The educational project in French schools:
professional challenges to transform the school*

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Abstract

This article aims to provide an insight into the way teachers in French primary education implement educational projects and, overall, to understand how these projects influence the school. The analysis, focused on organizational learning, aims to describe the schools' ability to combine action and knowledge production processes. The method relies on an ethnographic research developed in the Ile-de-France region. The data was analyzed using a Grounded Theory perspective. Our results underline the many challenges that the school project poses in the quest to develop original activities which meet ordinary problems. We discovered that the professional development of teachers is an issue at the heart of the educational project since it questions the profession's pre-existing individual and collective knowledge structures. Our postulate states that professional experiences taking place during the educational project could nourish the knowledge capital emerging from teaching practice both in and outside the classroom. In other words, if the project were to be considered as a process aiming to make school reality intelligible, and not only as a set of actions, it would be possible for teachers to understand and learn from the problems the projects themselves pose.

Keywords

Educational project – Organization – Primary school – Teacher.

Introduction

The decentralization process of education systems originated in different countries at the end of the twentieth century. These processes have pursued, through the "*project*" figure, the transformation of the organization and pedagogical functioning of primary and secondary schools (OBIN; CROS, 2003; SCHEERENS, 2014). Through this tool, educational policies in France give the teaching community and, by extension, the educational community, the right to develop strategies to regulate their school's performance.

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Educ. Pesqui., São Paulo, v. 45, e187992, 2019.

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In this article, we will focus our analysis on how organizational issues compromise the institutional educational project. It is worthwhile to consider the influence the project can exert on the school, which is considered a social organization. This analysis will be focused on organizational learning and the school's ability to simultaneously implement activities and produce knowledge through their educational projects.

Problem

The term 'project' is widely used in French society. Accordingly, Boutinet (2010) recognizes seven project families: personal, couples, object, action, developments/events, organizational, and social. For this author, the meaning of the word 'project' has extended beyond this, becoming a way to act in the world and capture the world. Uses of the project concept would reveal, from Boutinet's perspective, the human intention to control the unprecedented, to reduce life's vicissitudes in the pursuit of one or more objectives. The deployment of meanings, strategies, and artifacts mobilizing a project, speaks to us about a dynamic and complex object.

The French educational system falls within the republican teaching tradition, mainly public and secular education, with pedagogical orientations, learning objectives, and content intended for a centralized teaching system. However, since 1989, under the presidency of François Mitterrand and following the enactment of the Educational Guidance Law, French teachers have been compelled to form teaching teams to draw up and implement school projects for their primary and secondary schools. Education legislation in 2005 and 2013 has reaffirmed this instruction, inviting teaching teams to conduct pedagogical experiments through projects (GUIRIMAND; MAZEREAU, 2016; REUTER; CONDETTE; BOULANGER, 2013) which are subject to renewal every three to five years.

As specified in the Circular No. 90–039 from February 15, 1990, the *projet d'école* arises from the political desire to place the student at the center of the educational system. It finds its origin in both the social and pedagogical movements of the Progressive Education and the Popular Education that took hold in the 1960s and 1970s, as well as in an industrial economic conception of effectiveness and efficiency (NORMAND, 2004). It is, therefore, a matter of developing projects with a strategy that will address the schools' characteristics and the specific educational and pedagogical needs of the children they receive, as well as involving parents and other educational actors from the school environment in the decisions taken. To such end, teachers then benefit from a degree of authorized autonomy, only limited by the influence of National Education inspectors (RICH, 2006). According to current regulations, these projects must be at the service of the national educational mission which demands school success for all students.

However, after almost thirty years of existence, the significance of the implementation of the *projet d'école* policy should be put into perspective. Projects do not often go beyond the barrier of school administrators and are limited to a written and archived document.

It is essential to highlight the current lack of interest in projects shown by both the academic world and the French teachers themselves. While in the 1990s, many publications were designed to guide and motivate teaching and management teams to work under the project mode (BELLARD, 1994; BROCH; CROS, 1987, 1989; BROCH; CROS,

1991; PIERETTI, 1991; EDET, 2000; FAVRE et al., 2003; FÉROLE et al., 1991; OBIN; CROS; ROCARD, 2003; RIOULT; TENNE, 2002), in the 2000s, interest decreased considerably. In this regard we recognize the work done by Rich (2001, 2006, 2008), Marcel (2005) and Reuter, Condette, and Boulanger (2013).

According to a letter addressed to the Minister of Education by one of the teachers' unions, the project is considered to be more of a bureaucratic overload than a work tool[3]. The union stresses the need to redefine the nature and objectives assigned to school projects, to make them concrete professional tools to improve teaching quality and, thus, student success.

From the teachers' perspective, the educational project represents an administrative constraint (RIOULT; TENNE, 2002), often difficult to conduct and with little impact on school activities.

Nonetheless, implementing the educational project within schools remains an obligation for teaching teams. Teachers try to articulate their pedagogical proposals within the constraints of the academic demands of the school's achievements and success for each project development cycle, as a way of responding to the context in which their schools are operating. In this article, we examine the gap between the officially prescribed task and the work done by teachers during its execution. Leplat (1997) warns that teachers interpret instructions according to the means at their disposal and the demands they make on themselves to carry them out. We therefore consider that teachers translate these official guidelines from their own professional perspectives to overcome the different professional learning challenges arising from this organizational task.

Organizational challenges of the school project

It is appropriate to analyze the school project from an organizational perspective. Notably, such a perspective makes it possible to establish connections between project dynamics and organizational learning (DUFFIELD; WHITTY, 2015; SENSE, 2011; BON ZEDWITZ, 2002), which can be succinctly defined as a learning process based on an interaction between individual and collective spheres enabling an organization to achieve an objective (POPOVA-NOWAK; CSEH, 2015). Thus, it is considered that, through individuals, organizations are endowed with learning abilities. Therefore, as an organization, a school can influence it's employees by producing intellectual and mental references and preserving them (ARGYRIS; SCHÖN, 1978); it can design behaviors, norms, and values over time (DAFT; WEICK, 1984) and create or modify organizational routines (BALKAR, 2015; LEVITT; MARCH, 1988).

We believe that the school project is intrinsically associated with organizational learning. Like Kontour (2000), we consider that success in a project can be measured by the lessons it teaches to the institution supporting it. Thereby, we place organizational learning as a central marker of the impact of a school project, which consequently, could be considered a resource for schools and not an obligation. The school project is the

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3 - See letter to the Minister of National Education, October 2012, from the *Syndicat National Unitair des Instituteurs, Professeurs des écoles et Pegc – Fédération Syndicale Unitaire*. Available in: <http://snuipp.fr/IMG/pdf/01_10_12_LETTRE_AU_MEN_PROJETS_D_ECOLE.pdf>. Accessed: Nov. 16. 2017.

opportunity for organizational learning which can be derived both from the different management stages and from a subsequent assessment (SWAN; SCARBROUGH; NEWELL, 2010), or even from subsequent project failures (DESAI, 2015; SITKIN, 1992). In this sense, North American researchers (FINNIGAN; DALY; STEWART, 2012) have been able to prove that, in the absence of a methodology based on diagnosis, planning, and restructuring (as proposed by the project methodology), teachers are more likely to exploit and recycle existing knowledge and practices rather than commit themselves to innovative paths.

Considering the school as a self-evaluating institution has several advantages in this research orientation. First, this prism allows us to focus our analysis not only on teachers but also on organizational cultures and environments favorable to organizational learning.

The school project can be analyzed both in the field of action, focusing on behavioral changes, and in the field of the imaginary, focusing on a shared perception and understanding. This approach allows the emancipation of a Manichean logic which perceives teachers as exclusively accountable for the success or failure of projects. Conversely, associating the school project with organizational learning makes it possible to consider it as an object of sensitive research (BRITO; PESCE, 2015; LEE; LEE; RENZETTI, 1990) since it breaks with specific benchmarks within the teaching profession, and in this sense, it represents a threat. Three types of rupture are recognized here.

The first one associated with the school project can be described as epistemological. The organizational learning prism allows us to consider that the school project puts teachers into the position of learners. The pedagogical and didactic challenges associated with learning, which shape the daily life of the teaching profession, are thus imposed on teachers who are immersed in a learning process by trial and error. The project pedagogy leads project managers to detect and correct their mistakes, in contrast with the traditional model where, overall, the teacher's role is transmissive.

The second one refers to the management. The project is considered to provide relevant support for management (LAURSEN, 2011) since its implementation proposes an articulation of rational phases ranging from the diagnosis to the implementation of activities. A successful project, for example, one that mobilizes organizational learning, can fix problems and improve organizational effectiveness (ARGYRIS; SCHÖN, 1996; HECKMANN; STEGER; DOWLING, 2016) by identifying the underlying issues and not just the symptoms (SCRIBNER et al., 1999). Hence, theoretically and symbolically, the school project is an opportunity for change from within, problem-solving, and innovation. However, the project cannot achieve this without the right organizational culture being put in place (COLLINSON; COOK; CONLEY, 2006; GU et al., 2014; O'DAY, 2002); specifically, a cooperative culture (TSCHANNEN-MORAN; TODAY, 2000), trust relationships (STOLL, 2010), and effective leadership (LEITHWOOD; LEONARD; SHARRATT, 1998; VOULALAS; SHARPE, 2005). This project and the required organizational culture, which does not correspond to traditional French schools, can provoke a cultural confrontation which can highlight the gap between this culture and the functioning of different schools.

Finally, the third one, derived from the previous points, is psychological. Organizational learning requires a behavioral and cognitive change (CIRELLA et al., 2016; RAIT, 1995; SHRIVASTAVA, 1983) encouraging a proactive rather than a reactive attitude (COLLINSON; COOK; CONLEY, 2006).

Political challenges of the school project

Organizational challenges can be linked to more global challenges with a political scope. The school project and the learning processes that can be raised are connected to evaluative mechanisms (TORRES; PRESKILL, 2001) that some consider at the heart of the organizational learning implementation (KURLAND; PERETZ; HERTZ-LAZAROWITZ, 2010). All projects have the potential to be assessed, and the school project can promote the introduction of assessment practices in the school sphere. According to Bennett and Jessani (2011), evaluative thinking can be compared to a state of mind that has permeated many spheres of our society and which aims to increase effectiveness (DAHLER-LARSEN, 2011). Evaluation is one of the foundations of the modernization of public action (OSBONE; GAEBLER, 1992) since it implements a steering of public policies based on indicators and measures that make it easier to distinguish success from failure. The school project is a potential way to modernize a school assuming that it is open to assessing its effectiveness. In this regard, Anglo-Saxon research shows the solid connection between organizational learning and school effectiveness (CHAPMAN; HARRIS, 2004; FULLAN, 2002; LILJENBERG, 2014). Conversely, the school project as an evaluative practice is accompanied by constitutional challenges associated with the transparency of public spending and citizen participation in public policies.

Method

This research, geographically located in the department of Val d'Oise, Ile-de-France, was carried out under the principles of ethnographic research between 2009 and 2013. Three configurations of project development and regulation were considered:

Configuration 1: five primary schools accompanied by an international education association dedicated to the pedagogical monitoring of school teams.

Configuration 2: pre-designed project forms made available to teaching teams at twenty-six primary schools in a school district, that facilitate writing and guide the projects development.

Configuration 3: twenty-one primary schools in a school district set up a school district team to support teaching teams in the renovation of their educational projects.

Data were collected through three procedures: comprehensive interviews (KAUFMANN, 2011), participant observation (LAPASSADE, 2006), and a collection of documents in different formats. Our analysis material is derived from the following: six transcribed interviews; twenty participating research reports; forty-eight institutional educational projects; twenty-two minutes of monitoring and mid-term evaluation meetings; three different administrative documents.

Data were analyzed according to the rules of *Ground Theory* (STRAUSS; CORBIN, 1998) with the assistance of the qualitative data analysis software, Nvivo 11. The analysis began with an open coding process to explore all the collected materials and their integrity. We then mainly used *In Vivo* coding in the pursuit of closeness to our disparate data (interviews, institutional documents, minutes, reports). The large volume of *In Vivo* codes were progressively organized into thematic categories through a repeated categorization

processes allowing us to question the meaning of the content under analysis. Finally, relationships were established between the existing categories to formulate broad categories with a higher abstraction level which in turn facilitated the data condensation. From this process, four categories related to problems were derived (see Table 1), all have different origins.

Results

The emerging categories have been articulated around four themes or problems: 1) project implementation, 2) existential, 3) pedagogical, 4) political.

Table 1 - Categories and emergent subcategories, from the data analysis through the Nvivo 11 software

Categories		Coded Resources	Coded References
Problems of project implementation		**49**	**196**
Subcategories	Relative autonomy	13	56
	The challenge of getting the job done	13	27
	Project time constraints	33	78
	Step in the project	11	18
	The paradoxes of project writing	8	17
Existential problems		**41**	**191**
Subcategories	New teaching configuration	33	89
	An ambiguous assessment of working on projects	21	102
	Pedagogical problems	55	334
Subcategories	Development of a more active pedagogy	42	221
	Professional requirements of the work on projects	38	113
Socio-political problems		**58**	**496**
Subcategories	The need to pacify the school	20	45
	The need for an involving project	36	126
	Tensions between school and families	40	282
	Tensions in teaching staff	16	43

Source: Elaborated by authors.

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We tried to base our analysis on a process of conceptual abstraction which goes beyond mere description. Three dimensions were then proposed, allowing us to understand the project complexity beyond its challenges in execution and success.

Working conditions as a constraint for the construction of shared meanings

Teachers and local leaders believe that working on educational projects can offer improvement possibilities under certain conditions. Both see the educational project as an opportunity to give meaning to their daily work, which teachers find is increasingly overwhelmed by requirements related to school performance. As well as actions and pedagogical decisions, coherence between teachers in an institution, is, in their eyes, important as it enables recognition of the importance of pedagogical work. This dimension could be understood as a possible incentive for the actions and professional development of teachers willing to place the project at the service of new shared understandings.

> It is necessary to have a project to be shared, reflected on, experienced and assessed by all the participants so that it has prospects. (Teaching teams meeting minute, configuration 1, 2009).

However, as the subcategories, *project time constraints* (78 coded references), and *the challenge of getting the job done* (27 coded references), allow us to conclude, the road to the project does not seem to be free of obstacles that both motivate and discourage initiatives by teachers. This process leads them into a reflection dynamic which is not in line with the institutional conditions they are bound by, mainly regarding time. From their point of view, their working conditions do not facilitate collective working on joint projects and do not align with the aspirations and ambitions of the teaching community: which is the success of all the students at the school. The viability of such a mechanism is compromised for several reasons relating both to temporary and material obligations and the professional culture itself.

The subcategories, *professional requirements of the work in projects* (113 coded references) and *new teaching configuration* (89 coded references), allow us to understand that teachers do not believe they have the professional skills to make reliable diagnoses, formalize a project, and implement actions. Through the diagnostics, for instance, we will try to establish the initial starting point for the project. These diagnostics will determine the anchor point of the project's orientations and its evaluation, both of the process and its final implementation. It is worth noting that the skills required to develop educational projects would not be part of a teacher's traditional knowledge which is mainly focused on knowledge transmission. Consequently, working on the project can lead teachers to carry out complex practices that are generally poorly valued by the educational institution, since teachers are evaluated on their individual teaching activities and not the collective work, reflection, and organization dynamics requested by the logic of educational projects.

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> I find it very hard to structure it [the project]. We are primarily in action, rather than analysis. It means then to force oneself to reflect and write. While we are almost always in action […] when we were analyzing the pedagogical aspects, promptly the question was, what will we do? Since we realized that we had failed in these aspects, what can we do? When it is not necessarily that, but instead, what happened? What worked out well? What did not work out? (Elementary school director, configuration 1, 2009).

The project becomes an instrument of school bureaucratization where the potential reflective stance seems to be linked to operational requirements or to an alternative way of justifying the project's activities. The project's institutional and official dimension does not seem to help structure the carried-out activities. To a lesser extent, similar mechanisms can be noticed at the school level. Our field data indicates that the work on projects is more likely to generate an individualization of work processes than collective dynamics.

> In the teaching profession, we are increasingly required to do things. Then […] what are we required to do? Everything must be written down. Whatever we do, we must write a document. You do the slightest thing in your class, and you have a project to do. In fact, they want a great formalism […]. There is a written formalization of actions conducted in schools or the classroom, which is becoming more and more critical, which started with a good intention since writing makes it possible to structure the thought to define projects […] But here we have reached a stage in which we must write for everything and anything. So, we write, write, write […] I have colleagues who are not going to get involved in a project, since participating in this or that project requires them to complete a seven-page form, and since we are asked to fill out more and more documents, for many colleagues, at times, it is just very hard. (Nursery school director, configuration 1, 2009).

The mixed feelings that teachers have towards the project tool (subcategory: *the ambiguous assessment of the project* – 102 coded references) can be analyzed from a double perspective. The first one focuses on the project integration with a teacher's other daily missions, who is asked to manage several tasks at the same time. The second one, is linked to the level of collective control on the project dynamics.

Mobilization of the educational community in educational projects

Official texts encourage teachers to develop collaborative relationships with the socio-educational structures of non-formal education in the community, as well as to involve parents in school life. The latter has been considered a full member of the educational community since the 1989 Education Guidance Act.

The degree of parental involvement and the efforts the school must make to reach out to families, awakens conflicting opinions within the teacher teams and sometimes between teachers and parents (subcategories: *tensions between school and families* – 282 coded references; *tensions in teaching staff* – 43 coded references). Then, if parents are, on

the one hand, fundamental actors in their children's education, they are also, on the other hand, those who may not have committed themselves to the education of their children and the performance of the school.

The school opening itself up to the outside environment is not only a diversification strategy of the educational work supported by the other community educational agents but also aims to share educational responsibilities with them, mainly with parents.

Teachers believe that if families understand the project, get involved, and adhere to it, or more importantly, to the general French school goals, then school results and the quality of interactions would improve.

> We believe that building a quality school-family relationship will make it easier for our students to succeed in school. However, what is a quality school-family relationship like? Would it be a school and families that convey the same values, demands, and expectations? (Project nursery school, n°3, configuration 1, period 2010-2013).

In this way, the project would allow teachers to explain school expectations better and clarify specific aspects that would allow them to share more about the curriculum.

It is time for teachers to establish the co-education paradigm and partner with local communities (Subcategory: *the need for an involving project* – 126 coded references). By considering the family, teachers undertake a more comprehensive analysis of the child and his or her fulfillment. In other words, the project considers both the student's status by focusing on the content, and the status of the child by focusing on the methods.

> Education is necessary for students in difficulty. How can we take care of them? How to handle the specific situations that may occur with them? (Intermediary assessment team of teachers' minutes, school, configuration 3, 2012).

Technical-pedagogical challenges of the educational project

The objectives set out in educational projects aim to improve academic results which are measured annually by a national learning assessment system. This process is, politically, the main success indicator of implemented projects.

Here, learning French, the mother tongue, is predominant in both oral and written expression and comprehension. For this reason, educational projects emphasize this learning objective. The proposed actions aim to increase the number of opportunities the students have to communicate in the classroom by encouraging them to become more active in their pedagogical practice (subcategory: *development of a more active pedagogy* – 221 references): reading aloud, school correspondence, collective writing, writing school newspapers, cultural trips, among others.

However, teachers integrate other objectives that we will summarize as metacognitive, sociocultural, and communicative. The objectives we associate with the first one are related to the student's ability to know and understand his or her learning process. The projects

aim to develop critical thinking, promote their ability to make connections and compare or transfer their knowledge. To this end, teachers will promote an interdisciplinary and multi-content curriculum, and classroom experiments.

> To develop the "knowing how-to-be" essential for the learner's occupation (sense of learning, reflection, strategies, connections, mobilization, and knowledge memorization). (School project, configuration 2, period 2009-2012).

Regarding socio-cultural objectives, teachers emphasize the behavioral aspects of students, the relationships between peers and with adults in the school environment, and their citizenship education. Rules of community life, the election of class representatives, behavior contracts, children's councils, debates, and artistic workshops emerge as intervention proposals.

> Place the student as *acteur* of his or her school through actions such as student councils and responsibilities delegation. (Elementary school director, configuration 1, 2009).

As noted above, projects include objectives or goals aiming to improve communication between teachers and the families of children in the school community.

> Many families do not know much about the school, do not acknowledge the school or have a bad memory of it [then] the message addressed to them should be about the pedagogical content, the school organization, and the support structures. (School project, configuration 2, period 2009-2012).

These objectives aim to provide families with the resources they need to understand French school culture and its curriculum. The actions are informative: parent meetings, open days, discussion groups, among others.

Against these three objectives, the results of national assessments are not sufficient as an evaluation indicator nor for gathering feedback on the educational project, which has goals other than academic ones. Currently, there is no national assessment for learning competences related to 'how-to-live together'. It is up to the teacher to appreciate the importance of each of these competencies in his or her group-class.

Therefore, teachers elaborate their indicators:

> The number of students who remain in their position and those who agree to open up to debate and confrontation of views. The number of students who are receptive to cultural novelty. (Educative Project, primary school nº 14, configuration 3, period 2010-2013).

This is one of the tasks that teachers are given within the framework of the project: to develop indicators *ad hoc* to their objectives. However, this task is hard to achieve. In the project's intermediary evaluations performed by the team, indicators were still to be defined.

Teachers use factual criteria to evaluate these aspects of their projects. Namely, teachers interpret a success as when activities are completed and welcomed by the educational community, and a failure, those that are not conducted. Thus, if the activity works, it is prolonged; otherwise, it is suspended.

> The actions assessment has not been elaborated yet, but teachers are satisfied with the positive change in the classroom climate. (Intermediary evaluation, primary school nº 19, configuration 3, 2012).

In most cases, these indicators are not fed into the evaluation since they require the relevant tools to collect information. The need to rely on indicators adapted to the pedagogical proposals of teachers leads them to create their own instruments for assessing the results of their actions. However, it is possible to observe that this activity itself represents a difficult challenge.

The satisfaction lies in the mobilization level, commitment, and support of the people involved.

> Several commissions have been created to organize happy moments at school (epiphany feast, Christmas fair, book fair, book fair, New Years' show, welcome dinner for new parents, among others). A real exchange is built. Communication between parents and teachers has improved. The climate, in general, is more peaceful. New families are committing. We hope the movement expansion. (Intermediary evaluation, primary school nº 8, configuration 3, 2012).

The improvement in quality interactions within the educational community and the increase in rewarding experiences, establishes a feeling of success in the undertaken actions. However, the pedagogical analyses of their actions are less addressed.

> A Student Council has been set up on a weekly basis in all elementary school classes to allow the settlement of conflicts. Positive effects have been noted (more peaceful climate, more positive representations, and help from students towards children in difficulty). (Intermediary evaluation, primary school nº 9, configuration 3, 2012).

The Teachers' own findings regarding the class serve as an evaluation parameter, but other criteria of a theoretical (pedagogy and didactics), practical (learning experiences) or professional (theories or foundations proper to teaching) nature have not been noted. Teaching evaluation is mainly based on the image of a specific form of authority asserted by teachers, that does not necessarily imply a pedagogical problematization.

Insofar as the ultimate project goal is to obtain better school results for all students, teachers use these criteria to establish the learning level in mathematics and French. The path taken through the educational project is thus reduced to the improvement of school results. Teachers do not have other instruments to provide feedback regarding the experiences they propose in their projects.

Discussion

The educational project is a mechanism designed to respond to the global needs and concerns of the school which requires it to be collectively captured. To this end, teachers must organize themselves to reach a certain level of agreement on what they seek to transform: to complete a joint reading and develop a shared understanding of the problems they will attempt to solve through the educational project.

The chosen research protocol is not associated with a predictive approach, but with a comprehensive approach. As our results show, teachers recognize in the project an opportunity to propose strategies to improve the learning conditions and coexistence in schools. This result transforms into an opportunity to give meaning to their daily work, broadening the view beyond the students' academic performance. It is in this instance that issues are raised regarding staff cohesion, the relationship they maintain with parents and guardians, the students' autonomy to assume their school duties and rights, and the pedagogical work around the expected learning and skills.

These diagnostic and project design issues require specific forms of leadership, negotiation, dispute management, interpretative and creative forces to function. In this sense, our observational and narrative data shows us that teachers consider themselves less competent and more comfortable completing more traditional teaching tasks such as work in or around the classroom. In this sense, working in the project can raise professional demands, that are perhaps not new, but have been previously disregarded.

Our data triangulation, particularly the documentary analysis, leads us to a conceptual level which allows us to claim the production of not general but transferable knowledge. In this way, the production of educational projects mobilizes teachers on other dimensions of their professional practice: the analysis and interpretation of diverse information (social, educational, psychological); the problematizing of emerging phenomena in their work environment; the development of instruments for the regulation and evaluation of the impact of the educational goals identified by teachers; the interpretation and adjustment of scholarly contributions by those who trust them; the capacity to organize and unite the educational community through collective bargaining procedures.

In this way, it seems that the institutional educational project does not lead teachers to develop tools to examine their educational proposals any more broadly than the performance in national assessments. Teachers would not be professionally strengthened from this experience. Therefore, it would be interesting to initiate organizational research to see if any work dynamics can promote these processes further.

When it comes to change, the responsibilities of the teaching profession, the move towards diversification and increased professional standards (LANTHEUAUME, 2008), and the activities and demands presented by the school project, are all opportunities for the professional learning that was neglected during implementation: How can the school project experience be transformed into a professional learning experience for teachers in order to avoid blind project cycles?

The school project emerges, beyond an instance of problem-solving, as a space to define problems and construct professional assumptions grounded in processes based

on a shared intelligibility. *Problem situations*, which are at the center of the school's educational project, pose different challenges for teachers: of project implementation, existential, pedagogical, and socio-political nature.

To structure the school's educational project, one must go beyond the mere observation of students' pedagogical difficulties, and first try to structure the problems raised. This structuring means issuing action hypotheses that respond to the problem-situation, an act that requires different skills from those used by teachers in their work with students in the classroom. This activity also requires teachers to be engaged in intelligible actions which stand in the crossroads between the action hypotheses and the phenomenon presented as problematic: "The real is not only what works, but what works based on reason." (FABRE, 2009, p. 31).

Then, implementing the school's educational project requires skills and even the development of specific competencies related to the pedagogical decisions for project implementation. The design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of pedagogical experimentation are often not teacher-led operations. Given this, challenges are numerous: to adopt a new position and relevant professional gestures and to build collective thinking, to name a few.

Finally, there is always an element of social and educational desires and ideals in the project. It conveys a certain way of seeing the world to those who participate in its elaboration and execution. The project is a source of hope and frustration; a threat and an opportunity. Beyond intent statements and standardized responses, the school project is a space of human creation determined by the emotions and feelings of teachers who take it as a tool for change, improvement or a solution to a given situation.

We can see that the school's educational project not only emerges as a tool that channels the pedagogical and educational activity within the school but also as an opportunity to capture the complexity that characterizes the reality of the school as a living space. As with any tool or instrument of creation, the school's educational project cannot be reduced to the value of its results. It develops a wide range of professional skills and knowledge for the teachers making use of this tool.

It is possible to give a new perspective to the approach of the school's educational project, considering it as a unique learning and action instrument, and not only as a means to improve school results. Thereby, the project represents an opportunity – if teachers are willing to consider it as such – for professional learning and empowerment. Given the collective development of resources and methodological tools, the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of actions completed through the school project, this mechanism emerges as a learning device in the workplace.

Conclusions

The analysis of all the data allows us to describe the process that teachers face when they are constrained by policy to locally build and develop an educational project for their institution. This mandatory activity for pedagogical teams is still complicated to implement in schools.

Teachers' professional practice is not meant to be decontextualized or disembodied, the implementation of the school's educational project is a test. The professional development of teachers is at the heart of the educational project. The educational and professional challenges represent an adequate and necessary space for teacher effectiveness. It's important to consider the school's educational project as a symbolic mediation between the teacher and the school environment. This implies that the construction of the projected world and the identification of an ideal, can change the teachers pre-existing individual and collective knowledge structures. Several situations identified by teachers refer to different theories and mobilize different representations.

The variety of situations identified by teachers when developing their educational projects are an incentive to search for theories and to mobilize and question individual and collective representations. We have three areas of reflection: the evaluation and the school project; collaboration and organizational cooperation; and educational extension to innovative pedagogies.

On one side, it is possible to envisage the experimentation of a continuous training system combining the actions associated with the school project and professional learning, looking to develop skills and assess the impact of the project processes that have been implemented by the teaching staff. This process is the first step in identifying the institutional, methodological and logistical implications, as well as the individual, collective, and scientific, professional and socio-technical resources needed for the practical establishment of a professional learning mechanism in the workplace.

We postulate then that professional experiences can feed the knowledge capital emerging from professional practice and produce impact elements on the learning and the quality of life of students at the school. We believe that the professionals' unwillingness to mobilize in the face of this type of work can be explained by the gap between the obligation to produce projects imposed by the French public authorities and the capacity of teachers to face up to the educational, organizational and political challenges, which is inhibited by the scale and intensity.

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