Collaborative work as a proposal for ongoing training of 3rd cycle teachers in Paraguay

Treball col·laboratiu com a proposta de formació continuada per als professionals del 3r cicle al Paraguai

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Abstract

Teacher training is fundamental to the improvement of professional practice. Indeed, both initial training and ongoing training form an essential part of teachers' continuous improvement processes. For this reason, we analyzed the importance of collaborative work, seeking to devise a strategy to develop and improve practices and work in teaching and learning. More precisely, this research analyzes the importance of collaborative work as a proposal for ongoing teacher training since it may be considered a permanent opportunity to improve teaching practices. The method used was a qualitative approach, based on an analysis of data and information obtained by semistructured interviews, with n=3 participants who are directors of educational centers belonging to institutions under official management in Paraguay. The results were analyzed with the Atlas-ti program, from which emerged 7 main categories, namely: teaching profile, previous attitudes, managerial perception, teaching

attitude, opportunities, limitations, and recommendations. These categories served to build and recognize the main needs, opportunities, and limitations regarding continued training through collaborative work in the exercise of the teaching profession.

Keywords

Teacher training, ongoing teacher training, collaborative work, secondary education, the job of teaching.

Resum

La formació dels docents és una part fonamental de la millora de la pràctica professional; tant la formació inicial com la permanent són importants en els processos de millora. Així, la importància del treball col·laboratiu ha estat analitzada amb l'objectiu d'esdevenir una estratègia per desenvolupar i millorar les pràctiques i la feina en els processos d'ensenyament i aprenentatge. Aquesta recerca analitza la importància del treball col·laboratiu com a proposta per a la formació permanent del professorat, tenint en compte que és considerada una oportunitat permanent de millora de les pràctiques docents. El mètode utilitzat ha estat un enfocament qualitatiu basat en una anàlisi de dades i informació obtinguda per entrevistes semiestructurades, amb n=3 participants que són directors de centres educatius pertanyents a la gestió oficial del Paraguai. Els resultats es van analitzar amb el programa ATLAS.ti, del qual van sorgir set categories principals, que són: perfil docent, actituds prèvies, percepció directiva, actitud docent, oportunitats, limitacions i recomanacions. Aquestes categories han servit per construir i reconèixer les principals necessitats, oportunitats i limitacions pel que fa a la formació continuada en l'exercici de la professió docent, mitjançant el treball col·laboratiu.

Paraules clau

Formació docent, formació permanent docent, treball col·laboratiu, educació secundària, treball docent.

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1. Introduction

In our times, ongoing training for teachers has been of interest in the educational field because it is considered that there is a timely and essential need to increase knowledge and, even more, to promote the professional development of teachers and thus improve the quality of educational practice.

Highlighting this idea, Imbernón (2020) argues that lifelong learning should help teachers to progress in their professional practice. This favors the development of factors that drive the changes and innovations that are demanded in the educational field. It should be added that, both in higher education and basic education, there is a commitment to promote the development of teachers' competence, fostering in this way the quality of the educational system*** (Mentado *et al.*, 2017).

This research proposal, based on the current educational demands for teacher training, looks into the importance of collaborative work as a proposal for permanent teacher training. In addition, consideration is given to the purpose of fostering the accumulation of knowledge that allows in turn the promotion of teacher training and the enrichment of practice through collaborative work, bearing in mind the opportunities for improvement that it would provide for third-cycle teachers in Paraguay, a country where the educational system is still in the process of improvement, a process that includes the permanent training of teachers. Benítez Pérez (2022) highlights that ongoing teacher training in this context is an indispensable factor that contributes to the quality of teaching, generating positive results through reflective and critical learning, the solution of problematic situations, and the making of contributions to the teaching experience so that there is a greater ongoing impact on teachers' professional practice through different means and forms of learning. Consequently, considering the relevance and prominence of the job of teaching, we emphasize that collaborative work is an opportunity to improve the teaching and learning process through the training and professional growth of teachers. This encourages a more active participation among colleagues, with the promotion of networking in order to bring about a joint improvement in the educational system and especially in the third cycle.

1.1. Theoretical framework

1.1.1. Ongoing teacher training

One of the aspects that helps the most to cement the construction of the identity of teachers is the training that they receive, and this must include permanent or continuous training. In this respect, Canton & Tardif (2018) affirm that ongoing training is a "constant reconstruction process", explaining that it is mainly focused on practical activity and that it must be planned, executed and, above all, evaluated. Continuous training is a process that unfolds through multiple dimensions, which means that a large part of teacher training relies on the acquisition of knowledge through experience. This method of training provides responses and proposals to different realities and contexts, so thinking of a training based on techniques that is subject to pre-established aspects will not allow the necessary adjustment and appropriate proposals for the needs which are posed. In addition, this training model requires deep and frequent reflection as a challenge that will allow mobilization towards improvement processes in terms of the

job of teaching. Reflection and thought are essential elements that allow a rethinking of the concept of training and of analyzing, interpreting and offering ideas about a specific reality or context. For this and other reasons, it is said that continuous training is a constant reconstruction of professional activity. In consideration of all this, it may be affirmed that being a teacher implies being aware that one will continue to train and never stop learning as a professional. That is why it is called *permanent* or *continuous* training, that is to say, it refers to the constant process of learning through continuous professional development. Likewise, Imbernón (2014) emphasizes that teacher training involves constant change. This is not simple and concrete change, but rather a change in the culture of teacher training. In addition, ongoing training is not only a scientific and technical update that is to be put into practice, but also implies learning and unlearning issues and aspects in teacher training. Being active means that teachers are the protagonists and pillars of their own growth as professionals. To enable such changes in training, it is necessary to reconsider the meanings and implications of cultures and of the ways of identifying realities. This would require focusing on personal and professional experiences and on the experiences of each individual, making the context known for better understanding and to prevent teachers from falling into a decontextualization, distancing what is taught from the reality of what is intended to be taught.

The relevance of ongoing teacher training is crucial to the teaching field. Highlighting this, Imbernón (2018) presents 5 models that can be applied to continue growing in teaching. In the first place, there is the individually oriented training model, where teachers oversee the directing and building of their own learning through experiences and academic training processes. The second training model involves training or qualification, where there is an expert professional who puts forward the technical or methodological aspects and the strategies for the teachers who are already exercising teaching functions. The third model is based on observation and evaluation, that is to say, it seeks to carry out an observation of work and at the same time to evaluate it, exchanging proposals and ideas among classmates so that they may continue improving their work in class. The fourth model points towards the development and improvement of teaching, where a teacher is involved in the creation of activities and projects that aim to better understand the needs, problems and situations that occur in the environment. The fifth model is the research or inquiry process, in which the teacher proposes a competent investigation based on work experience, collecting data and information in order to be able to contrast them and thus formulate questions, proposals and pathways for an understanding of the reality that is presented.

Another challenge in ongoing teacher training has to do with the level of impact that it has on the job of teaching. García Álvarez (1993) mentions the need to evaluate and reflect on the aspects that ongoing teacher training influences, not only in the teachers themselves but also in their educational centers and in their students. That is to say, the results provided by ongoing training, the way in which it contributes to the quality of teaching and learning, and the solutions it offers for what is truly needed for the job of teaching are the aspects to be considered.

1.1.2. Collaborative work

The word *collaboration* is derived from the concept of *synergy*, which comes from the Greek συνεργός (synergós), alluding to the adjective collaborative. By fragmenting this term, we find that it is divided into two parts. The first is σuv (syn), a prefix that means "together" or "together with", and the second is the noun $\epsilon\rho\gamma\sigma\nu$ (ergon), which means "work, job" (Janz de Verón, 2011). Therefore, it may be inferred that the word collaborate, in its original etymology, means "working together" or "together with the work/job", referring to two or more people, entities or resources that collaborate and contribute to the achievement of determined objectives. By observing the meaning of the word *collaboration*, it may be deduced that if certain projects or proposals for improvement are considered in a school or educational center, a collaboration is needed for their achievement. Therefore, the process of working together, in which each person, entity or resource contributes collaboratively to achieve the proposed objectives, allows it to be affirmed that there is a "working together". This leads to a reflection on the importance of having a "collaborative" capacity, knowing that mutual help leads to a better coexistence wherever one is found. However, this term also includes related or synonymous words and phrases that have the same implication or the same meaning, such as the word *cooperation*' or the term *teamwork*. These terms also refer to work and collective contribution, but each one has its own characteristics.

1.1.3. Collaborative work for ongoing teacher training

However, Braidotti (2020) affirms that the importance of collaborative work lies in the connection between practice and educational reality in a broader and much more diverse world. That is to say, mixture, diversity and variety contribute to a better panorama of learning, forming their own worldviews through analysis, evaluation and collaboration of ideas, proposals, perceptions, and opinions, taking teaching to a more precisely oriented level in practical and relational terms. The presence of collaborative work may also be seen in some of the permanent training models proposed by Imbernón (2018), in the observation and evaluation model, in the development and improvement of teaching, and in inquiry or research. In these models, a large amount of collaboration is needed from different capacities, skills, and competences to pose problems and to propose possible solutions. What characterizes these models is that this individualistic training is biased, in as much as there is only one infallible expert and the teachers must follow what the expert proposes in their workshops and talks without considering the context and reality of each educational environment. It should be noted that for these models to have an effect, reflection and analysis need to be put into practice as means of facilitating learning and practice. Krichesky & Murillo (2018), in the results of the research that they have carried out, also highlight that collaborative work provides the opportunity for better communication between colleagues and superiors, making information more understandable and causing it to circulate in a more systematic and organized way, flowing in an appropriate manner. On the other hand, they highlight that collaboration provides a greater environment of trust and security, both for the process and for decision-making itself. In this way, an environment conducive to conflict resolution, listening, and assimilation is created, and it provides a space of security and support for all, with disposition, mutual aid, maturity, and trust as a guarantee. Likewise, Montero Mesa (2011) highlights the positive impact that a collaborative culture has

among teachers through support, collaboration, interdependence, and collective responsibility at work.

Collaborative work not only favors the interrelationship between colleagues and educational actors, but also allows teachers to establish a greater connection and harmonization with students, with families, and with the entire reality of the educational center in which they work. Hargreaves & O'Connor (2020) mention that collaboration allows for a greater connection of teachers with the different realities, rather than just facing the challenges present in the educational reality. In addition, this leads teachers to realize that the connection with the challenges and the different contextual circumstances of reality is what should drive mutual aid. Collaboration is more than a relationship between colleagues: it is action, it is training, it is growth, and, above all, it is a confrontation with reality.

The knowledge, skills, and abilities that one has are essential factors to acquire experience and trajectory in teaching. For this reason, collaborative work can be considered a part of the improvement not only of the permanent training of teachers, but also of their professional development in particular. In this respect, Aránega (2018) highlights that changes and social complexity more frequently require teachers to acquire new methods and structures of training and professional practice. Above all, mention should be made of the preponderant role played by the integration of diversity in the professional field, that is to say, the views, perspectives, ideas, and knowledge acquired. This helps to provide solutions and to create a system in which all are woven together, creating a well-fashioned and appropriate context for future decision making. Teachers are different but they all contribute their knowledge and their practice to build solutions and to find pertinent answers that strengthen the central axis of education: the formation of the subject of learning, thus improving the quality of teaching in educational centers.

1.1.4. Ongoing teacher training strategies that promote collaborative work

In order for collaborative work to have a significant positive effect on teacher training, it is essential for teachers to have training in reflective-practical culture. Imbernón (2019) highlights the impact that this will have on secondary school teachers (including those of the third cycle) if it is imparted in a forceful way, deepening the context, and he goes on to consider the effect of this on the student body. One of the strategies that can be considered to achieve this is the joint performance of research projects, presenting proposals for innovation and pedagogical improvement. These practices will help teachers to engage in constant reflection about their practice and their work. In addition, teaching processes can be evaluated and shared among peers who have the same motivation and enthusiasm to work collaboratively.

Likewise, another way in which it could be considered for training and collaborative work is constant active interaction with digital technological means. This will always represent a challenging strategy for teachers, but it is one of the ways in which they will be able to train and place themselves in the same context as their students. The use of digital technologies offers opportunities to deepen knowledge, and to practice and thus foster reflective capacity among colleagues in order to strengthen teacher practice (Cipagauta Moyano, 2020). On the other hand, Aguilar Moreno & Figueras Ferrer (2019) present a strategic proposal to form collaborative networks between peers from different educational centers. This will help teachers to continue to train through the acquisition of experiences by other colleagues, evaluating and analyzing practice together, and thus allowing the acquisition of new ideas, contributions, cultures, knowledge, methods, and innovations for teachers' work. The purpose is to grow in training through collaborative networks between teachers from different disciplines or subjects and positions.

1.1.5. Contextual and characteristic aspects of the third cycle of Basic School Education in Paraguay (3^o Ciclo E.E.B.)

First of all, we highlight what the Republic of Paraguay's National Constitution establishes in its Article 73 (Constitución Nacional de la República del Paraguay, 1992), which refers to education and culture, stating the following:

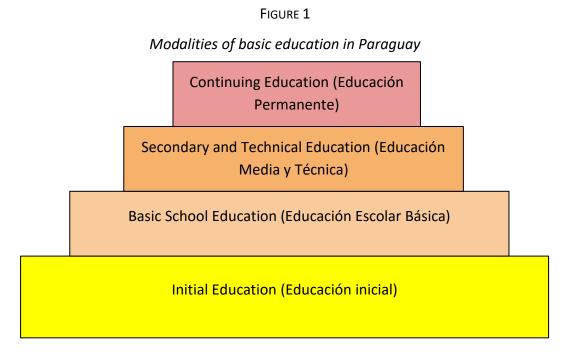
Everyone has the right to integral and permanent education, which as a system and process is carried out in the context of the culture of the community. Its aims are the full development of the human personality and the promotion of freedom, peace, social justice, solidarity, cooperation, and the integration of peoples; respect for human rights and democratic principles; the affirmation of the commitment to the homeland, of cultural identity and intellectual, moral, and civic training, as well as the elimination of educational content of a discriminatory nature. (p. 13)

This demonstrates the support and promotion by the Paraguayan State regarding the integral and continued education of all Paraguayan citizens. Hence, it is important to ensure ongoing teacher training in Paraguay, providing opportunities for growth and development in professional work. In addition, it not only promotes education, but also has the purpose of promoting commitment, responsibility, and collaboration, which are essential principles in the educational field.

Paraguay is a country with an area of 406,752 km² in the southern hemisphere of the American continent. It borders Bolivia and Brazil to the north, Brazil and Argentina to the east, Argentina to the south, and Bolivia to the west. It is divided into 2 areas: the Eastern and Western regions, the latter better known as the "Paraguayan Chaco". Its political division is formed by 17 departments, including 14 in the Eastern region and 3 in the Western region. The capital is the city of Nuestra Señora de la Asunción. It is a bilingual country whose official languages are Spanish and Guaraní. In many cases, the Guarani language predominates for communication, especially in rural areas. However, in the capital (Asunción) and in some other large cities in the country, Spanish and *Jopara* (a mixture of Guarani and Spanish) predominate in communication (Lafuente, 2009). The following is stated in Article 4 of Law N° 5749, which establishes the Organic Charter of the Ministry of Education and Sciences (Ley 5749, 2017):

Basic education is understood as that which all people need for their fulfillment and personal development, as well as for the exercise of active citizenship, their social inclusion, full employment, and the ability to continue learning throughout life. Secondary education will be promoted in its various modalities; it will be considered basic education because it is necessary for all citizens, and consequently it will be free in public educational institutions administered by the State, the body that will guarantee universal access and completion of secondary education as part of compulsory basic education.

This law, promulgated and sanctioned by the National Congress of the Republic of Paraguay, states that the modalities of basic education are as shown in the following figure.

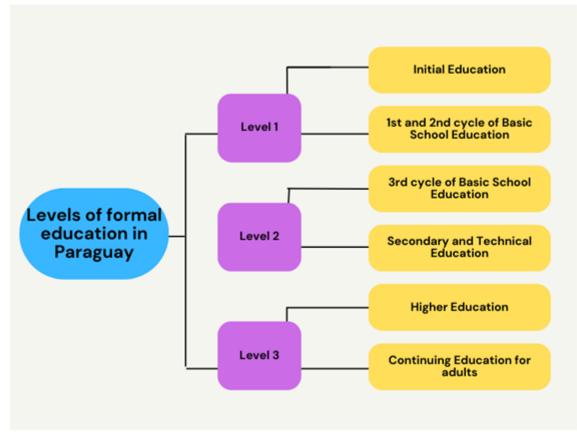


NOTE: Figure 1 shows the four levels and/or modalities which form basic education in Paraguay. SOURCE: Prepared by the authors with information obtained from Law 5749, which establishes the Organic Charter of the Ministry of Education and Sciences (2017).

The same document classifies formal education in Paraguay on the following levels: the first level corresponds to Initial Education, which includes Pre-kindergarten, Kindergarten and Pre-school. In addition, the first and second cycle of Basic School Education is included, comprising the first, second and third grades for the first cycle; and the fourth, fifth and sixth grades for the second cycle.

The second level encompasses the third cycle of Basic School Education, which includes the seventh, eighth and ninth grades. Secondary and Technical Education are also included, corresponding to the first, second and third year of Secondary School. On the third level there is University Higher Education as well as permanent education for young people and adults. The following figure gives a summary of these levels of formal education in Paraguay:

FIGURE 2 Levels of formal education in Paraguay



NOTE: Figure 2 summarizes the three levels on which formal education is established in Paraguay. SOURCE: Prepared by the authors with information obtained from Law 5749, which establishes the Organic Charter of the Ministry of Education and Sciences (2017).

As has been seen in the description of the levels and modalities of the educational system in Paraguay, the third cycle corresponds to the second level of formal education, as well as the modality of Basic School Education. It is aimed at the population of children and teenagers from 12 to 16 years old and it is made up of the seventh, eighth and ninth grades, according to General Education Law 1264, in the in-person modality, and it can be taken in official, private, and subsidized private educational institutions of the national education system. To access this cycle, applicants must have passed the last grade of the second cycle of the first level (sixth grade). The subjects proposed for the third cycle are: Spanish Language and Literature, Guaraní Ñe'ê ha Iñe'êporâhaipyre (Guaraní Language and Literature), Art Education, Mathematics, Natural Sciences and Health, History and Geography, Ethics and Citizenship Training, Work and Technology, and Physical Education. Each subject contains a specific number of teaching hours with a duration of 40 minutes each (Ministerio de Educación y Ciencias, 2022).

For a long time the third cycle has been a challenge, not only for teachers in the area but also for the educational system itself, since it has evolved continuously and adjustments and modifications had to be made for improvement. On the other hand, most of the teachers work part-time in different educational institutions and, according to their number of teaching hours, they are given the chance to teach the corresponding subjects.

2. Material and methods

The approach proposed for this research is qualitative, the objective being to investigate and consider collaborative work as a proposal for ongoing training of third-cycle teachers in Paraguay. Consequently, it is considered that the qualitative approach will allow us to discover the perceptions and theoretical-practical bases of its efficiency. "In qualitative study, the researcher is the instrument itself, so that the validity is found in the way in which he puts into practice his skill, ability and competence in his professional work" (Ñaupas *et al.*, 2014). In addition, Sandín Esteban (2003) highlights that when the context is considered, a better understanding could be obtained of the situation of the phenomenon in question. Hence, if the phenomena and events to be investigated are separated from the context or environment, they cannot be understood in depth. It should be noted that qualitative research has an interpretive character, with room for justifications, evidence, findings, and the human data collected, together with a theoretical framework.

This research has been designed for the collection of data and information through semi-structured interviews, emphasizing what Morga Rodríguez (2012) proposes, collecting more aspects that need to be clarified in order to have more data, giving depth and content to the information obtained. The semi-structured interview has been organized with 7 open questions because a degree of flexibility and adjustment towards the interviewees is intended. This will allow a better adaptation and a greater possibility of motivating the interlocutor to clarify terms, identify ambiguities, and reduce formalisms in an exaggerated way, without losing the focus or purpose of this valuable technique for obtaining information (Díaz-Bravo et al., 2013). As proposed, the semistructured interview was prepared to gather relevant information from educational directors and supervisors. In this case, a written invitation has been formulated and sent electronically to three (3) general directors of different educational institutions. To carry out the research, the following criteria of scientific rigor were considered: the credibility that evidences the phenomena and human experiences from the perceptions of the participants (Noreña et al., 2012) and the reflexivity that serves as a bridge between the researcher and the participating agents (Cuesta-Benjumea, 2011). In addition, the invitation was attached to the informed consent, which contains all the purposes and the procedure that will be carried out in the interview, considering the ethical criteria.

Finally, for the collection of data, this research worked with three directors of educational centers belonging to public schools of Paraguay, located in the departments of Caaguazú, San Pedro, and Central. A sample of n=3 participants was established. It should be noted that it has been chosen to interview the directors, considering that, from their positions, and regardless of the administrative function which they fulfill, they are agents who are involved in the job of teaching, playing a role of pedagogical accompaniment to the teaching staff.

The sample being formed by n=3, invitations to participate in the interviews via video calls were sent to the participants, with whom an interview with an average duration of 30 minutes was applied by the researcher. Subsequently, the recordings were downloaded and the data were transcribed with Atlas-ti, followed by the process of analysis, coding and categorization of the answers received according to the sequence of the question script.

3. Results

By performing an inductive analysis of the interviews held with the directors of different educational centers, it was possible to verify the perception that each one had about collaborative work and their proposal for permanent training of teachers, especially in the third cycle of Basic School Education in the country. Seven categories were identified that could help to understand and interpret the arguments of their perceptions. To do this, shown below is the matrix of the categories which emerged and the conceptual map of the project developed with Atlas-ti:

Table	1
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N⁰	Category	Comment	Code	Frequency	Actor involved
1	Teacher profile	The profile describes what the interviewees have shown in terms of their training, their experience and the pathway of their work as educators and/or directors.	•	4	School directors
2	Previous attitudes	Behaviors that the interviewees expressed, thus highlighting the way they felt when they were or currently feel as classroom teachers.	•	3	School directors
3	Director's perception	All the thoughts and perspectives that the interviewed participants have regarding collaborative work as a lifelong learning method for teachers.	•	4	School directors
4	Teacher attitudes	Conduct or behavior of teachers regarding their work and environment.	•	3	School directors
5	Opportunities	Space, environment, and situations that promote and facilitate the improvement of the job of teaching.	•	4	School directors
6	Limitations	Difficulties, challenges, situations, needs or problems that form an impediment to the performance of a project or activity.	•	5	School directors
7	Recommendations	Suggestions by the interviewees to be more open towards aspects that could contribute to the practice of collaborative work.	•	7	School directors
			Challenges	3	Teachers Students

Categorization of the data obtained from the analysis of interviews with school directors

SOURCE: Prepared by the author based on the data obtained from the Project in Atlas-ti (2022).

3.1. Teacher profile

This category, which emerged in Question 1, details and describes the profile, management, experience, and training that the interviewees have had and the path they have followed in their work as educators and, at the same time, as directors. Several subcategories emerge from this, in which their educational management and training for their activity, both initial and permanent, stand out. In addition, two of them stressed

that they come from rural areas, and two of them mentioned that they oversee administrative management or positions. It is also important to note that the three were previously teachers or professors who worked in the classroom, teaching students. In fact, one of them had mentioned that even though she is a director, at the same time she has teaching hours in some courses of the third cycle of Basic School Education. This is very important because it is part of the permanent training, especially of the directors, since it allows them to get to know and above all, to understand the hard job of the teaching staff and the training that each one requires. This is related to one of the problems that Medina (2013) describes, regarding the importance of incorporating and adding to training the knowledge that teachers have acquired during their experience in professional practice.

3.2. Previous attitudes

The second question asked participants how they felt about their peers when they were teachers or classroom professors. Accordingly, they mentioned some previous attitudes relating to the behaviors that they had showed, highlighting the way they felt earlier or at present as classroom teachers. From these previous attitudes, different subcategories emerged: autonomy, which one of the interviewees expressed in this way: "-They felt freer and more independent" in carrying out the work, before their promotion to managerial positions. On the other hand, the collaborative attitude emerges when one of the interviewees states that during the time he worked as a teacher, experiences were shared with colleagues. He also mentioned the following: "-There was always a bond of solidarity, communication and mutual support between comrades. We talked frequently to exchange experiences and to turn weaknesses that arose in the institution into strengths."

3.3. Director's perception

This category encompasses all the thoughts and perspectives that the interviewed participants have with respect to collaborative work as a lifelong learning method among teachers. Each of them manifested his or her perception and these subcategories associated with their respective perceptions and points of view emerged. They were associated with learning circles among teachers, a term that interviewees used to refer to frequent meetings in which knowledge is exchanged and experiences are shared to improve work in the classroom. On the other hand, their perception is also associated with some difficulties relating to problematic situations entailing impediments to collaborative work. One interviewee said: "And generally, it is in public institutions that it is more difficult to work collaboratively." These difficulties will be described in more detail in the category of limitations. The proposal of collaborative work also depends a great deal on leadership, as one of the participants stated. Collaborative leadership highlights the way the directors carried out work in their schools.

3.4. Teacher attitudes

Participants were asked if they consider that there is an openness to collaborative work on the part of teachers, considering how hard their work is in schools. One participant said that many of them are still closed to the possibility of working collaboratively among colleagues. Another interviewee added that "the teacher is not always open to working with colleagues and may be unwilling to say, for example, that he or she has difficulties or deficiencies and would like to pool ideas for improvement. It's like the teacher shuts down and sometimes doesn't accept that he or she needs others' contributions". Motivation is also mentioned, highlighting that, on the other hand, there are educational centers where teachers show a predisposition, a positive attitude, and great involvement to work collaboratively. Yet another interviewee believes that "teachers do show an openness to collaborative work and they even clamor for such learning spaces". This highlights the fact that, aside from individualistic attitudes, there are also teachers with an open attitude with regard this proposal for teacher training. In addition, some aspects emerged that were identified as challenges for teachers in terms of collaborative work, such as working for better communication between pedagogical supervision and schools, raising awareness among teachers that what is important is "helping each other and not controlling", and becoming aware that growth forms part of teachers' permanent training.

3.5. Opportunities

Collaborative work provides a better educational environment and space, that is to say, constructive places and moments for learning. The interviewees unanimously highlighted that working collaboratively provides the opportunity to grow together and above all, to learn how to teach. Collaboration also provides a much broader vision of work because there is greater objectivity and more opinions for future decision-making. One of the participants added that "several heads think better than one, and in a circle of learning many ideas arise, many new things that help us to innovate our practice every day". On the other hand, it helps to organize periodic meetings with a large part of the educational community, highlighting that, in these meetings, the different contexts can be valued and preparations can be made for the performance of common plans that allow teachers to cope with the educational process in their respective institutions. Likewise, this approach not only provides opportunities for the teachers themselves, but also for the student body. With a collaborative vision and policy, a greater quantity and quality of didactic resources are available, such as better lesson plans, books, and didactic strategies that can be used for the development of classes.

3.6. Limitations

In the first place, all the interviewees highlighted that decentralized availability is a strong limitation to working collaboratively in an educational center. This decentralized availability refers to the fact that third-cycle teachers have teaching hours in several different educational centers during the week. This implies that it is not always possible to combine the schedules when planning permanent training through collaborative work. One of the directors expressed it in this way: "I have colleagues who even have schedules in 7 educational institutions, to which they have to travel during the week." Secondly, a lack of communication between teachers, principals, and even pedagogical supervisors is also evidenced. One participant stated that "there is no fluid communication between colleagues, it is like each one enters his or her own room, does what he or her has to do, and then just leaves". Unfortunately, this type of working environment does not help or contribute much to teaching staff with respect to finding an openness to working collaboratively. In addition, a working environment of this type

is the result of a lack of trust and dialogue, and it often hinders good decision-making in the exercise of teaching.

Thirdly, many teachers show demotivation, with a lack of responsibility, initiative, and commitment. Each teacher is completely closed within his or her schedules and is not always open to proposals for new strategies. Fourthly, another limitation that was highlighted by one of the participants is the lack of regulation of the times for performing in a normal way the duties and activities planned or proposed in the teaching framework. This can partly be related to decentralized availability, since a lack of time means that it is not possible to regularize pre-established jobs and activities synchronously or less asynchronously. Fifth, staff shortages are also a limiting factor for collaborative professionalism. One of the participants mentions that she even has to devote some hours to substitutions due to a shortage of teachers in the third cycle of her educational center.

3.7. Recommendations

The recommendations presented here are suggestions from the interviewees with respect to showing a greater openness towards aspects that could contribute to the practice of collaborative training. These suggestions are based on their experience and encompass everything that was discussed in the conversation on the subject under consideration. It was recommended that there should be a more open attitude with respect to the transfer of knowledge, that is to say, "a teacher should not be jealous of his knowledge but rather, if someone knows more, he or she should share it in order to enrich the institution." Transference is important for teacher training because it is what helps to use and to disseminate what has been learned in different ways. Taking the initiative to motivate oneself and showing a commitment to collaborative work was what another participant recommended as an appropriate way to start taking the first steps with regard to this proposal for permanent training. For this reason, it is important for there to be a predisposition and trust among teachers, as mentioned in the previous categories. Two of the interviewees emphasized the taking of initiative and highlighted the importance of "showing an openness to participate in learning circles, to ask questions to colleagues, to help others and, above all, not to be ashamed to ask a question when they have one". In addition, through this proposal, it will be possible to better develop the skills and abilities required to improve and perfect the job of teaching. This means exercising practice and teaching potential through daily learning. Above all, teachers should be prepared to experiment with new strategies and ways of working, that is to say, "that they are encouraged to take the first step towards working collaboratively, because that will help to expand the panorama of work", as was suggested by one of the interviewees.

On the other hand, the interviewees recommended that each teacher should have a spirit of vocation, love, dedication, and endeavor to provide better education and to enhance the job of teaching. Above all, one should visualize the future. In other words, as one of the participants recommended, it is necessary "to have a vision of change, the change that our country really needs and that is to be found in every teacher. And above all, we should not get tired of doing our job well and of dreaming of a better future". It is important to create projects, proposals, and new ideas for the improvement of teacher training and education.

4. Discussion and conclusion

Both the interviewees and some authors concur that collaborative work is essential for teaching. The strengths that the participants have highlighted with respect to collaborative work as training may be related to some of the opportunities presented by collaborative work as a method of lifelong learning. First, it is related to the improvement of professional practice and experience. What Aránega (2018) highlights in terms of changes and constant social complexity, and the demand for new forms of practice and professional training, can be seen in the statements of the interviewees in this regard. Moreover, the participants mentioned that the integration of various knowledges, skills, and experiences contribute greatly to the improvement of the job of teaching.

Secondly, by emphasizing the continuing education of third-cycle teachers, the interviewees still rely on lifelong learning that is individually oriented. Here it is good to remember that in the proposals of Imbernón (2018) regarding permanent training models, there are two models that relate to individually-oriented training and three models that provide an opening and an opportunity for collaborative work. Individuallyoriented training and training in general are very good models for continuing teacher training. Nevertheless, they tend more towards individual training or the existence of an "infallible expert" who provides the new guidelines and methods for the job of teaching, limiting the opportunity to propose and share knowledge and experiences with a view to growing together. However, the models of observation-evaluation, development, and improvement of teaching and inquiry or research are propellants of learning and training that are more collaborative, more participatory, and more appropriate for involvement in the job of teaching and in teacher training. In view of this, it was also observed that, when speaking of continuing training, teachers are often still limited to the first two models of lifelong learning mentioned above. Hence, it is important to promote the training models that aim more towards collaboration and greater approximation to context.

Thirdly, considering the limitations and some of the perceptions of the participants, putting into practice or proposing collaborative work among teachers as a method of ongoing training still poses challenges. On the one hand, some argue that a restructuring of teacher training is needed to take into account the importance of collaborative work, even from the time of the initial training of teachers, in order to avoid what Bozu (2009) calls the "clash of the student with reality", creating a resistance on the part of the novice teacher to changes and other ways of teaching and learning. On the other hand, this restructuring also coincides with what Medina (2011) proposes in terms of learning orientations, inclining a little more towards the practical, technological, and sociocritical orientation for the performance of teacher training. What's more, in the selfsame process of initial training, teachers become aware that collaborative work must form the framework of the job of teaching and of the process of continued training.

Fourthly, it is also highlighted that there is still a large percentage of isolation or individualism in the job of teaching. As may be seen in the fourth category with respect to the teaching attitude, individualism emerges. If we relate it to what Hargreaves (1996) and Lavié Martínez (2004) say, we can see that in institutions there is still a restrictive individualism because limitations and needs that induce individual work are highlighted.

Likewise, there is a strategic individualism since in many cases the guidelines and procedures are strategically oriented towards individual work and training. The interviewees emphasize their position in favor of working collaboratively, while pointing out that there are many limitations and challenges that are beyond their control, hindering the opportunity to undertake a commitment to the collaborative training of third-cycle teachers. Lastly, it is also worth mentioning that the participants presented the context and reality that currently exists in the third cycle of Basic School Education in Paraguay. In the third cycle of Basic School Education, teachers do not always have the complete or sufficient disposition to be able to develop projects, research or collaborative learning circles, which form part of lifelong learning models. This is due to teachers' long teaching hours and the fact that they must teach in several different institutions over the course of the week. It is a matter of fact in Paraguay that needs to be restructured and reorganized in order to be able to begin to think of a more collaborative culture not only as a strategy, but also as part of ongoing teacher training. Escobar Yegros & Aguilar Morínigo (2002) propose that active teachers embrace collaborative work and consider it a part of their updating, improvement, and ongoing training. Different factors and reasons still exist that limit this proposal. The directors have been very open and have made recommendations for each institution with a view to beginning to put into practice and to carry out the collaborative culture in order to improve education in Paraguay. Huberman (1994) reminds us that the aspects to be considered as important in ongoing training would be, first, to start from reality and evident needs, so that after analyzing them, proposals for solutions and improvement may be put forward. Second, constant dialogue is essential to learn about expectations and to formulate objectives, goals, and ideas with the aim of proposing a training that promotes improvement. Third, it is important to evaluate the achievement of objectives that promote help among teachers and members of the educational community for the purpose of solving problems and situations, allowing continued growth in the educating experience in this way.

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