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The impact of school culture and leadership on new teachers' learning in the workplace

MARIA ASSUNÇÃO FLORES

Drawing upon empirical data, this article explores the ways in which school culture and leadership impact on new teachers' learning in the workplace. The study was carried out over a two-year period and involved a cohort of 14 new teachers and 18 elementary and secondary schools. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with the new teachers and headteachers and a questionnaire which was also administered to all staff in each of the schools. Findings suggest the key role of school culture and leadership in (re)shaping teachers' response to the institutional and situational constraints of the workplace and their learning and socialization process at school. Implications for induction and the role of schools in fostering teacher professional growth are discussed.

Context of the study

Becoming and being a (new) teacher has been investigated from different theoretical stances, ranging from the development of expertise to the existence of a 'rite of passage', and from the evolution of teachers' concerns to the analysis of their socialization process (e.g. Fuller and Bown 1975, Eisenhart *et al.* 1991, Arends 1995, Pigge and Marso 1997). Regardless of the different approach, literature on becoming a teacher has emphasized the richness and complexity of the process (Arends 1995, Bullough 1997), which encompasses a wide array of idiosyncratic and contextual factors. Thus, the shift from student to teacher is always marked by the growing awareness of the new institutional role and by the complex interplay between different, and sometimes conflicting, perspectives, beliefs and practices.

Literature has argued that new teachers strive for personal and professional acceptance from pupils, colleagues and school administration, and they tend to develop a 'survival kit' and a set of 'coping strategies' (Vonk 1993) in order to deal with the complex tasks inherent in being a teacher with full professional responsibilities. Research has also focused on the preferred assistance strategies for novice teachers, amongst which emotional support, the existence of a mentor and the opportunity to share experiences with other colleagues are the most popular (Houston *et al.* 1993, Barrett and

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Davis 1995). In this respect, a growing body of literature highlights the uniqueness and the complexity of the induction phase and stresses the need for adequate support and guidance during the early years in the profession (Tickle 1994, 2000).

Despite the recognition of the peculiar traits of the initial phase of the teacher's career, which is believed to have long-term implications for continuing professional development, little attention has been given to new teachers, especially in the Portuguese context, where the study described in this article was conducted. Although recent research has demonstrated the relevance of formal induction, new teachers are left alone with handling all the tasks and duties required of them as full-time teachers, most of the time in isolation and in changing educational settings (Silva 1997, Couto 1998, Flores 2000, Alves 2001, Braga 2001).

More recently, attention has been paid to the influence of school organizational factors in shaping teachers' professional practices and attitudes toward teaching. Research has demonstrated the effects of workplace conditions and school culture on the induction of beginning teachers (Cole 1991, Williams *et al.* 2001) and the importance of school leadership in creating and maintaining the conditions necessary for the building of professional learning communities within schools (Fernandez 2000, Barker 2001). Hence, gaining deeper insights into the professional world of new teachers may contribute to better understanding their needs, their expectations, and their commitment, and to provide them with meaningful opportunities for their continuing professional development. The study reported in this article drew upon existing knowledge and research on new teachers, but went further in presenting an holistic, empirically-based picture of how teachers' early development was shaped over time. It examined the ways in which new teachers learned, developed and changed (or did not change) during the first two years of teaching, by exploring their personal biographies and their perceptions of school culture(s) and leadership in changing contexts of teaching.

Conceptual framework

Transforming schools into learning communities has been a major concern for policy-makers, researchers, teacher educators, In-service Education and Training of Teachers (INSET) and Staff Development providers, and school leaders, as they have come to acknowledge their potential for teacher professional growth, innovation and reform initiatives, and the quality of teaching and learning (Fullan 1993, Day 1999). In this respect, Sarason (1990, cited in Smylie 1995: 92) argued that 'it is virtually impossible to create and sustain over time *conditions for productive learning* for students when they do not exist for teachers' (emphasis added). This is particularly relevant to understanding the (negative or positive) experience of new teachers (see, for instance, Cole 1991, Hebert and Worthy 2001) and the nature and process of their professional development in the early years of teaching. As Fullan (1993: 15) stated, 'learning is critical for the beginning teacher because of its formative timing'.

Schools are places where teaching occurs, but they are also places for teachers to learn and develop. Despite the widespread recognition of the importance of working conditions in fostering school and teacher development, most structural reform efforts have failed to address this issue adequately; instead a bureaucratic and managerial orientation is still prevalent in many cases (Fullan 1993, Smyth 1995, Day 1999).

Rosenholtz's study (1989) demonstrated that in learning-enriched schools, teachers held a sustained view of their learning, and their work was responsive and focused upon student motivation. Conversely, in learning-impoverished schools, teachers revealed a terminal perspective of learning and routine prevailed. Further, she found that 'stuck' schools, in which there was no common purpose for teaching, were less effective than 'moving' ones, where teachers learned from one another and saw teaching as a collective enterprise. Importantly, McLaughlin (1993: 99) drew attention to the notion of school as 'a workplace community', viewed not only as a physical setting and a formal organization, but also as a 'social and psychological setting in which teachers construct a sense of practice, of professional efficacy and professional community'.

It has been widely recognized that workplace conditions play a key role in enhancing teacher learning and development in schools and in classrooms, with implications for the quality of education provided to students (Cole 1991, Day 1999). It is, therefore, essential to identify the factors that might foster or hinder these processes if schools as learning communities are to be developed and if meaningful continuing professional development of teachers is to occur and flourish. The literature suggests that there are two main influential factors affecting teacher learning and professional development at school level: school culture and leadership (Hargreaves 1994, Glattorn 1995, Day 1999).

The landscape of school culture(s)

Hargreaves (1992: 271) defined cultures of teaching as the 'beliefs, values, habits and assumed ways of doing things among communities of teachers who have had to deal with similar demands and constraints over many years'. In this sense, understanding teaching and teachers implies the consideration of the cultures in which they work.

McLaughlin (1993: 99) stressed the importance of looking at schools as professional communities in order to understand the 'norms and beliefs of practice, collegial relations, shared goals, occasion for collaboration, and problems of mutual support and mutual obligation'. Likewise, Day (1999: 78) drew attention to the need to take into account the 'ways in which values, beliefs, prejudices and behavior are played out within the micro-political processes of school life'. Thus, examining the school culture, seen as a dynamic and changing phenomenon, implies the analysis of the meanings, values and attitudes of those working in a given context, as well as the ways in which these are conveyed and understood within a community of teachers.

Research into school culture has highlighted different forms which impact teacher learning and professional development in different ways (Nias *et al.* 1989, Hargreaves 1994, Lima 1998, 2000a, Little 2001). Hargreaves (1994) distinguished four main forms of school culture: individualism, balkanization, contrived collegiality and collaboration.

Isolation and privatism are prevalent in school cultures characterized by individualism. Teachers are isolated in classrooms, preventing them from receiving either criticism or feedback from peers. Whilst individualism is a distinctive feature of teaching reiterated in many studies of school culture, it also may suggest a less pejorative meaning. In this respect, Hargreaves (1993: 63) identified three determinants of teacher individualism: (i) *constrained individualism* – when teachers work in isolation because of administrative or other situational constraints (e.g. egg-crate structures of school architecture); (ii) *strategic individualism* – relates to teachers' construction of individualistic patterns of working as a response to the daily contingencies of their work environment; and (iii) *elective individualism* – refers to a preferred way of working all or some of the time.

Balkanization occurs when teachers reveal strong loyalties to a given group (usually the department, especially in secondary schools) within the school community. In balkanized cultures, groups of teachers will compete for resources, status and influence in the school, and collaboration only takes place in the interest of the group.

According to Hargreaves (1992, 1994), *collaborative cultures* refer, to working relationships which are spontaneous, voluntary, evolutionary, development-oriented, pervasive across time and space, and unpredictable; whereas *contrived collegiality* is imposed and compulsory for teachers. Therefore, working relationships characterized by this form of culture are predictable and fixed in time and space. This kind of mandated collaboration is likely to have a limited impact upon teacher development. However, Day (1999: 81) argued that contrived collegiality may be seen as 'a stage in the journey from individual or balkanized cultures towards more culturally embedded forms of collegiality and collaboration'.

An examination of the school culture literature reveals a growing emphasis on teacher collaboration as a key factor in fostering teacher and school development, as well as in implementing successful innovation and change efforts. It has become, in recent years, a kind of panacea or 'magic word' reiterated by policy-makers, educational researchers and other stakeholders.

However, a number of writers have warned against the risks of the widespread belief in teacher collaboration, seen as an antidote to teacher individualism and as synonymous with improving the quality of teaching and learning in schools (Huberman 1993, Smyth 1995, Lima 2000b). As Fullan (1993: 82) observed, collaboration has become 'one of the most misunderstood concepts in the change business'. Hargreaves (1994) underscored the problems of contrived collegiality, which may limit, rather than foster, learning and professional development opportunities for teachers.

Critics assert that the rhetoric of teacher collaboration and collegiality may lead paradoxically to teacher competition, which can be seen, for

instance, in the balkanized school cultures described earlier. In this respect, Huberman (1993: 13) contended that 'collegiality is not a fully legitimate end in itself unless it can be shown to affect, directly or indirectly, the nature or the degree of pupil development'.

Discussing the concepts of individualism and individuality, Hargreaves (1993: 71) suggested that teacher individuality – described as 'the power to exercise independent discretionary judgement' which is linked to competence and effectiveness – may be undermined in attempts to impose administrative devices in terms of collaborative working arrangements. Some teachers may like to work collaboratively, others may prefer to work alone. This is to say that school culture is diverse rather than monolithic. There may be the case that different cultures co-exist in a given school, and consequently, different opportunities are available for teacher learning and development. Alongside individualism, other forms of teacher interaction have been identified, such as seeking and giving assistance, sharing teaching materials and collaborative work (Rosenholtz 1989, Little 1990, Lima 1998).

Notwithstanding the diversity of teacher interaction at school, recent studies of the effects of workplace conditions and school culture on the induction of beginning teachers have demonstrated the importance of collaborative cultures in the transition from student to teacher (Cole 1991, Weiss 1999, Williams *et al.* 2001). Spontaneous and 'natural' collaborative workplace relationships and cultures are associated with the provision of a supportive environment and better development opportunities for new teachers (Cole 1991, Williams *et al.* 2001), and with new teacher morale, commitment and retention (Weiss 1999).

School leadership

There is widespread acceptance of the key role that leadership plays in promoting and managing school development and change and in developing and sustaining schools as communities of learners (Hopkins *et al.* 1994, Day *et al.* 1998, Leithwood *et al.* 1999, Fernandez 2000, Retallick and Fink 2002). An analysis of the literature on this topic indicates the challenges, characteristics and kinds of school leadership and their impact upon teachers and schools.

Based on empirical work, Fernandez (2000) suggested that leadership constitutes one of the overarching influences in fostering a sense of professional community amongst teachers who work in collaborative ways to create shared goals, visions and standards for their schools. She argued that developing a sense of self-efficacy and self-worth amongst teachers is a common trait in school leaders who support and promote the building of professional communities within schools.

Discussing the principal's role in teacher development, Leithwood (1992) proposed four guidelines for school leaders, viewed as instructional leaders: (a) treat the teacher as a whole person (emphasizing teachers' psychological and career cycle development, along with growth of professional expertise); (b) establish a school culture based on norms of

technical collaboration and professional inquiry; (c) carefully diagnose the starting points for teacher development; and (d) recast routine administrative activities into powerful teacher development strategies.

Likewise, in research carried out in Canada, Leithwood *et al.* (1999: 161) identified a number of initiatives which school leaders can undertake to promote teacher development within a school improvement context: (i) ensure adequate resources such as time, personnel, money; (ii) provide opportunities for teachers to develop a shared vision of the school's mission and goals; (iii) help teachers assess their own needs for growth and gain access to sources of assistance inside and outside the school; (iv) foster the development of a collaborative culture, with opportunities for authentic participation in decision-making about school improvement efforts and meaningful interaction with colleagues about purposes and how to achieve them; (v) build feelings of self-efficacy by recognizing teachers' accomplishments and by providing support to reduce anxiety about tackling new initiatives; and (vi) share and distribute the responsibility for teacher development throughout the school (e.g. other colleagues, teachers themselves, external experts, etc). Drawing upon empirical data from a recent study carried out in England with headteachers, teachers, students, support staff, governors and parents, Day *et al.* (2000) emphasized the characteristics of effective and successful leadership: the centrality of personal values, people-centered leadership and the ability to manage tensions and dilemmas.

Overall, literature on school leadership suggests its key role in developing professional learning cultures in schools, where teachers, as well as students, continue to learn and develop. Effective leaders are committed, able to motivate staff and students and to create and maintain the conditions necessary for the building of professional learning communities within schools (Fernandez 2000, Barker 2001). This is crucial to sustaining the continuing professional development of teachers, particularly in the first years of teaching, during which new teachers are confronted by a wide variety of tasks and roles. The potential of learning opportunities in the workplace within a view of teachers as lifelong learners and of schools as professional learning communities was one of the main assumptions underpinning the study described in this article.

Research design

The purpose of the study

This article draws upon findings from a broader piece of research aimed at investigating the ways in which a cohort of 14 new teachers learned, developed and changed (or did not change) over time in changing contexts of teaching (Flores 2002). The study reported here was carried out, in 1999/2000 and 2000/2001, in northern Portugal and 18 elementary and secondary schools were involved in the research project. It focused upon the following research questions:

1. How, what and under which circumstances do new teachers learn at work?
2. How do they develop professionally over time and what are the factors that hinder or facilitate their professional growth?
3. How and when do they change (or do not change) over time and what are the factors influencing this process?

In order to capture the processual and dynamic nature of professional learning, development and change, a longitudinal approach over a two-year period was undertaken. The following assumptions underpinned the design and development of the research:

1. The emergent (Guba and Lincoln 1989) and flexible nature of the research design and the interactive, iterative (Miles and Huberman 1984) process according to which data were gathered, reduced and interpreted, in a 'continuous interplay of data collection and analysis' (Guba and Lincoln 1989: 178).
2. The 'direct involvement' of the participants in the 'hermeneutic process' seen as a 'joint construction' (Guba and Lincoln 1989).
3. The ongoing nature of the negotiation process between the researcher and the participants (Guba and Lincoln 1989, Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995) within a collaborative perspective.

Through such a research design, I sought to contribute to our knowledge about teacher learning and continuing professional development, and about the conditions which foster meaningful opportunities for teachers' professional growth, especially in the early years of teaching.

Participants and methods

Findings from previous research – within the context of my Master's dissertation (Flores 1997) on beginning teachers' problems and support needs – and official data (namely schools' characteristics and location) obtained from the local education authorities were the two main sources of information for sampling purposes.

Six schools were selected on the basis of the following criteria: type of school (rural, inner-city and suburban) and size (large, small and medium). Pragmatic reasons were also considered: all of the schools were located in northern Portugal. Teachers were recruited according to the following criteria: having undertaken an Integrated Model of Teacher Training degree in a public university or institution of higher education and being in their first year of teaching without prior teaching experience. The Model presupposes that the subject area (e.g. math, biology) and the pedagogical component are distributed simultaneously throughout the course. The latter encompasses subjects such as history and philosophy of education, psychology of development, sociology of education, curriculum development, educational technology, methods of teaching, and so on. It is a five-year course, including four years of full-time study at university and one year

of teaching practice in a school. The purpose, time demands and overall procedures of the research project were explained to all new teachers in each of the schools and volunteers were called for. Overall, 14 new teachers participated in the study. The subjects taught included physics and chemistry (7), languages (3), math (1), biology (1), physical education (1) and music (1). Nine were female and five were male teachers. Their ages ranged between 22 and 28 years old. All of them were followed up in their second placements in order to examine further the processes of professional learning, development and change.

Data were gathered twice a year through semi-structured interviews. All the interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Transcriptions were returned to participants to be checked for accuracy, and to have comments and/or supplementary information added. New teachers' feedback on the transcripts (and on the researcher's interpretation of the data) proved to be informative. Their comments related mainly to their reflexive process on their views of teaching and being a teacher as they went through the transcripts and data analysis. Data about the schools (namely school culture and leadership) were gathered through semi-structured interviews with the headteachers at the beginning of each academic year and through the administration of a questionnaire to all staff in each of the schools in which the new teachers taught. Pupils' essays were also used to elicit further information on the process of teacher change. They were asked to write a short essay describing their teacher at the beginning and at the end of the academic year, stressing the way in which he/she had changed over this period of time (his/her teaching, his/her relationship with the students, his/her classes etc.).

In the process of analysis, an inductive approach was used, and substantive themes were defined as they emerged from the data, according to the overall principles of 'grounded theory', as suggested by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Strauss and Corbin (1990). The process of data analysis was undertaken according to two phases: (1) a vertical analysis (Miles and Huberman 1994), according to which each of the respondents' interviews was analyzed separately; and (2) a comparative or horizontal analysis (cross-case analysis) (Miles and Huberman 1994). In this second phase, a 'constant comparative analysis' (Glaser and Strauss 1967) was used to look for common patterns and differences. This process was undertaken iteratively and adjustments in the coding process were made where necessary. A case record was also kept for each of the respondents over the two-year period and an overall analysis was undertaken at the end of the research. This enabled checking for recurring themes and regularities, as well as contrasting patterns, both in each teacher's accounts and across teachers' responses.

A wealth of data was generated over the two-year period. The discussion of all the results[1] emerging from the longitudinal study is beyond the scope of this article, which reports on findings arising mainly from the interviews I conducted with the 14 new teachers over the first two years of teaching and from the interviews with the headteachers at the beginning of each academic year. It explores, in particular, the influences of school culture and leadership on new teachers' learning in two different school settings.

Because of teacher surplus and teacher recruitment policy (which occurs mainly at the national level) in Portugal, new teachers have to move from one school to another during the first years of teaching, which was the case of the vast majority of the participants in this study.

Findings

Overall, new teachers' learning in the workplace was influenced by a panoply of factors, which determined, to a greater or lesser extent, the nature and outcomes of their professional growth. Along with issues of personal motivation, willingness and commitment to learning, extrinsic factors such as school culture, working conditions and leadership emerged as mediating influences on teachers' learning in the workplace. In this article, I deal with these particularly.

The effects of school culture

New teachers' portrayals of the school as a workplace at the beginning of their first year of teaching, which I have described elsewhere (Flores 2001), clashed with the school reality they encountered. The 'ideal' conceptions of school, depicted metaphorically as a 'family' and a 'second home', did not match the 'real' settings in which most of them worked. Lack of equipment, scarcity of resources and the poor quality of the buildings were some of the features referred to by the beginning teachers.

However, the most striking factors, which determined, to a greater or lesser extent, the nature of their learning and experience as first and second-year teachers, were intrinsically related to issues of school culture and leadership. In this respect, three main themes emerged from their accounts: (a) balkanization, competition and lack of collaboration amongst teachers; (b) the normative side of school and the bureaucratic control existing over teachers; (c) the 'unwritten' and 'implicit' rules of school culture.

Balkanization, competition and lack of collaboration amongst teachers

The nature of working relationships at school was a recurring theme throughout new teachers' accounts. Overall, ineffectiveness, balkanization, competition and individualism were key issues reiterated throughout the interviews conducted over the first two years of teaching, which led these new teachers to adopt a 'step-back' attitude and a 'laissez-faire' perspective. Some of them reported that they became more isolated from their colleagues and that they tended not to engage in school projects:

> The school climate is even worse than within a factory . . . it's a tricky culture, and if you do not say anything, you won't have any problems. So what I am going to do is . . . not to get involved in school activities other than my own teaching. (NT8, Interview 3, Beginning of Year 2)

> Now I think that the best policy is not to bother too much. I mean it's working against the odds. You are the subject of criticisms if you engage in different kinds of projects. So the best thing to do is to adopt a laissez-faire perspective. You are constrained by so many factors, why bother even more? It isn't worth it, and this way you won't run into trouble. (NT12, Interview 3, Beginning of Year 2)

New teachers emphasized the 'culture of separation' amongst staff. One of them was clear about this when she talked about the distinction between what she termed 'dinosaurs' at school and the newcomers, but she also stressed the 'separation' amongst the newcomers themselves. Commitment and professionalism lie at the heart of this distinction:

> In this school there are two groups of teachers: the 'dinosaurs' and the newcomers. Amongst the newcomers there are those who do not want any trouble because they know that next year they won't be here, and those who are aware of their situation and, despite this, they want to do something for their students even if it's only for one year. In doing so, we know that we are working against the 'interests' of a small group: the 'dinosaurs', who don't want any trouble too because they have got used to their leadership roles . . . (NT11, Interview 3, Beginning of Year 2)

Related to this negative view of school culture was the lack of support, guidance and collaboration reiterated throughout new teachers' accounts. They stressed the 'isolated' and 'personal' way in which they had been 'socialized' into the school culture, leading, in some cases, to feelings of being 'lost'. Therefore, taking the initiative to 'find one's own way' was the only road left to beginning teachers in order to get to know the 'practicalities' of the school. Not surprisingly, new teachers also referred to the lack of knowledge of school policy and its main curriculum guidelines. They emphasized that they were not aware of the school goals in terms of curriculum development and pupil achievement:

> To be honest with you, I felt a bit lost. There was no formal induction or welcome activity. I had to take the initiative and I asked questions in order to understand how the school works. (NT1, Interview 3, Beginning of Year 2)

> Nobody told me anything. I know nothing about the school goals . . . (NT8, Interview 3, Beginning of Year 2)

> What makes me feel sad is the lack of organization within the school. You don't know what's going on here. (NT9, Interview 3, Beginning of Year 2)

> Last year I realized that people do not work together, there is too much isolation in the school. Even within the so-called departments or subject matter groups people are isolated, they do not discuss what they do inside the classroom, they do not talk to one another . . . You come here every morning, you do your job, and you go home . . . (NT11, Interview 2, End of Year 1)

The way in which older and more experienced staff related to newcomers and younger teachers at school was also an emerging issue in teachers' accounts when they described the school settings in which they worked. Instead of the 'expected' encouragement, welcome and support, most of the teachers participating in this research project talked about the lack of commitment, feelings of discouragement and 'criticisms' from older colleagues at school:

> People say 'you care too much, but in a few years' time things will be different, you'll see . . .' (NT14, Interview 4, End of Year 2)

> I feel that what they [other staff] think about me is . . . 'You are just a newcomer to the profession, you have those great ideas, you think that you can change the world. But such things do not exist. You will find out soon that it will be frustrating, because you won't be rewarded for your work! And you will change.' (NT11, Interview 1, Beginning of Year 1)

The 'normative' side of school and bureaucratic control over teachers

When new teachers were asked to report on their perceptions of school culture, they stressed its normative and 'official' dimension. They described it as being strict or flexible according to the 'internal' (school) or the 'external' (government) regulations. The performance of the tasks related to the profession, the formal meetings, the social organization of the school were seen in the light of the 'implicit' or 'explicit' regulations existing in the workplace, which were associated with the bureaucratic dimension of teaching. New teachers referred to the external – social and political – '*control*' existing over teachers and over the profession, but also to the implicit and context-specific rules within the school setting:

> People know in advance what they have to do: invitations to meetings, and everything. At the registrar's everything is computer-assisted (. . .) it's a very organized school and there is a great concern about doing exactly what the government regulations prescribe . . . it seems to me that they do exactly what the Ministry regulations say . . . (NT4, Interview 1, Beginning of Year 1)

> You say 'good morning' and sometimes they [the school support staff] don't say anything to you. It seems to me that they are continually criticizing the teachers' classes. It looks as if someone is always there behind the door, checking if you are doing the right thing. (NT10, Interview 1, Beginning of Year 1)

> You think that after your teaching practice you can enjoy more freedom because there are no supervisors to tell you what to do. But there is always a law . . . or a rule for you to follow. (NT8, Interview 3, Beginning of Year 2)

The 'unwritten' and 'implicit' rules of school culture

When the beginning teachers described their workplace conditions, during their second year of teaching, and when they talked about school culture and leadership, they continued to focus their perceptions on the 'regulations' and 'laws' governing the school. However, in their accounts the 'unwritten', 'implicit' or 'tacit' rules emerged as a key feature in their understanding of school culture. The nature of teachers' work, the running of the school and the working relationships amongst staff were depicted against the 'set of tacitly agreed but unwritten' rules which new teachers perceived at school:

> The leadership team does not have control over the support staff, they do nothing. And in terms of teachers, I think that the way things work is not very clear . . . You know, the system doesn't work . . . I mean there are different rules for different people . . . (NT9, Interview 3, Beginning of Year 2)

> At the beginning, I saw situations in this school that disappointed me very much, because they weren't very clear to me. For instance, the way people are 'chosen' to perform roles at school . . . it seems that there are other rules than the 'official' ones . . . And I had a few problems at the beginning because of that. This school has old quarrels amongst teachers. I could understand some of them during a formal meeting. They put other colleagues to the test and they mistrust them, which is very bad for the profession. (NT8, Interview 3, Beginning of Year 2)

Again, balkanization and the existence of 'vested interests' at school appeared to be two issues related to these 'implicit' rules in the workplace. Staff with a permanent post at the school were entitled, according to new teachers' perceptions, to a specific (and higher) status. Interestingly, this balkanized culture was not bound by disciplinary affiliation, which seems not to be supportive of previous research demonstrating the strong influence of departments, especially in secondary schools, as loci of balkanized cultures (see Hargreaves 1994). Rather, it seemed to depend on the compliance with a set of interests, most of which were related to the running of the school (e.g. the performance of specific roles at school, namely heads of department and subject leaders). Overall, the way in which new teachers perceived school culture as a whole had a greater impact on their understanding and practice of teaching than departmental culture:

> I guess you follow the school rules, because within your department there isn't much to decide, I mean we can set a few informal rules, but that's all . . . (NT8, Interview 4, End of Year 2)

> Basically, I try to follow the rules of the school . . . but as far as my teaching is concerned it is more a personal thing really, because we don't decide much in my department. (NT10, Interview 4, End of Year 2)

This seemed not to support the most recent trends in the school improvement literature which suggest the importance of department cultures (see, for instance, Harris 2001). The need to adapt to the school setting, with its norms, values and regulations, and to become accepted as 'full professionals' are factors which might explain the more influential nature of the school-as-a-whole rather than the department level in teacher socialization in the workplace. Also related to this is the decision-making process, in which school leadership plays an important role. Although departments may have a say in determining the goals and norms of the school, the leadership team and the pedagogic council (one of the main decision-making bodies at school) have a crucial role in making or approving decisions concerning school policy. In the contexts described here, schools are run by a collegial team of teachers (usually three, the president/headteacher and two vice-presidents) elected from their peers.

The impact of school leadership

Leadership was also an emerging and recurring theme throughout new teachers' accounts. When they talked about their job, their learning process at school and their personal and professional experience as first and second-year teachers, they underscored, whether implicitly or explicitly, the key role of school leadership. All of the 14 new teachers emphasized the crucial

influence of leadership on building a sense of community, on their learning process in the workplace and on the development of site-based innovation and school improvement projects. In other words, the way in which new teachers adapted to school settings was very much influenced by their perceptions of the quality of school leadership.

Three different kinds of leadership can be identified in their accounts: the *normative*, the *effective* and the *laissez-faire leadership. Normative leadership* was depicted as too rule and law-dependent, strict, bureaucratic and inflexible, in which hierarchical and distant relationships prevailed:

> All that he [the headteacher] cares about is the law, all he can do is what the law says and I was going to ask him 'what about the school autonomy?' (NT8, Interview 4, End of Year 2)

> I think this school is too rule-dependent, all they think about is laws and regulations, they are not flexible at all . . . (NT1, Interview 4, End of Year 2)

> Last year they [the headteacher and his/her team] had control over everything at school, that's why there wasn't a close relationship between them and teachers, students and support staff. There was a distance between them and the school . . . whilst here there is also a strong leadership, but they are close to you. Students can go there and there is a more informal way of informing people . . . (NT4, Interview 4, End of Year 2)

In contrast, *effective leadership* was described as being knowledgeable, strong and goal-oriented, but at the same time, flexible, encouraging, supportive, helpful and close to staff ('being there for you'):

> I had all the support that I needed from the headteacher and her team and things were just happening, I haven't faced any difficult situations . . . things work here, they are flexible . . . Their relationship with staff is not as impersonal as it was at the school in which I worked last year . . . Here they come and talk to you and keep you informed . . . (NT7, Interview 4, End of Year 2)

> In this school things are well-organized, but they are flexible and they know what they are doing. (NT4, Interview 4, End of Year 2)

> The headteacher is like the boss of the school, he knows the school very well and he is doing well. You can tell that things are well-organized . . . I mean, you have to comply with the rules because there are well-structured rules, for instance, in terms of student assessment . . . But they know what they are doing. People work because they have goals to achieve; whereas, in my previous school, there were different groups within the school trying to stop other people doing a good job . . . (NT10, Interview 4, End of Year 2)

This is consistent with previous empirical research on effective and successful leadership (e.g. Day *et al.* 2000). Some teachers drew a distinction between effectiveness and strictness when they depicted school leadership. Although they recognized the positive organization within the school, they also admitted the existence of well-defined target goals for teachers to achieve:

> This school is different from the one where I taught last year. It is well-organized, but they [school leadership team] are stricter. They know exactly what kind of learning goals they want us to achieve . . . (NT10, Interview 3, Beginning of Year 2)

Lack of orientation and organization in the running of the school, the non-existence of shared goals and values, lack of vision, information and support

were the main characteristics referred to by the teachers when they portrayed the *laissez-faire* leadership:

> In this school there are no rules at all, people do whatever they want to . . . (NT9, Interview 4, End of Year 2)

> Last year it was chaos, nobody knew what to do. There was no up-to-date information. People didn't know what they were supposed to do until the last minute. Everybody was lost. Only older staff had access to the information and younger staff like me didn't know what to do; whereas, in this school, everything works. (NT7, Interview 4, End of Year 2)

> To be honest with you the headteacher doesn't know how to run the school, I mean he hasn't the qualities to be a leader . . . (NT8, Interview 4, End of Year 2)

New teachers also identified the reasons behind the ineffective school leadership. A poor understanding of the job, the lack of 'leadership qualities' and the lack of knowledge and adequate training were cited by beginning teachers to account for the unsuccessful school leaders:

> The head and his team are not the best you could have in the running of this school. I understand that they have been doing the job only for a couple of months (there were elections at the school a few months ago), but nothing is under control. You feel the lack of organization everywhere. Even the headteacher . . . I mean he does not have the qualities to do the job at all. He is a very low-profile person . . . They are not good enough for the job. No one knows anything . . . I think they are a bit lost. (NT8, Interview 3, Beginning of Year 2)

> What disappoints me in this school is the lack of organization. The head and his team do not have the required qualities to do the job. Apparently people came here and they started to perform the roles and they got used to them. Now they do not want to leave and they do not perform them properly. I think you should have specific training for this kind of job. (NT11, Interview 3, Beginning of Year 2)

> In this school the headteacher and his team do not do a good job. They lack organization, sometimes I go there in order to ask for information and they do not know the answers to my questions. (NT6, Interview 3, Beginning of Year 2)

Increasing compliance versus sustained commitment

The existing 'rules' at school and the isolated (and personal) way in which new teachers got to know not only the 'practicalities' of the profession but also the more 'conventional' expectations and tasks related to teaching led to a process of 'adaptation' in which most of the new teachers complied, in a sense, with the school culture:

> When I got here the school had been set up for a long time. It had its own identity, which can be improved or not, but the thing is the school doesn't need to adapt to me, instead I need to adapt to the school. (NT14, Interview 3, Beginning of Year 2)

Using the concept of 'social strategy' (Lacey 1977), to describe the way in which teachers (in this case new teachers) are socialized into the school culture, most of them, according to their own accounts, tended to adopt an attitude of 'strategic compliance' as time went on. They described the way in

which they started to comply with the norms and values of the workplace, despite the fact that they did not match their own beliefs and values. The ethos of the school – in which collaboration, support and commitment were non-existent – 'forced' them to act accordingly and not to follow their own ideas and values.

This loss of idealism was also corroborated by some of the headteachers I interviewed. They underlined the 'too high expectations' new teachers hold when they get to schools and the decrease in motivation and commitment as time goes on:

> They [new teachers] get disappointed . . . because they are young and enthusiastic, and they think that they are going to change the world, and the school as well. Then they start to realize that there are problems which have to be sorted out. They wouldn't think of them as problems in the first place. The bureaucratic dimension is too strong within a school, and they get disappointed. They realize that the reality is different from their own expectations . . . They have idealistic perspectives, and they cannot put them into practice, because of a wide array of reasons: the students, the teachers . . . Sometimes their colleagues are older. They have got used to the reality, and they are not willing to change. New teachers would like to do different things in a school, but they face many obstacles. (Headteacher at a suburban school)

> On the one hand, new teachers know very little about the reality, and, on the other hand, they have high expectations about teaching . . . (Headteacher at a suburban school)

Three teachers denoted an attitude which was more in accordance with Lacey's (1977) notion of internalized adjustment, in so far as they followed and agreed with the school expectations and requirements. Two teachers seemed to follow a 'strategic redefinition', according to the elaborated version of Lacey's social strategy drawn by Zeichner and Tabachnick (1985), one of them being successful, the other one adopting a 'strategic compliance' stance owing to the 'failure' and 'frustration' resulting from his experience in trying to change the *status quo:*

> In my case, the best for you to do in a school is to forget about what you want or your own perspective. I think it's the best solution, do whatever they want you to do, if they want things done in a certain way, do it, they will be happy and you won't have any problems . . . Because you talk and you give your opinion and you get upset, I mean I got upset several times this year, because I've tried to do what I thought was the best thing to do . . . But I realized that the best for you to do is not to bother and let them go . . . (NT8, Interview 4, End of Year 2)

> I don't know if people receiving so many 'no's', and faced with so many contradictions in teaching, gave up, because they were only seeing part of the question. You can achieve the maximum, but to get there you have to go step-by-step and it depends on you wanting to achieve the maximum. I don't give up . . . I mean, I tell them and I do what I think is the best for the students. I have always been like that . . . I was involved in a disciplinary problem at school and I had to sort it out myself . . . The headteacher and his team didn't like it, because they weren't capable of dealing with that properly . . . I was for the student and at the end of the day my perspective was right and I did what I thought was the best, even against them, and it worked . . . (NT11, Interview 4, End of Year 2)

Overall, new teachers tended to become more compliant and less enthusiastic about teaching as time went on. However, two of them still maintained their initial optimism and two other teachers seemed to have 'recovered' their lost ideals during the second year of teaching. The

following quote illustrates well the influence of the (positive) context of teaching in their understanding of, and response to, the workplace conditions:

> This year I could realize that the idea that I had created during my teaching practice and last year that students were not motivated and that there was a distant relationship amongst teachers wasn't true in every context. Now I can say that there are some schools and some contexts where you can find a good atmosphere, like in this one . . . and this makes you feel like working here . . . (NT4, Interview 4, End of Year 2)

At the beginning of the second year of teaching he also stated:

> Last year, from the very beginning, I realized that they [headteacher and his team] were too law-dependent. They were bureaucrats. Every single decision had to get through the entire hierarchy of the school; you had to fill in loads of official documents . . . It seemed to me that they wanted to keep control over every single task, every single situation in the school. It seemed to me that they wanted to keep control over teacher autonomy. In this school people run the school in a more practical way, they only fill in what the law strictly requires them to. And at the beginning of the year there was this welcome activity for people to get to know the school and its educational policy. (NT4, Interview 3, Beginning of Year 2)

Not surprisingly, teachers who taught in schools in which there was supportive, informative and encouraging leadership and effective working relationships amongst staff were more likely to reveal positive attitudes toward teaching. It is worth quoting from the five new teachers who worked in supportive schools (according to new teachers themselves and to the questionnaire data).[2] As far as school leadership was concerned, they highlighted issues such as 'being there' for the teachers and for the students and caring about the school. Decisiveness, responsiveness and commitment were key features reiterated by the new teachers as the most distinctive characteristics of strong and positive leadership. Their accounts pointed to a democratic, supportive, encouraging and active leadership in which the human dimension became a key issue:

> In this school you notice a way of working and dealing with the problems which is very different from what I saw last year. They [members of the leadership team] are always willing to sort out the problems the best they can. They care, and whenever there is a difficult situation to sort out-they will deal with it as quickly as possible. I mean, the way the school is organized and the way it works is very positive. They are keen to work and they are always there for you, I think they are very humane, too, in the way they solve the situations and in the running of the school. (NT14, Interview 3, Beginning of Year 2)

> I think the most important bit in a school is the leadership. The way they organize the school activities, the way they bring together teachers and students to work as a team, the way they organize the timetables, and so on. I have never noticed a wrong situation in this school, because they try to sort it out as quickly as possible . . . I can tell there is good leadership in this school . . . Everything is timely, well-organized and planned. And there was one thing that I have never seen before: there was a kind of referendum on the way to put in place the formal assessment meetings. People could make their own choices. (NT10, Interview 3, Beginning of Year 2)

> This year getting to know the school was easier for me because the headteacher and her team made me feel very comfortable and 'integrated' into the school culture from the beginning of the year . . . (NT7, Interview 3, Beginning of Year 2)

Support and encouragement were also key issues in new teachers' accounts of their positive perceptions of the schools in which they worked. They also emphasized the collaboration amongst staff. This is in line with previous research which has highlighted teacher collaboration and the existence of shared teaching goals as two of the hallmarks of learning-enriched schools (Rosenholtz 1989):

> When I came here I was told that this was a family. And you feel supported, there is no competition amongst groups like I saw in my previous school. Here people are willing to help you . . . (NT4, Interview 3, Beginning of Year 2)

> I can say that I am happy and I wouldn't mind teaching here next year. There are no negative things (apart from the lack of equipment), in this school everything works well, people are very supportive and helpful, and it was the first time that I came across students who have good marks, who are motivated, keen on learning, and committed. (NT7, Interview 4, End of Year 2)

> People in the school are excellent, we have a good relationship and, to me, the human dimension is very important. Despite the distance, which at the beginning was a constraint on me, now I can say that I wouldn't mind teaching here next year . . . (NT14, Interview 4, End of Year 2)

By and large, issues related to workplace conditions affected the way in which new teachers learned over the first two years of teaching. Unsupportive working relationships amongst staff and ineffective leadership led to the emergence of idiosyncratic coping strategies and, therefore, to an isolated and individual process of learning (see Flores 2004). In contrast, teachers who worked in schools in which collaboration, information and support were key characteristics revealed more positive attitudes toward teaching and felt more committed to their own professional development.

Conclusions and implications

This research has identified the struggles, continuities and discontinuities in new teachers' learning and in their socialization process in different school contexts. Most of the teachers reported on the way in which they became socialized into the school culture by adopting its norms and values. Conservatism and compliance emerged in their accounts, replacing their initial enthusiasm and, in a sense, their proactive attitude. This shift was described as a gradual process as they got to know the ways in which schools (and their colleagues) operated. Individualism, low morale and commitment amongst teachers, the existence of 'vested interests' and the excessive bureaucracy in schools were recurring themes referred to by teachers to account for the loss of idealism, the emergence of routines and a sense of 'giving up'.

Two of the teachers studied – in one case despite the negative perception of school culture and leadership – maintained their enthusiasm and optimism. Interestingly, both had given intrinsic motivations for entering teaching. They stated that they were still committed to teaching as a career in which, they assumed, they could make a positive contribution, especially for the benefit of their students. Two other teachers seemed to have

'recovered' their lost idealism and optimism during their second year of teaching. They emphasized that the less positive experience of their first year of teaching (and of their teaching practice) led them to feelings of disenchantment and disappointment. Teaching in a different context, however, was to bring about a very positive and rewarding experience, due especially to student motivation, commitment and achievement and positive perceptions of school culture and leadership. These findings corroborate Zeichner and Tabachnick's (1985) study, which demonstrated that induction into teaching does not lead necessarily to a loss of idealism.

This study has highlighted the complex interplay of personal and contextual factors in new teachers' learning and development over time. Findings from this research have shown the effect of school culture and leadership in influencing, to a greater or lesser extent, the way in which new teachers evaluated their first teaching experiences and made sense of them.

Of particular importance was the quality of school leadership, which emerged as a key factor in determining the nature and process of learning in the workplace, which is in line with earlier work (see, for instance, Fernandez 2000, Barker 2001). Encouraging, supportive and informative leadership was a crucial feature emerging from teachers' accounts of their positive experiences at school. This has important implications for the role of school leaders in creating and sustaining professional learning communities. Research has identified the common traits of successful leaders in fostering the building of professional communities of learners at school, amongst which are the promotion of shared goals, a sense of self-efficacy and self-worth amongst staff, the development of collaborative cultures with opportunities for authentic participation in the decision-making process, the centrality of personal values, the ability to manage tensions and dilemmas, a people-centered view of leadership and a sense of vision (Leithwood 1992, Leithwood *et al.* 1999, Day *et al.* 2000, Moller 2000, Fernandez 2000, Barker 2001, Day *et al.* 2001, Kremer-Hayon *et al.* 2002).

This raises questions about the recruitment and training of leaders both at school and at the department level. Evidence from this study supports the contention that, as is the case of other roles at school, such as teachers coordinating teaching for students with special needs, mentors and trainers, leadership roles should require the mastery of specific knowledge and training, which has been, in many cases, neglected in the Portuguese context.

Another key issue arising from this study relates to the provision of learning opportunities in the workplace within a view of teachers as lifelong learners and of schools as professional learning communities. For 'authentic and enduring' (Shulman 1997: 100) teacher learning to occur, it is essential to provide teachers with the conditions (including resources and time) and opportunities to engage in sustained processes of reflection, collaboration and inquiry (Day 1999, 2001, Tickle 2001, Eraut 2001). As Shulman (1997: 101) suggested, the potential of teacher learning is dependent upon 'the processes of activity, reflection, emotion and collaboration . . . supported, legitimated, and nurtured in a community or culture that values such experiences and creates many opportunities for them to occur.'

The corollary of this is teacher personal motivation and willingness to continue to learn and develop. This was also a key distinctive feature between beginning teachers who were enthusiastic and committed to teaching and learning and those who revealed a loss of idealism and feelings of increasing compliance and 'giving up'.[3] Providing teachers with meaningful learning opportunities and support deemed necessary at different phases of their careers, especially in the early years of teaching, needs to take into account their readiness and willingness to learn, their needs and motivations, as well as the characteristics of the contexts in which they work.

This study also supports the contention that induction is a key phase in the teacher's career, which needs to be given more attention by policy-makers, school leaders, teacher educators, teacher education course providers and other stakeholders. In the Portuguese context, this is an issue that has not yet been addressed effectively despite the increasing number of studies which have highlighted its relevance (Silva 1997, Couto 1998, Flores 2000, Alves 2001, Braga 2001). Furthermore, support and guidance provided by school leaders in the workplace is far from being responsive to new teachers' needs, as evidence from this study also suggests.

Up until now, induction programs have not yet been put into practice in the Portuguese context. The geographical distance between teachers' workplaces and corresponding teacher education institutions (Campos 1995) is seen as one of the main obstacles. Added to this are issues related to the training of mentors and the financial support that such programs would involve. A collaborative strategy, through partnerships, between universities and schools appears as a way of overcoming the practical and situational constraints related to the implementation of induction programs. This requires universities and schools to engage in a collaborative (and effective) dialogue in order to enhance the potential of both institutions. The building of partnerships is, therefore, a key issue in bringing together teacher educators, mentors and trainees and in overcoming the classic divide between 'practitioners' and those who are said to 'theorize', between teacher and academic research (Zeichner 1995, Day 1999) within the view of learning as a lifelong enterprise (Day 1997, 1998). Nevertheless, a political decision also needs to be made through the formal recognition of an induction program for all entrants to teaching.

High quality teaching and learning depend greatly on high quality teachers. Therefore, it is essential to provide them with support, resources and opportunities to develop professionally. This is even more crucial during the early years of teaching. Induction emerges as a key element in the transition from student to full-time teacher. However, it has to be framed and organized within a broad perspective of professional development of teachers. It needs to go beyond the mere practical advice and socialization process, whereby new entrants become members of a given professional culture, to include opportunities for self-questioning and reflection, not only upon teachers' own action, but also upon the values and norms underlying the educational settings in which they work. A sustained view of learning and professional development is, therefore, crucial to transform schools into professional learning communities – in which school leaders have a key role

– for both teachers and students, and consequently, to improve the quality of education.

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Notes

1. For a detailed account, see Flores (2001, 2003, 2004).
2. For more information, see Flores (2004).
3. Despite this, all new teachers remained in teaching after their first two years of teaching, which may be explained by a number of personal, cultural, social and economic reasons. However, according to the data, there were different levels of motivation, morale and commitment to teaching amongst the participants in the study.

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