

Expanding Our Horizons
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**Talking together, growing together:
the role of exchanges in the
professional development of language
teachers.**

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Talk's structure

- 1. Contextualisation** – the project "Languages and Education"
(as a context of language teacher education)
- 2. The Study** – theoretical background and methodological details
- 3. Findings** – 3 cases
- 4. Discussion and Conclusions**



Contextualization: The project “Languages & Education: constructing and sharing professional knowledge”



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CIDTFF – Research Centre Didactics and Technology in Teacher Education

<http://www.ua.pt/cidfff/lale/PageText.aspx?id=10394>



<http://linguaseeducacao.web.ua.pt/>

Professional Development Community (PDC)

Context of collaborative education – a locus of transformation of experiences, views and practices in language education, based on a learning environment inhabited by teachers, researchers and teacher educators



Theoretical guiding axes

Educational Research and Action

interconnected practices

The qualitative transformation of language education practices is fostered when its actors do research about such education and create new understandings of their own research

Professional Development (teachers and researchers)

priority

Capacity of such educational actors to dialogue with social changes, educational institutions, and the language education environments, as well as of being able to integrate in their professional repertoires new theories and practices

Cultures of collaboration and communities

places of interrelationships, sharing and identity construction

The spaces, cultures and practices of collaboration are essential to the didactic know-how and thinking, to teacher education, to the professional development and research

Environments of change around *common projects* in language education



Research dimension: project's aims

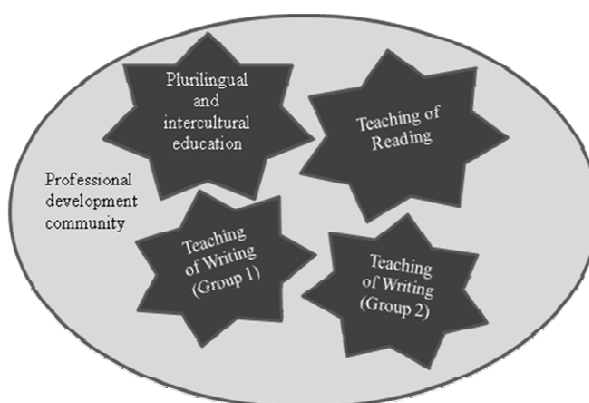
1. To characterise language education professionals (primary school teachers, language teachers, and researchers/teacher educators) of the geographical area of intervention of the University of Aveiro (Portugal), with respect to motivation and representations about teacher education, research, professional development, collaboration and language education.
2. To build knowledge about professional development communities (PDC) in language education, in terms of
 - construction dynamics (organization, management, roles, etc.);
 - professional development paths in the context of collaborative work.
3. To envisage future PDC development scenarios.
4. To contribute towards teacher education and research policies in the area of language education.

GTA



Dimension of Teacher Education: implementation

3 accredited workshops

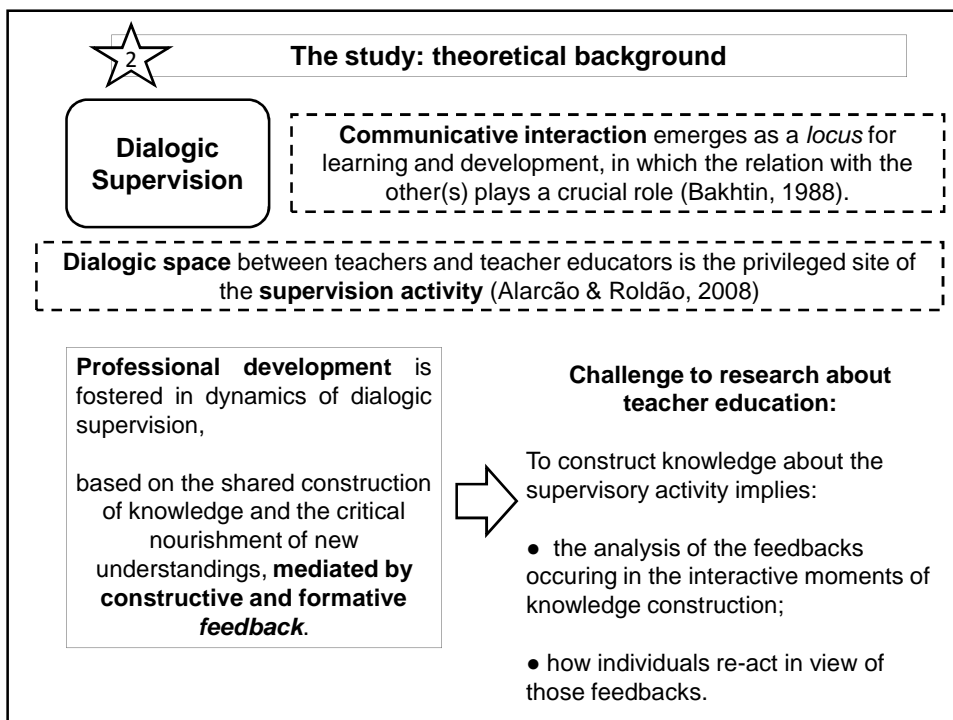
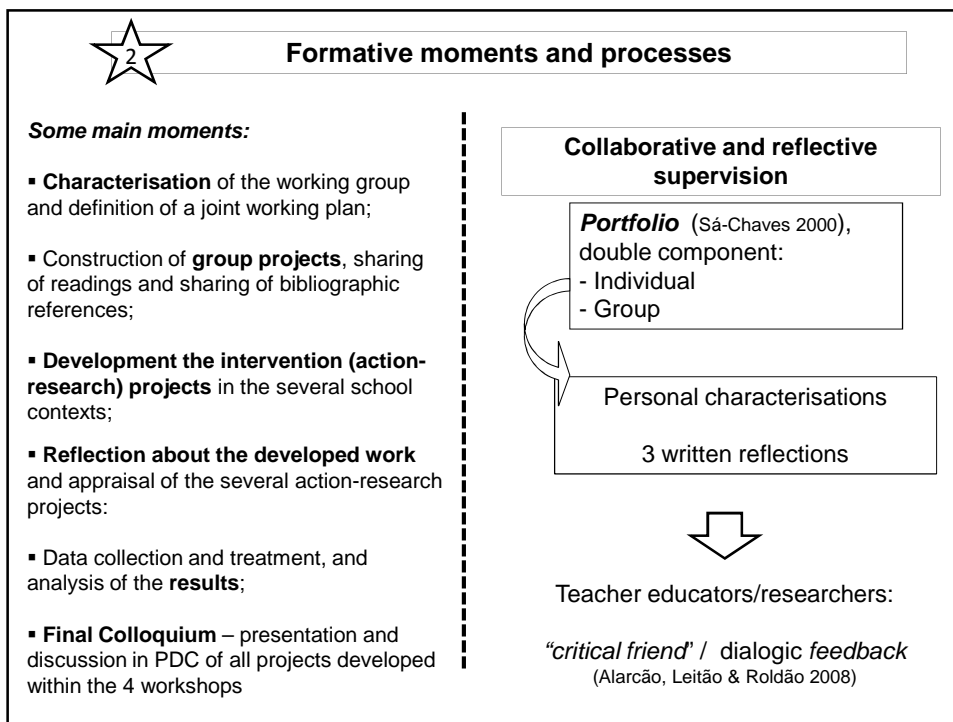



School year 2008/2009

75 hours work (presential and autonomous)

Blended learning

7 plenary sessions (time for work in larger and small groups)





Methodological details

Supervision process in scaffolding the schoolteachers' meaning-making

Transformative dimension of teachers' professional development

Research questions:

- What is the **content** of teachers and teacher educators' "collaborative talk" in the context of the feedback-giving processes?
- What kind** of feedback is given?
- How do the feedbacks **influence/contribute** to the subsequent written reflections?

- Which **learning processes or transformations** is it possible to identify?


3 cases (Stake 2000)

Corpus: 9 written reflections + 6 written feedbacks

Content analysis (Bardin 2000), mixed with procedures of conversational and discourse analysis methodology (Bauer & Gaskell, 2000);

Pre-existing system of categories.

Topics of Reflection (Andrade & Pinho, 2010)	Typology of co-constructive feedbacks (Alarcão, Leitão & Roldão, 2009)
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Language(s) 2. Language learning process 3. Pedagogical content knowledge 4. Near and distant contexts 5. School and educational functions 6. Others 7. Oneself 8. Teacher education 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Questioning as a request of explanation 2. Critical or stimulating questioning 3. Support / encouragement 4. Recommendation 5. Synthesis/appraisal 6. Conceptual, theoretical and methodological explanation



Findings

Display of the study results:

- By case (intermingling WR and Feedback);
- Narrative tone (to put in evidence the trajectory of each analysed case | the categories are diluted in the flow of speech)



Case 1

Teacher A is a young schoolteacher (under 30 years of age) working in a primary school (6 to 10 year-olds), with little professional experience and with postgraduate education. She was doing her Master dissertation under the theme of Awakening to Languages at primary school.

Reflection 1:

- motivations and valuing of the workshop's / project's rationale
- concern with **core concepts** of the workshop: collaboration and language education, particularly the topic awakening to languages and intercultural education.
- reflective focus on the *pedagogical content knowledge*, predominantly on the *theoretical knowledge* about the topics.

WR = review of the literature (need to develop theoretical knowledge)

Feedback 1

Synthesis

Critical or stimulating questioning

"Yet, it is a pity that this theoretical exposition does not show a critical look at these concepts and the ways in which they can be implemented in your professional practices.";

"It would also be useful, for example, to reflect about the moments of sharing fostered (or not) by the workshop, about the development of your group's project."

Methodological explanation

"It would also be useful, for example, to reflect about the moments of sharing fostered (or not) by the workshop, about the development of your group's project."

Reflection 2:

- teacher educators' feedback and suggestions used to organise the reflection's macro-structure and to select the topics of 'conversation';
- teacher directly answers the remark about the theoretical focus of the first reflection, justifying it (*concepts were new to her*), as well as to the question about the influence of the workshop to her educational practices (*Others – shared knowledge capital*):

"I felt that the most important to me would be to have a view about the theoretical concepts, since it would be easier to make a statement or to be able to understand the concepts about which we decided to develop our work. [...] it was something new to me."

"the deepening of my vision, both made possible the maturity of concepts, practices..."

- *Transitional points in Pedagogical content knowledge and self-knowledge (awareness):*
- her theoretical search/queries, practical issues emerge:

"at the same time I was taking part in the workshop, I was giving the first steps in the research project, whose focus was the awakening to languages approach; it was when my doubts began...How to promote the awakening to languages approach? How to foster the pupils' respect towards Others, their languages and habits?"

Feedback 2

Synthesis (systematises and shows discursive tendencies; establishment of links with previous feedback; retrieving of topics)

Questioning as request of explanation + theoretical explanation
(theoretical visibility to deeper description of practices)

"Yet, [...] as the excerpt about this question is incomplete, we cannot comment about how these effects are perceived by you. Note that you quote pupils' sentences, but as you neither analyse nor interpret them, all the meanings that may be associated to those quotations become implicit."

Supportive and encouraging feedback (give confidence + promote more critical questioning)

"Notice that it seems to us that this is a good route to a qualitative reflective self-questioning."

Brief comment to the dialogic conversation considering teacher educators' feedback style:

- a more recommendatory discourse, in which the questioning or interrogative statements are masked as declarative statements.
- reference to topics in which the teacher demonstrates more difficulty in exploring or making meaning of.
- teacher seems to apprehend the intentionality of their comments and respond accordingly, by directly referring to the teacher educators' feedback, namely by paraphrasing some of the topics or by transforming them into questions to which she tries to offer some answers.

This is also perceptible in her third and final written reflection (no feedback given).

Reflection 3 – a retrospective narrative as a feedback to teacher educators:

- Formulation of (self) interpellant questions that guide her reflection and discourse line (script + feedback).
- Particular attention to categories **Others** and **Teacher education** – *harmony between two worlds* (university and school) *within the project's education dynamics*.
 - Displays critical thinking about training process (limitations), and hints of experiential knowledge construction about the building of communities in her reflection

"the enthusiasm linked to the idea of sharing of knowledge, savoirs, practices...", "The different routes traced out by the groups and subgroups of this professional knowledge community had a common destiny.", the diversity of individuals, the confluence of interests, the joint work,...

- *Transitional points in Pedagogical content knowledge and self-knowledge (awareness):* (recovery of feedback 2):

I can contribute to a greater expressivity of the pupils, by resorting to other strategies that were not contemplated in the developed intervention project, namely the construction of a blog and/or a webpage [...], and also the promotion of a more active participation of the whole school community. This way, the project wouldn't have been circumscribed to the classroom context."

Ending of Reflection 3:**“What now?”**

She interrogates herself about the future, putting the emphasis of her own answer on herself as professional.

Challenge

to continue to contextually develop an intercultural education, and to share the experience lived in the workshop with future colleagues and other contexts.

**Case 3**

Teacher C is a language teacher that was at the time part of her school's Direction Board, and thus she was in a decision and management position. As it will be perceptible, this was an influential factor in this teacher's reflectivity.

Reflection 1:

- two striking themes: school and educational challenges (society's diversity) – demands for *Language learning* and *Oneself*.
- evidences of broader thinking about school and language education – presents herself as a variable

A mission, a project to her school

(around which her professional learning motivations evolve)

“to acquire knowledge, to follow the development of projects of awakening to languages and cultures, share ideas and experiences, and develop a project with meaning to my school.”

- *Teacher education* and project's dynamics – most appropriate for professional self-development and the attainment of the mission projected to her school.

Feedback 1

Use of **stimulating and encouraging** remarks, impelling her to continue the good work.

Very positive feedback, ending in a congratulating tone, highlighting the grasp/extent of teacher's reflexivity:

"Congratulations for your complete (you mention all dimensions of the project and training workshop), as well as objective and concrete analysis of the path so far".

Synthesis and appraisal

(of the content of the teacher's reflection and the evidenced capacities):

"[you] reflect about the importance of this training at individual, local and global levels, valuing the diversity of approaches, topics, and developed tasks. There are hints of a wish to change, and you take the responsibility for that change in your contexts of action."

Theoretical /methodological explanation

(more theoretical visibility to the description of her practices / deeper reflection about the influence of the workshop in her professional action):

"It would be important to explicit the (potential or real) effects of this training to your professional activity."

Reflection 2:

- Recovery of many topics of previous reflection (critical appraisal of the workshop's dynamics, personal perspective of collaboration and research in TE (highly valued); description of her group's action-research project in extra-curricular scope)

- Great attention to concerns regarding language education (local and global levels):

1- political and ethical dimensions of language learning (how to promote human rights, education for citizenship, respect for linguistic and cultural diversity);

2- growing linguistic ethnocentrism and its reflex in her school (English as most important language; devaluing of other languages)

"it is a concern which I face in my school. [...] This kind of attitude has very little of democratic citizenship and even less of respect for human rights".

- Oneself – growing self-learning awareness, and sense of direction for her professional learning project, with identification of most adequate teacher education methodology for her

"in the future, I intend to continue to invest in my scientific and professional in the scope of action-research and of belonging to a community of educators. The teaching of languages (in plural) and its place in the national curriculum (insufficient and with little relevance) is the question that I would personally like to engage in hereafter."

Feedback 2

There are many similarities between the style and content of this written feedback and the previous one.

Using a congratulating tone teacher educators make a **synthesis and appraisal** of the written reflection (enumerating achievements and the extent of teacher's reflexivity).

Use of expressions that aim to **encourage and support** the teacher's reflective focus, such as

"We newly congratulate you", "We compliment all the transformative concern you display about the contexts you inhabit.", or "We congratulate you for having taken our previous suggestion into account and surpassed all our expectations! The educational institutions need people like you! Keep your enthusiasm!"

Reflection 3:

- Narration of the story of the project, herself and her colleagues', but does not add much to the previous reflection. Flashback displaying a more profound and personal meaning-making of the principles, practices and dynamics of the project/workshop.


- Highlight of main challenges as language teacher and decision-maker in her School Board. → Sense of belonging to a new generation of educational professionals

It is because I intend to belong to this new generation of teachers, teachers-learners, which reflect upon their practices, do research, interact, collaborate, and create professional communities that I have registered in this workshop – Plurilingual and intercultural sensitisation and education."

- Trajectory of her learning path → based on research-evidence based reflection:

"I have deepened my knowledge about the awakening to languages approach and plurilingual and intercultural education.";

"There was interaction, sharing and dialogue. We analysed, discussed, wrote and rewrote documents, worksheets, grids, presentations, flyers, posters and so on. We kind of created a mini-community of educators, which was visible in our schools, since we have motivated and involved, in our intervention project, other actors."



Discussion and Conclusions

Teachers' professional development - transitions

Teacher 1

- Great **concern with theory** and the development of that dimension of her professional knowledge;
- Need to be documented and to understand the theory inherent to the language learning approach she will resort to in the intervention project;

- First step to the research of reading material and to the **questioning process** she makes transparent in her second reflection.

↓

Development a **growing self-awareness**, as she also gets more confident on the self-improvement she feels it's happening.

“During this formative path there were several the questions I asked, and which I searched answers for; but to only find other questions that led me to ways I had not envisaged before.”

- main focus: **herself as teacher**, in a relation with the classroom context, and her professional future.

Teacher 3

- main focus:
- when referring to herself, she is considering the mission she envisages to her school and community.
- her near context and her role in it, and what she needs to learn to accomplish that mission.

She defines her professional development project and learning/training objectives in view of a more innovative role in her school and community, having as ground a more complex perspective of language education (not only referring to the classroom, but to other educational settings).

As time goes by, she is more capable of understanding which directions to take.

Teacher 3 displays a more multilayered and complex reflectivity, since she summons and integrates more dimensions of the educational process.

The role of feedbacks in teachers' professional development

❖ What can be said about the **influence of feedbacks** to the subsequent written reflections and teacher's learning progress?

Roadmaps

***Constructive/
edifying***

- Teachers retrieved many of the teacher educators' comments, and used them to structure their written reflections. (some more dependent than others)
- Useful not only to go deeper into a topic, but also to explore new themes, as well as to gain perception of own transitions and personal and professional learning.
- Show the reflective paths to follow, to re-evaluate, to avoid.

Teachers' own characteristics have influenced the feedback to be given.

Teachers in different phases/moments of their professional development require different types/focus/content of feedback.

Evidences that...

- Some teachers call for feedback that fosters their critical reflective capacity, impelling them to look farther, to question, to envision other dimensions of the same phenomenon and thus develop a multidimensional insight,

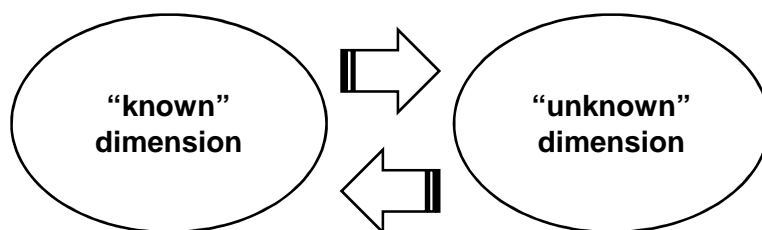
...to re-create themselves as teachers, or to develop other educational practices.

- Others require direct challenging interpellations, in order to improve/evolve within a more solid and experienced trajectory.
- Other teachers need to be encouraged to continue and not to get discouraged in face of adversities.

Finding patterns or tendencies to....

❖ What **type of feedback** is given?

- **synthesis or appraisal** of the written reflection – starting point to other comments, confirm own interpretations, reinforce teachers' displayed representations or arguments;
- **questioning**, either with a more *critical* or *stimulating* purpose, or as a request of *explanation* and clarification of certain topics.
- **recommend** with the aim of cultivating teachers theoretical deepening or the discovery of other dimensions of a specific topic (e.g., Case 2, topic of research).
- use of expressions that intend to **encourage conceptual clarification**, theoretical description of practices (both educational and in the context of the workshop), or the self-awareness of practices and their implicit meaning;
- function as **supporters** and **encouragers**, in order to give confidence and help maintain teachers' engagement at several levels.



Sergiovanni & Starratt (2002)

In trying to **create conditions for change and improvement**, teacher educators intended to:

- make teachers more aware of possible inconsistencies in their espoused theories, theories in use, to help them find alternatives to reflective and conceptual patterns, to find solutions or other pathways to existing dilemmas....
- foster and/or support teachers' readiness and willingness for change.

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Obrigada!

Thank you!

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