

EDU WORLD 2022**Edu World International Conference Education Facing Contemporary World Issues****COLLABORATION AND AGENCY IN TEACHING FOR
INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY**

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Abstract

In this analysis it is proposed to address two research questions: (1) what is the role of collaboration in teachers' professional growth and ability to educate for diversity and inclusion in Romanian classrooms? and (2) how does it affect teachers' professional agency? Our data includes semi-structured interviews and voice-recorded conversations of teachers collaboratively planning ways forward in their classroom teaching through Lesson Study. Findings suggest that collaborative work that is dialogical, purposeful, and learner-centred might help teachers change their perspective on teaching for diversity and inclusion, moving away from viewing students as problems, to seeing what they are capable of instead. Further debate and research are necessary since some collaborative practices and the contexts they create, make this particular transformation in teachers' perspectives and their sense of professional agency less likely. Teachers position what is important to them in the requirements of the practice they recognize, suggesting that professional agency is historically and contextually constructed. It requires ongoing interpretation because it is neither an attribute nor a representation of a fixed self. This has important ramifications for professional development initiatives.

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1. Introduction

Current forms of teacher preparation call for critical reading to advance inquiry and exploratory work past the levels of what and why supports learning and onto understanding how learning is conceived. To do this, it might be necessary that we look past typical perceptions of teachers' learning as merely focused on procedures, management, materials, and curriculum (Athanases et al., 2012), or as linearly transferring from self to curriculum and then students' outcomes (Vermunt & Endedijk, 2011).

To account for the interconnected, co-evolving nature of individual and collective instantiations of learning, and professional identities (Edwards, 2015) and the significance of developing a deep understanding of the relationship between how teachers position themselves and position others in the activity of learning within the school, it is proposed to understand the individual learning and development situated in environmental affordances for thinking and acting (Cole, 1996).

2. Problem Statement

In past scholarship collaboration engaging professionals in addressing the problems of everyday practice, particularly when situated in the context of work, has widely been appointed as a critical element in the effective approaches to teachers' professional development (Borko et al., 2010; Mitescu-Manea, 2016; Opfer & Pedder, 2011). Whilst a lot has been argued as to why collaboration works and what makes it such a great environment for teachers' professional learning and development, there is still plenty to understand about the relationship between teachers' collaboration, learning, and professional agency, partly because of a lack of consensus over conceptualizations of these three notions, and partly because they are difficult to map over the vast diversity of everyday teaching practices.

In their contribution to addressing how learning evolves in teacher groups, De Jong et al. (2021) observe that most longitudinal studies looking at teachers' professional learning and collaboration mainly focus on teachers' perceptions of learning and of activities of learning overall (p. 2). This leaves much uncharted territory in how effective collaborative professional learning works. Lefstein et al. (2020) suggest that an effective manner of exploring this territory is by diving into teachers' dialogues and conversations for more insight into what and how happens during collaborative work. In their longitudinal study of teacher learning in collaborative groups, De Jong et al. (2021) noted that groups of teachers differ in the amount, consistency, and stability of learning outcomes they self-report. The differences relate to the number and types of dialogic moves between teachers within each group, teachers challenging each other coupled with teachers' collective participation and facilitation in the group being noted among the most effective dialogic moves supporting teachers' learning (De Jong et al., 2021, p.1).

Along with a growing interest in understanding collaborative contexts for professional learning, there has been noted a similarly heightened interest in the concept of teacher agency. Marked by a generally disputed ontology (Brodie, 2019) and a difficulty in reaching consensus over an exact and meaningful conception of it (Aspbury-Miyaniishi, 2022), the concept of teacher agency bears important implications for professional development and teachers' professionalism. According to Eteläpelto et al. (2013), agency involves practitioners taking a stand and having the power to shape their professional identity and work. This ability is constantly developed. Since agency places a strong emphasis on

commitment, responsibility, strong judgments, self-evaluation, connection to the common good, and attention to what people do, it follows that consideration should be given to some interaction between person and practice or culture when studying agency (Edwards, 2015, p.779). However, as Aspbury-Miyaniishi (2022) observes, this is often proving to be easier said than done, for whilst there is often a perfunctory recognition that social factors both enable and constrain agency, how this happens remains undertheorized in the literature on teacher agency (p. 2). Brodie (2019) addressed a similar concern, observing that whilst the rhetoric for certain approaches to teachers' learning can be quite appealing, implementation of such approaches in support of strong teacher development can be quite problematic. Brodie (2019) focused on exploring the relationship between teacher agency and teachers' choices to leave or stay in professional learning communities and observed that understanding the dynamic between individual and social factors in teacher agency serves to unpack important elements of participation and sustainability of professional learning communities.

Here, it is hypothesized that conceptualizations of agency and collaborative work have a significant relationship. These conceptualizations are contextually constructed and discursively explorable, making it clear how crucial it is to understand the standards of behavior, the motives, power relations, and the community that support collaborative work, teaching, and learning practices. The purpose of verifying such a hypothesis surpasses merely adding to the appeal of arguments promoting collaborative learning for teachers' professional development. Instead, it is proposed critically explore ways into understanding how to render collaborative work operational for professional learning in specific contexts of practice. To this avail, introducing the concept of teacher agency is paramount.

3. Research Question

It is proposed an exploration of the relationship between understanding teachers' professional agency and the various conceptualizations and practices of collaboration in teaching for diversity and inclusion in Romanian educational contexts. There are two research questions answered:

- i. what is the role of collaboration in teachers' professional growth and ability to educate for diversity and inclusion in Romanian classrooms?
- ii. how does it affect teachers' professional agency?

4. Purpose of the Study

The proposed objective is to comprehend the rationale behind teachers' responses to the difficulties of inclusive classrooms in Romania. It also looks at the dynamics of interactions between the various voices contributing to the narratives of learning to teach for diversity and inclusion at different levels of pedagogical decision-making and how these interactions affect teachers' perceptions of collaboration and professional agency.

5. Research Methods

Our data sample consists of semi-structured interviews with school administrators and teachers about the various forms of teacher collaboration and their meanings in the school context. Additionally, it

includes voice recordings of conversations between teachers as they prepare, reflect on and explore ways to improve how they teach in the classroom through Lesson Study (Dudley, 2013)

Eight teachers and two managers from three lower-secondary schools in three different regions in Romania took part in the interviews. Participation was benevolent and followed an open, written invitation from the researcher, explaining the purpose, scope, and procedures in the proposed study and granting participants anonymity and complete freedom of choice in degree and type of participation. Two teachers accepted to take part in a collaborative work task addressing inclusive teaching, which was structured on the principles and methodology of Lesson Study (LS). In LS ((Dudley, 2013), teachers who want to improve aspects of the learning of their pupils, work together to plan in detail lessons which they first teach, then they discuss based on what they have observed had happened in terms of students' learning and annotate their plans about the distances between their projections and what and how students have experienced and learned. Plans are refined and a new teaching–observing–reflecting cycle can begin.

The conversations between the two teachers' pre- and post-LS cycles have been voice recorded. All voice-recorded data has been transcribed and analysed at a later stage.

The analysis involved chronotopical analysis (Bakhtin, 1981) and positioning theory (Davies & Harré, 1990) for the interview data, and Sociocultural Discourse Analysis methodology - SCDA (Mercer, 2004; Vrikki et al., 2017; Warwick et al., 2016) for the conversational data. In Table 1 it is presented a synthesis of the analytical instruments and examples from our data sets are being used to illustrate each of them

Table 1. Language data analytical tools with examples from data

Conversational Data: Sociocultural Discourse Analysis (SCDA, Mercer, 2004)		
Dialogic moves	(REQ) Requesting information	„What should we be focusing on?”
	(BUI) Building on information	„And we could then split them into groups”
	(REA) Providing evidence for reasoning	„Because there's little time”
	(CHA) Challenging	„It's not that! I think he just wants to seem different”
	(SUP) Supporting	„Yes, I think so too”
	(S1) One student	„Gabriel said exactly what we wanted it to”
Scope of conversation	(S2) More/all students	„Kids learn this stuff quickly”
	(TR1) The teachers' own reflections/emotions	„I did not feel at all watched, I felt supported”
	(TR2) Both/ all teachers' reflections/emotions	„Generally, when you're doing this kind of activity, other kids might catch our eyes” „He's not shying away from saying what he thinks. He'll say “Hey I am singing I love girls...””
Learning processes	(DL) Descriptive	„I like this about him”
	(IL) Interpretative	
Interview data: Chronotopical analysis & Positioning Theory		
Chronotopical analysis	(IC) Personal chronotopes	„I was really stressed in the beginning...I did not think it was going to go well and things are going to work out”
	(SC) Shared chronotopes	„She said to ask them to present ...I did not think of it. It was her idea (...) I am really curious to see what she will say to me

		<i>tomorrow because we need to move forward from here (...) And I am going to see what she thought of. And we will come up with an idea”</i>
	(PC) Public chronotopes	<i>„Teachers don’t want to because they are scared of an idea they are not familiar with”</i>
Positioning Theory	(P) Positioning	<i>„We cannot change their destiny, but we can do something about their chances, and we don’t”</i>
	(BP) Being positioned	<i>„The teacher should not be the person good for everything”</i>

Sociocultural Discourse Analysis methodology (SCDA, Mercer, 2004). Views language as a social mode of thinking – a tool for teaching and learning, constructing knowledge, creating joint understanding, and tackling problems collaboratively. Learning is a temporal, extended process. The various dialogic moves show contributions to dialogue, taking the conversation forward (Warwick et al., 2016) and include: a) requesting information (teachers ask clarifications, questions, invite opinions or reasoning), b) building on ideas (building on ideas or come to an agreement after a difference of opinion), c) providing evidence for reasoning: teachers explain their reasoning, illustrate their opinion. The Scope of conversation indicates the extent of the conversation (one or more students). The Learning processes are identifiable as descriptive ones, meaning co-construction of knowledge at the level of representing a selection of what was known (i.e. describing lesson plans, expectations for pupils, and teaching), or interpretative ones: indicating the teacher’s capacity to attend intentionally to classroom events, a capacity developing with experience.

Chronotopical analysis (Bakhtin, 1981; Brown & Renshaw, 2006) and Positioning theory (Davies & Harré, 1990) have been used mainly in the analysis of data from interviews. Chronotopical analysis has been used in past research to explore how students express their agency by actively shaping the space-time contexts of the classroom, drawing on past, present, and future temporal relations through discursive interaction (Brown & Renshaw, 2006). In the analysis of the relationship between teacher agency and various conceptualizations of collaborative practices, we have looked at the discursive juxtaposition of personal, shared, and public chronotopes. To this avail, we employed the Positioning theory (Davies & Harré, 1990) in analysis, focusing on the nature, formation, influence, and ways of change of local systems of rights and duties as shared assumptions about them influence small-scale interactions. In our analysis, the categories of self (positioning) and another positioning (being positioned) helped operationalize various subject-positions discursively constructed through conceptualizing and reflecting on collaborative practices. It also helped render visible the various instantiations of teacher agency in the context of collaborative work.

6. Findings

In this section, we first present data demonstrating the discursive construction of the meaning of collaboration, highlighting the significance of comprehending practice norms, motives, power dynamics, and community framing articulations of collaborative work and teaching and learning for diversity and inclusion in various contexts of educational practice (research question 1). Then we turn to explore how

conceptualizations of teacher agency are rendered visible in the discourse of collaboration and of teaching for inclusion and diversity (research question 2).

6.1. Collaborative work in support of teaching for inclusion and diversity

One first category of findings in our study regards the difficulty of locating opportunities for teachers to work collaboratively. Only 2 teachers in the group of participants in this study - one teaching the Romanian language, the other Music – agreed to take part in the Lesson Study approach. And for these two teachers, it was possible to schedule only one cycle of planning-teaching and reflecting out of the three in the original design of LS. By all accounts, this is not the most encouraging outcome of our (or any) research efforts, but we found that in understanding this episode of teachers attempting collaboration rest significant repositories for mapping conceptualizations of collaboration and teacher agency onto everyday practices in education.

The many constraints to working collaboratively in the school context have been articulated by all participants in the study, indicating that the meaning of collaboration is contextually constructed in close connection to the affordances teachers find in the contexts of practice. In articulating what they perceive as constraining aspects of collaboration, teachers render visible the various norms of practice, motives, and power relations – which are significant in how teachers come to conceptualize collaborative work and their participation in it. In Table 2 examples of constraints teachers position in their explorations of collaborative work addressing teaching for inclusion and diversity is presented.

Table 2. Categories of constraints framing the conceptualizations and practices of collaboration in everyday teaching practices

Category of constraint	Excerpt from language data (interviews/ conversational)	Coding – Chronotopical analysis & Positioning Theory	Norms of practice/Motives/ Power relations mediating conceptualization of collaboration onto everyday teaching practice
Scheduling conflicts	“Scheduling our time together is hard, though. The contents we can easily structure, associate, dissociate, diversify...” (Teacher)	SC, P	Scheduling teaching time – one teacher per year group at a time (Norm of practice)
Curriculum requirements/pressures	“Let’s not forget that language is in the exams, and thus I have to go through the contents in the curriculum, thus the other specialists follow what is required in the discipline that will be in the exams” (Teacher)	PC – IC, P	Hierarchical positioning of different subject teachers (Power relations)
Appraisal mechanisms	“...and there are the parents who want accomplishments and make comparisons between the results one or another teacher has obtained” (School manager) “There won’t be much collaboration as long as we have	PC, BP PC	Motives – of different categories of stakeholders in education; Engaging teachers in competitive appraisal

Opportunities for collaboration & professional learning	gradația de merit (appraisal) ” (Teacher) “I did not feel at all monitored, I felt supported. This is really rare! -I like it! I’ve done it before...nice classes” (Teacher)	procedures for higher payments (Norms of practice) Set of cultural expectations associated with having another teacher in the classroom (Norms of practice)
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Conversational data from the LS cycle participants have experienced suggest that through dialogical, purposeful, and learner-centred collaborative LS, a shift in teachers’ perspective on collaborative teaching for diversity and inclusion may take place - from positioning students as problematic to visualizing what they can do. This finding is consistent with findings from prior research (Dudley, 2013). In Table 3 an example of conversational data is presented, along with the codes used to identify the dialogical moves, the scope of the conversation, and the type of learning process (Mercer, 2004; Warwick et al., 2016).

Table 3. Constructing the meaning of collaboration in deliberate, dialogic reflection on co-teaching

Excerpt from conversational data	Coding
“T1: We should think of an activity you lead and we focus on these four, but we’re not giving them leading roles. T2: In general, when you’re doing this kind of activity, other kids night catches your eye too T1: In history, we haven’t done group work because there is no time T2: Yeah, I know T1: But in other disciplines, they don’t either T2: Well, not group work then...it doesn’t necessarily have to be group work T1: Group work matters a lot! It really matters! There is a certain freedom, the kids talk to each other, it matters...but they don’t do it in these classes there isn’t enough time T2: In one hour per week. T1: No, it cannot be done. And look how hard it is for them to help each other with the chairs, and... T2: No, they are too young to ask efficiency now”	REQ, S2, DL BUI, S2, TR2, IL REA, TR2, IL SUP, TR1 BUI, TR2, DL CHA, DL CHA, S2, IL BUI BUI, REA, S2, DL BUI, REA, S2, IL

Albeit the sample of conversational data analyzed in this study is quite small, the language is packed with evidence of dialogic moves that show teachers engaging in inquiry, reflecting, challenging, and providing reasoning for their positions. In conversation teachers often transition from individual to collective perspectives over conceptualizing students’ experiences in the classroom, and teachers’ professional experiences. The space-time relations between the actions of the two categories of educational actors are evolving in tandem with the scope of teachers’ conversation.

Collaborative experiences being revisited in interviews indicate an alignment/coupling of teachers’ perspectives on the role and impact of collaborative work on students’ participation, development, and improved academic achievement. However, when pondering on the outcomes of students’ learning, the two teachers position their collaboration as beneficial mainly because it offers teachers (generally positioning as subject specialists) an opportunity to provide multiple perspectives on teaching contents, in a logic of hierarchical attribution of importance, favoring subjects in the national examinations:

But how could I ever get to the level of the information a specialist in music or art could come with?” Nor can they come in and start interpreting a literary text!... Let’s not forget that language is in the exams, and thus I have to go through the contents in the curriculum, thus the other specialists follow what is required in the discipline that will be in the exams (Teacher).

6.2. Teacher agency

In this study, analysis of teachers’ experiences and reflections on collaboratively working to address teaching for inclusion and diversity issues in the classrooms has consistently provided evidence that conceptualizing collaboration intertwines with mapping teacher agency over everyday teaching practices. Teachers engage in interpretative labour with hermeneutic effects on their sense of professional agency by identifying, interpreting, and responding to various occurrences in practice. However, as we have shown in our previous section, the many constraints and boundaries upon which collaborative practices are being conceptualized in teachers’ language, are to similar extent building blocks to conceptualizing their professional agency as well. If conceptualized as a capacity to make choices and take principled action (Anderson, 2010; Eteläpelto et al., 2013) which is achieved when a teacher can choose between different possible options in the situation in light of their purposes and intentions (Priestly et al., 2015) – then it is simply considerate we look at our data with Aspbury-Miyanishi (2022)’s concern in mind, for clarifying what choices confront a teacher and why is the teacher seeing those choices and not others?

Our findings indicate that in contexts of everyday teaching practice where collaboration faces so many constraints, there is potentially a great chance that a comparably rich and diverse plethora of instantiations of the inhibited professional agency may surface at various discursive levels. Examples of such instantiations from our data sample are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Instantiations of inhibited agency in mediating policies of inclusion and diversity through everyday teaching practices

The teacher as a content specialist	“We should be helped. I cannot. I am empathetic, but I think there should be specialists dealing with...let me work with the others, deliver them the information ”
The teacher as an academic performance elicitor	“On certain subjects, especially those in the exams, there will be parents who require performance, they seek places in the National Olympics in math and language, At a certain point this becomes the parameter you’re measured by as a teacher” (Teacher)
The teacher as a skillful master of specifically attributed sets of teaching tools (e.g. assessment tools)	“Music is on the second page. Music is not important (...) You cannot leave uncovered a moment in the school’s life – we sing for mom’s day, dad’s day, flag’s day.... wait a minute, I am not a supplier of artistic moments. I have a subject to teach. When I introduced quizzes at Music...wait a minute! What do you mean by quiz in Music Education? But we do teach theory that can be tested. It had not been heard of before ...Well I am not that cold-hearted, because I know they work a lot for other subjects... but is just not normal that way!” (Teacher)
The teacher as a mediator in the school–parents’ relations	“There are families who won’t accept their child has a problem and they hide the condition from us, that is they don’t provide all the medical records when they bring the child to the school., possibly because they still fear we won’t have their child (...) I’ve made some parents admit ...and at the parents meeting the other parents started telling me I should insure safety to all children in the school” (School manager)

Whilst Aspbury-Miyaniishi (2022) argues that in the dynamic of the classroom environment, and oftentimes in lesson planning too, teachers acting in the moment is more intuitive than it is the result of concrete, discrete choices, and relates this sort of “skilful coping” (Dreyfus, 2005) to the teachers’ responsiveness and readiness to read the affordances in the context of the activity, he also argues that this responsiveness is something teachers can improve in contexts of co-teaching (usually, but not necessarily, with a more experienced colleague). As such, conceptualizations of agency and collaborative teaching practices seem to be mutually generative. Whilst in our findings we could not see evidence of the distinction Aspbury-Miyaniishi (2022) proposes between conscientious deliberation and skilful intuition in what teachers do (or do not do) when showing agency in the classroom, the co-generative tandem between conceptualizations of collaborative work and everyday practices of teacher agency could be noted.

It is also important to note that only specific types of collaborative practice, such as lesson study, provide opportunities for descriptive and interpretative learning processes (Vrikki et al., 2017), as well as an expanded scope of inquiry that incorporates discussion of the teacher’s reasoning (noticing and reflecting) and emotions, making the relational, dialogical aspect of teachers’ professional agency visible:

I’ve seen the kids differently than I see them in my class of music. At least the four we focused on, you know? Kids whose voices have not been heard felt frustrated... Did you see it? [Ch1] was frustrated that maybe [Child 2] but [Child 2] said exactly what he wanted....I think for him was a wonderful experience! (Teacher during LS reflection)

Others, however, are paired with a range of constrained professional agency manifestations. It is possible to explore multiple perspectives in support of teaching for diversity and inclusion via collaborative practices that emphasize the relational, dialogical nature of teachers’ professional agency. This may augment teachers’ perception of the affordances in their context of the activity, which Aspbury-Miyaniishi (2022) had proposed as a basic way of enabling and supporting teacher agency. Teachers position what is important to them about the requirements of practice they are aware of, suggesting that professional agency is historically formed. However, it does not reflect a fixed self. So constant interpretation is necessary. This contradicts certain notions of professionalism (i.e. focusing on accountability and measurement) and has important ramifications for professional development initiatives:

I would be more interested in a correct evaluation in the first place and with the diagnosis, the doctor, the psychologist, and the neurologist should say this kid can do only this, and then this is what I will be planning for. If I see progress, I can say I went a little farther because I’ve seen the kid could do it. And then we can talk about an improvement in the condition (School manager).

7. Conclusions

We proposed understanding the relationship between teachers’ professional agency and the various conceptualizations of collaborative work and approaches to teaching for diversity and inclusion in Romanian classrooms. We conclude similar to Lefstein et al. (2020), by observing that collaborative’ practices, norms, and structures are complex, interlocking, and situated, and one element cannot be separated from its interactions with other elements to fully comprehend. Understanding the complex

dynamics of the relational nature of professional agency with collaborative practices in teaching may constitute the cornerstone of understanding what teachers make of collaborative work and learning experiences and how they achieve professional agency across real possibilities for action they perceive. Exploring the conceptualizations of collaboration and teacher agency as tandems across everyday educational practices reveals important implications for understanding learning and professional development in teaching. In this, teacher agency does not appear as an individual or collective attribute, or as Aspbury-Miyaniishi (2022) puts it – something teachers have - but as something they can achieve in practice, to various degrees. Context and culture play significant parts in how conceptualizations of collaboration and agency map across teaching practices and must be factored in the development of effective and sustainable professional learning opportunities.

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