducing practices in schools.

## **Políticas e práticas de avaliação externa de escolas: quais os espaços para a colaboração docente?**

### **Resumo**

*A profissão de docente foi tradicionalmente uma profissão solitária. Todavia, cada vez mais, quer pela consciência da complexidade da tarefa que é educar; quer pela emergência de uma ideia de currículo assente em competências transversais, o trabalho colaborativo dos professores tem sido objeto de maior atenção pela investigação. A colaboração docente tem uma existência paradoxal nas escolas, uma vez que tem sido desejada no âmbito das políticas educativas e nos discursos dos professores e das escolas, mas são poucas as práticas que refletem autêntico trabalho colaborativo docente. No presente artigo, procura-se identificar de que formas se operacionalizam estas colaborações nas escolas. O olhar é estabelecido, a partir do referencial e dos relatórios do 3º ciclo da Avaliação Externa das Escolas levados a cabo pela Inspeção Geral da Educação e Ciência em Portugal. O estudo usa a análise documental como técnica de recolha de dados e a análise de conteúdo como técnica de análise de dados. Os resultados salientam a valorização transversal do trabalho colaborativo como meta desejável a promover na melhoria das práticas pedagógicas, de modo relacionado com a supervisão.*

**Palavras-chave:** Colaboração Docente. Avaliação Externa de Escolas. Políticas de Avaliação Institucional. Análise Documental.

## **Políticas y prácticas para la evaluación externa de las escuelas: ¿espacios para la colaboración del maestro?**

### **Resumen**

*La enseñanza ha sido tradicionalmente una profesión solitaria. Sin embargo, tanto por la conciencia creciente de la complejidad de la enseñanza y el surgimiento de una noción de currículo basado en competencias transversales, el trabajo colaborativo de los maestros es actualmente el foco de mayor atención e investigación. La colaboración de maestros tiene un estatus paradójico en las escuelas, como lo desean las políticas educativas y los discursos de los maestros y las escuelas, pero hay poca evidencia de prácticas auténticas de colaboración de maestros. El presente artículo tiene la intención de identificar cómo la colaboración del maestro está en juego en las escuelas. La perspectiva aquí considerada es la del marco de referencia e informes del tercer ciclo de evaluación externa de las escuelas, realizada por la Inspección General de Educación y Ciencias en Portugal. El estudio utiliza el análisis documental como una técnica de recopilación de datos y un análisis de contenido para el análisis de datos. Los resultados apuntan a la valoración transversal del trabajo colaborativo del maestro destinado a promover la mejora de las prácticas docentes relacionadas con la supervisión.*

**Palabras clave:** Colaboración Docente. Evaluación Escolar Externa. Políticas de Evaluación Institucional. Análisis Documental.

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## Information about the authors


**Filipa Seabra:** Ph. D. in Educational Sciences, Universidade do Minho, Portugal. Researcher at the Laboratório de Educação a Distância e E-learning, and Auxiliary professor at the Universidade Aberta, Portugal. Contact: [filipa.seabra@uab.pt](mailto:filipa.seabra@uab.pt)

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1690-9502>


**Marta Abelha:** Ph. D. in Didactics, Universidade de Aveiro, Portugal. Researcher at the Centro de Estudos Interdisciplinares do Séc. XX, Universidade de Coimbra. Auxiliary Professor at the Universidade Aberta, Portugal. Contact: [marta.abelha@uab.pt](mailto:marta.abelha@uab.pt)

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7105-3722>

**Susana Henriques:** Ph. D. in Sociology, Instituto Universitário de Lisboa, Portugal. Researcher at the Centro de Investigação e Estudos de Sociologia, Instituto Universitário de Lisboa. Auxiliary Professor with Aggregation at the Universidade Aberta, Portugal. Contact: [susana.henriques@uab.pt](mailto:susana.henriques@uab.pt)

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1245-2234>

**Ana Mouraz:** Ph. D. in Educational Sciences, University of Coimbra, Portugal. Researcher at the Centro de Investigação e Inovação Educacional, Universidade do Porto, Portugal. Auxiliary Professor at the Universidade Aberta, Portugal. Contact: [ana.lopes@uab.pt](mailto:ana.lopes@uab.pt)

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7960-5923>