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Cultural and micropolitical interactions of teacher relations

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With the research discussed in this article we aimed to investigate the social-relational factors that negatively affect teacher relations. For this purpose, the perceptions that teachers have towards their relations, and especially collaboration, were investigated from micropolitical and cultural perspectives using a qualitative approach and a phenomenology model. Data were analysed using content analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 60 teachers in Türkiye to explore their thoughts on teacher relations. The findings shed light on micropolitical strategies that negatively affect teacher relationships. In addition, findings provide empirical data from micropolitical and cultural frameworks on theoretical and applied strategies that facilitate approaches and practices to improve teachers' collaborative relationships.

Keywords: collaboration; micropolitics; professional development; school improvement; teacher relations

Introduction

Due to social, scientific, economic, and technological advances, the daily updating of the knowledge base creates an obligation for schools to constantly transform themselves (Ulferts, 2021). Teachers are facing more and more challenges in designing teaching practices that respond to rapidly changing conditions (Guerriero, 2017). This fact, which heightens professional development expectations, increases the importance of the collaborative relationships that enable teachers to learn from each other (Admiraal, Schenke, De Jong, Emmelot & Sligte 2021; De Jong, Meirink & Admiraal, 2022; Lefstein, Louie, Segal & Becher, 2020; Mora-Ruano, Heine & Gebhardt, 2019; Prenger, Poortman & Handelzalts, 2019; Toikka & Tarnanen, 2022; Youmans & Godden, 2022). In this sense, in particular, having the opportunity to have easy and frequent access to the teaching strategies, understandings, and practices of their colleagues is seen as an important leverage for teachers (Levine & Marcus, 2010). According to Freire (1975), teachers can only overcome the limitations of their knowledge and experience by first becoming aware of them through the dialogues they develop with each other and in critical relationships. Collaborative interactions and supportive colleague interventions, such as the knowledge and experience sharing that occur in positive processes (Wessels & Wood, 2019), create a professional school community by linking isolated expertise and experiences (Moolenaar, Karsten, Slegers & Daly, 2014). Such interactions increase positive emotions and commitment to goals (Owen, 2016), develop teaching practices (Tam, 2015; Thurlings & Den Brok, 2017), and contribute to teacher professionalism (Pozas & Letzel-Alt, 2023). The growing importance of collaborative practices places teacher behaviour and relationships in a critical position that determines the quality of teaching (Giudici, 2021; Lindqvist, Vasset, Iversen, Almås, Willumsen & Ødegård, 2019). Although collaborative relationships are an important opportunity for teachers to transcend their own experiences and habits (Duyar, Gumus & Bellibaş, 2013; Goddard, Goddard & Tschannen-Moran, 2007), research has shown that the types of collaboration that can cause significant changes in teachers' practices are quite limited. According to the research findings of García-Martínez, Montenegro-Rueda, Molina-Fernández and Fernández-Batanero (2021), teachers are reluctant to collaborate, even though they know the improving effects of collaboration on teaching practices, and are generally unwilling to discuss new ideas (Reeves, Pun & Chung, 2017). Similarly, the results of the teaching and learning international survey (TALIS) 2018 reveal that deep professional collaboration, which has the potential to improve teaching practices (Datnow, 2018; Ronfeldt, Farmer, McQueen & Grissom, 2015; Vangrieken, Dochy, Raes & Kyndt, 2013), is at a very low level (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2020). According to Feldman (2020), collaborative processes, like many teaching practices, are social in nature, making it necessary to take into account the natural challenges of collaboration (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2017; Keranen & Encinas Prudencio, 2014) and the obstacles and conflicts arising from human nature (Datnow & Park, 2019). The fact that strong academic and political expectations that encourage deep teacher collaboration do not adequately meet in real life renders the inhibitors of collaborative practices an important research issue. Studies in the literature generally focus on the effects of external facilitators and inhibitors on teacher collaboration to reach the desired level. These facilitators and inhibitors include leadership practices (e.g. Ansari & Asad, 2024; Hsieh, Chen & Li, 2024; Ma & Marion, 2024; Verheijen-Tiemstra, Ros, Vermeulen & Poell, 2024), structural conditions (e.g. De Jong et al., 2022; Liu & Benoliel, 2022; Webs & Holtappels, 2018), educational policies (e.g. Ávalos-Bevan & Flores, 2022; Lee, DHL 2022) and managerial strategies (e.g. Moynihan & O'Donovan, 2022; Mxenge & Bertram, 2023).

In contrast, limited studies focus on the intrinsic handicaps resulting from the social character of collaboration practices that are essentially based on intense human interaction. It is, therefore, seen that micropolitical and cultural perspectives that provide an opportunity to understand the internal relationships that develop in line with the interests and expectations, conflicts, rivalries, and struggles of school stakeholders are needed as an alternative to technical-rational frameworks and explanation based on goal-oriented organisational behaviour (Kelchtermans, 2016; Lindle, 2020; Montes López & O'Connor, 2019; Uitto, Jokikokko, Lassila, Kelchtermans & Estola, 2021). Such micropolitical and cultural approaches clarify the relationship between collegial relationships, ways of doing business, and personal and organisational goals and interests (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2012; Nias, 2005). This allows insights to be gained into the unique characteristics (Kelchtermans, 2006) and educational value of teacher relationships, as well as the subsequent designing of interventions that enhance teacher collaboration. Adopting a micropolitical and cultural perspective, this research, which aimed to investigate the inhibitors that stem from the social-relational aspect of teacher collaboration, is guided by three questions:

- 1) How do teachers interpret teacher relationships in terms of collaboration and conflict?
- 2) How do teachers overcome social problems encountered in the collaboration process?
- 3) How do teachers evaluate the outcomes of collaboration and conflict?

Through the study we provide insight into the social-relational reasons why deep teacher collaboration has not reached the desired level in schools, despite the growing consensus on its positive educational outcomes. We also provide unique information about teachers' complex perceptions of collaboration practices. By examining teacher relationships from a micro perspective, explored how they are associated with school culture.

Literature Review

Robust discourses on school change and effectiveness are increasingly emphasising the key roles of teachers, who are seen as the most important in-school source of influence (Barber & Mourshed, 2007; Bellibaş, Polatcan & Kılınc, 2022; Buchanan, 2015; Durrant, 2020; Fullan, Gardner & Drummy, 2019; Harris & Jones, 2019; Lee, I 2019; OECD, 2005; Pantić, 2017, 2021). In particular, increasing student achievement through teachers' enhanced professional practice requires teachers' agency in increasing school effectiveness. A growing number of researchers have, therefore, analysed the variables that mediate successful professional development among teachers (García-Martínez et al., 2021; Ketterlin-Geller, Baumer &

Lichon, 2015; Moolenaar, 2012; Ninković, Knežević-Florić & Đorđić, 2024; Patrick, 2022; Sawyer & Rimm-Kaufman, 2007). In particular, the understanding that collaborative teacher interactions play an important role in processes such as curriculum development, innovative pedagogy, capacity-building, and meaning-making has spawned a large body of literature on collaboration and teacher relations (Campbell, Lieberman & Yashkina, 2017; Chan & Pang, 2006; Glazier, Boyd, Hughes, Able & Mallous, 2017; Goddard et al., 2007; Kolleck, Schuster, Hartmann & Gräsel, 2021; Woodland, Lee & Randall, 2013). Accordingly, teacher collaboration plays a positive role in teacher self-efficacy (Chong & Kong, 2012), job satisfaction, and student success (Banerjee, Stearns, Moller & Mickelson, 2017; Jao & McDougall, 2016; Reeves et al., 2017), developing potential for change (Chan & Pang, 2006), teacher enthusiasm (Öngel & Tabançalı, 2022), and school mindfulness (Tabançalı & Öngel, 2022).

The literature shows different conceptualisations of collaboration. For example, formal collaboration refers to the collaborative processes structured by the administrative authority for teachers to collaborate in order to improve teacher practices in a wide range of areas, from curriculum development to the design of innovative pedagogical strategies (Estrada, Graham, Peterken, Cannon & Harris, 2023; Hargreaves, 2019; Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018). Informal teacher collaboration refers to informal conversations or discussions in which teachers exchange information about school issues (Avalos-Bevan & Bascopé, 2017). In a more systematic approach, Gräsel, Fußangel and Pröbstel (2006) analyses collaboration in three forms: exchange (sharing information and materials), synchronisation (sharing tasks for a specific purpose), and co-construction (creating shared meaning and working accordingly). According to Weddle (2022), who approaches collaboration from a perspective of effectiveness, only deep collaborations can be effective, in which ideas, understandings and beliefs should be confronted and discussed by teachers. Weddle (2022) asserts that this will lead the emergence of transformations that will improve teacher practices.

Collaboration is also an important component of designs such as recommended professional learning communities, professional development programmes, and learning organisations for supporting schools and all staff members by nurturing new learning and developing a shared vision, solidarity, and resilience (Battersby, 2019; Carpenter & Munshower, 2020; Hairon & Tan, 2017; Kafyulilo, 2013; Prenger et al., 2019; Sjoer & Meirink, 2016).

Professional collaboration involves teachers working together to develop their skills, knowledge, expertise, and other characteristics to improve educational processes and outcomes (OECD, 2009). Learning from each other creates opportunities for teachers to gain an inclusive view of relevant functions such as current teaching practices, professional development, student needs, scientific innovations, and academic achievement (Zhang, 2023). In the words of Darling-Hammond, Burns, Campbell, Goodwin, Hammerness, Low, McIntyre, Sato and Zeichner (2017:111), “collaboration is at the heart of effective schools.” According to research by Jensen, Sonnemann, Roberts-Hull and Hunter (2016), one of the common features of high-performance educational systems is the presence of collaborative processes that support the professional development intrinsic in the daily practices of the school.

Collaboration, in this sense, often requires instrumental relations, and the choice of whom to collaborate with is not always left to an individual’s discretion. However, human relations, by their very nature, constitute a field impacted by interference from many formal and personal variables. Collaboration is established based on interpersonal relationships shaped by the communication culture of an organisation (Admiraal et al., 2021). In particular, interaction history (Noben, Brouwer, Deinum & Hofman, 2022) and trust (Çoban, Özdemir & Bellibaş, 2023) are very important for teacher collaboration. The most important obstacles in collaboration processes, which are attributed to key roles for professional development, arise from the outcomes of the complex nature of human relations that may hinder or facilitate particular conclusions (Mikkola & Nykänen, 2020). This is because collaboration involves interpersonal dynamics (Rice-Bailey & Chong, 2023). Micropolitics is one of the important ways to gain an understanding of the possible conflicts, tensions, and disagreements that may arise in the processes in which teachers interact (Shakenova, 2017).

The micro approach, which examines relationships between colleagues through a magnifying glass (Beltman, 2021), helps to understand the human factors that play dominant roles in the stage in which professional development designs are enacted. Thus, it contributes to finding realistic solutions. Underestimating the role of disagreements, opposition, and conflicts of interest inherent in human relations hinders the adequate exploration of collaboration processes, and renders policies and programmes based on teacher interaction inadequate. Therefore, micropolitical and organisational frameworks need to be taken into account to achieve more desirable outcomes in collaboration (Achinstein, 2002; Kelchtermans, 2009; Keranen & Encinas Prudencio, 2014;

Weddle, 2022). In this way, appropriate solutions and process designs can be realised in processes such as school management, teacher education, and policymaking by gaining insights into teacher behaviour and reasons for resisting change due to institutionalised teaching practices.

Materials and Methods

The primary goal with this research was to illuminate the nature of teacher relationships and the handicaps of collaboration by considering them from a micropolitical and cultural perspective. In this way, we aimed to obtain important implications for the allocation of teacher relations that will contribute to professional and school development. The research was designed according to the phenomenology approach, which is one of the qualitative research designs, and is particularly suitable for examining emotional, expressive, and generally intense human experiences (Merriam, 2009). Open-ended interview questions (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016) were used to ensure participant-oriented qualitative answers.

This study was guided by the following questions: How do the participants interpret teacher relations, conflicts, and collaboration? How do they describe the occurrence of conflicts and collaborations? How do they describe the relationship between teacher relationships, school culture, student achievement and school development? What indicators do they present as causes of conflict? What are the suggestions and solutions for constructive teacher relations?

The study group was designed in accordance with maximum variation sampling to gain a comprehensive understanding of the participants’ perceptions on the issue of research. Maximum variation sampling was chosen specifically to capture a wide range of views, comprehensions, and real-life experiences, as well as to generally achieve a broad understanding of the phenomenon in terms of the focus of the research (Douglas, 2022). The participants included 60 teachers (34 female, 26 male) across all levels (elementary, secondary, and high) in various subjects (primary school teachers, physical education, music, English, mathematics, biology, Turkish, history, social studies, science, etc.), from novice to veteran.

Interviews lasting approximately 1 hour were conducted, digitally recorded over the phone, transcribed verbatim, and uploaded to MAX Qualitative Data Analysis (MAXQDA) software. Qualitative content analysis was preferred in the analysis of the data as it is suitable for exploring new topics, comparing and contrasting differences, and identifying themes that summarise the content in the raw data set (Drisko & Maschi, 2016). The initial coding process was carried out twice to capture all concepts relevant to the purpose of the

research. The use of codes allows the researcher to attribute summative qualities to some of the data obtained in content analysis. Reaching themes through codes essentially allows the crystallisation of a large theme from small pieces (Saldaña & Omasta, 2016). In this way, by progressing from codes to categories, and then from categories to themes, the main themes that would conceptualise teachers' perceptions and practices in relation to teacher relations were reached. For coding reliability, another academic experienced in analysing qualitative data was included in the process. Verbal and written consent were obtained from the participants before the interviews and certain validity strategies were used in the research. In order to increase the internal validity of the research, relevant theoretical and experimental literature were used in the preparation of interview questions, and opinions were taken from three other specialists in the relevant subject (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). In order to achieve data richness, interviews lasted long enough to allow participants to express themselves comfortably and in detail (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). In order for the participants to express themselves comfortably, a commitment was made that no information that could decipher them would be included (King, Horrocks & Brooks, 2019).

Findings

In describing teacher relationships, collaboration, and conflict processes, the interviewed teachers expressed several meanings that offered important implications for the nature and organisational cultural value and handicaps of these interactions. It can be said that a broad insight was gained into the micropolitics of teacher conflicts, especially in public schools. The participants tended to disclose more about conflicts than about collaboration. For this reason, it seemed that conflicts were an important agenda regarding teacher relations. Moreover, they had trouble explaining how the processes of collaboration and conflict were related to organisational culture. In the questions about the results of the collaboration processes, they stated that generally successful relationships and collaborations have a positive effect on teaching.

Collaboration

The interviewed teachers reported three different forms of collaboration: 1) formal collaboration, which are time and space-specific collaborations designed with an administrative power; 2) informal collaboration based on a simple-level exchange of information about teaching materials, strategies, or students; and 3) in conflicts, collaborations that arise from seeking supporters to justify themselves, or personal affinity.

Formal collaboration

Formal collaboration was one of the common themes of the teacher interviews, in which the participants described extracurricular activities, celebrations, or meetings, often designed by different administrative levels.

We usually collaborate in national holiday celebrations ... The feelings of unity and solidarity are felt intensely on such days.

Intensive teacher interactions take place during the preparation of theatrical performances, choir studies, and oratorios to be exhibited in schools on national holidays and commemorative days.

The teachers work together in their ordinary meetings held at certain periods and in the preparation of school boards on special days and weeks.

It can be seen from the interviews that a significant part of teacher collaboration takes place in the form of structured activities at the management level, and so such formal collaboration can be regarded as being compulsory.

Informal collaboration

The participants also discussed the forms of collaboration that emerged spontaneously, rather than administratively structured cooperative relations. In response to how, and on what, topics teacher collaboration takes place, the participants talked about collaboration in the form of exchanging information to improve teaching practices and learn more about students.

We frequently collaborate on sharing student and parent information.

Especially teachers who teach in the same class collaborate ... We share information about students' chronic diseases or financial problems.

This form of collaboration between teachers can be summarised as an information exchange that increases the teachers' awareness of their students rather than putting forward a common action.

Collaboration in conflicts

The theme of collaboration in conflicts is the area where collaboration and conflicts are intertwined and micropolitical density is high. According to the participants, in a conflict situation, the parties explain some details of the conflict to the others with different motivations. The first of these is the effort of the party that thinks that they have been wronged in the conflicts, to explain what happened to others, to prove information about their legitimacy, and thus, to create a public perception in their favour throughout the organisation. The participants defined this type of collaboration as a social justice mechanism that acts together or takes a common stance in the face of injustice.

The coterie of literature teachers, who had fewer class hours, put pressure on the administration to increase the literature course hours so that they

could take more additional course fees. This situation caused me to earn less ... the needs of students were ignored ... I explained the situation to other English teachers ... We talked to the administration all together and resolved the issue in favour of the students and ourselves ... but this created a long-lasting tension between us and the literature teachers.

In fact, the fact that teachers tell other teachers about their conflicts helps everyone to be aware of the situation ... The fact that injustices come out sometimes causes people to take a step back ... I think it is important to create awareness of acting together against injustice.

Looking after only our own interest can increase the workload of others and create difficulties for them in practice ... This should concern everyone, not just the victims of injustice. Others should also know this so that a common discontent with those who disturb the labour peace can be expressed and conflicts and grievances can be prevented.

Another conflict issue frequently mentioned by participants was the alliances between teachers. Participants felt that these alliances sometimes lead to depersonalisation of organisational goals, collegiality principles, and educational ideals. In the interviews, acting together was interpreted as a factor that sometimes causes injustices to gain deceptive legitimacy.

Teachers from the same branch or with close friendships support each other in fights at all costs. They think that they can do whatever they want because they act together ... Being a member of a group becomes tempting as they can achieve the result, they want by doing so.

Sometimes when you have a problem with someone, it can be difficult to collaborate with close friends of the person you are in conflict with You may have to treat problematic people as if they are right so that the tensions do not last long ... It is the fact that the conflicting parties seek supporters for themselves, which magnifies the problem ... There is no point in speaking the truth if a large number of people are on the side of the wrong.

In summary, those who want to create a perception and supporter at the organisational level that they are right may prefer to circulate some information about the conflict. Others may prefer to use the power of their social capital in conflicts. And even professional values can be manipulated for personal interest. Or, on the contrary, organisational public pressure may be created for unfair processes. An important inference that can be made here is that these processes, which are already difficult to analyse, place excessive stress on the highly fragile teacher relations and compel the relations. This is because in such cases, it can be very difficult to find the ultimate truth.

Conflicts

The interviewed teachers pointed to two main sources of conflict: perceptions and attitudes

towards collaboration processes; and disagreements caused by different worldviews.

Conflicts in collaborations

For conflicts in collaboration, the teachers' inability to negotiate, failure to develop common understanding, and unfair distribution processes were reported. Firstly, the teachers interviewed emphasised *reactive autonomy*, a type of non-negotiation, which refers to being close to the opinions of others and not making mutual adjustments as the cause of conflict in collaboration.

An important source of tensions while collaborating is individuals who think that only they know how to do everything....

... not finding common ground because of selfish teachers who insist on the superiority of their own opinion....

... intellectual arrogance, selfishness, ego, ambition are the real source of conflict.

... just believing your own method is the right one....

According to the participants, one of the important sources of teacher conflicts is the perception of *unfair distribution* that arises in the collaboration processes. The interviewed teachers described micropolitical interactions that begin with perceiving the other's self-serving behaviour and attitudes in the distribution of praise, interests, duties, or responsibilities.

It's really frustrating when someone talks about a job as if they've done it alone and polishes themselves ... they just want everyone to talk about their success

... belittle the contribution of others, shine only the part of the work that you do ... compliment fisher

They don't really respect the working teacher. They forget that the business is a whole. What is the part about them is important ... the principal just praises them.

Another sub-category on the theme of unfair distribution which emerged from the data was *unfair distribution of interests*.

Sometimes we can't reach consensus on matters that will provide financial benefits ... They argue about something that is really in their own interest as if it were for the benefit of the students.

Projects with the opportunity to travel abroad are sometimes perceived as holiday opportunities. For this reason, which teachers will carry out such projects can cause conflicts.

Teachers sometimes try to influence students' choices by making them worry about marks. Thus, they can earn more additional income by increasing their participation in their extracurricular activities ... This may result in decreased participation in activities conducted by other teachers ... This creates a race to find students among teachers.

The last sub-category of unfair distribution is regard to implementation.

Freud says 'to perceive is to suffer' ... If I feel like I have to protect myself when I realise things aren't going fair, I'll play by the rules.

When I see teachers trying to take the easy part while sharing tasks, my sense of trust weakens ... In order not to be exposed to injustice, I rattle my sabre....

Conflict arises in activities where work sharing is not done fairly.

According to the participants, one of the important sources of conflict in collaboration processes is the inability to find common ground. The participants described the lack of a *common understanding ground* that hinders them to come together, such as common purpose, common benefit, common interest, and common decision, as a factor that causes collaboration processes to fail and causes divisive conflicts.

Not having a common understanding and interest is an important handicap.

Teachers who cannot meet on common ground are likely to have conflicts.

To summarise, the participants pictured a kind of "own-account worker" teacher profile. According to our general impression, in educational contexts where there are no values and norms related to being community, co-teaching improvement, and co-improvement, they may misunderstand collaboration as an uninspired division of labour by teachers.

Worldview conflict

According to the participants, an important potential source of conflict in teacher relations is *worldview conflict*. According to the participants, such conflicts are quite common, not only in collaboration processes, but in all teacher relations.

Sometimes, student behavior, which one teacher perceives as indiscipline, may be evaluated within the scope of freedom by another teacher.

The fact that teachers from different cultures or with different experiences give importance to different points prevents communication.

... In the teachers' room, there are teachers who do not speak at all because of ideological differences, couldn't do a job together ... or rather, do not know how to communicate....

The participants described a lack of shared understanding of educational ideals, values, and goals.

Consequences of Conflicts

Apart from the effects of conflicts on teacher behaviour, participants also talked extensively about the theme of teachers' individualisation, which occurs in different ways. The first subcategory of the types of individualisation was over-individualisation. This type of individualisation refers not only to withdrawing from collaboration, but also from areas of common use.

Teachers try to resolve the conflict by isolating themselves from the environment, that is, by staying away from others.

They do not even want to share the same environment with the teachers with whom they have conflict or even come face to face with them.

Another type of individualisation was the *ambitious individualisation* sub-category, which indicates the result of teachers working harder after conflict.

The teacher who is in conflict with someone may become even more ambitious ... Moreover, they can show a very creative and diligent performance on their own in order to be more successful than the teacher they are in conflict with.

One or all of the disagreeing parties may be more ambitious to prove that they are doing their job better.

The teacher may make a great effort or do more activities to make their class more successful.

According to the data, the third type of individualisation that emerged after conflict was described under the category of *indifferent individualisation*. In the interviews, the participants talked about how conflicting teachers can become indifferent to professional ideals, educational values, or organisational goals.

When a teacher's relationship with other teachers deteriorates or they are treated unfairly, their bond with the school may weaken, and they may even become disinterested in students, thinking that their efforts are meaningless.

When a person believes that they have been treated unfairly, they may feel resentment towards school administrators and other teachers who do not support them ... Moreover, they may lose all of their dedication and start to lose interest in everything.

The art teacher had a quarrel with the literature teachers during the common exams we held throughout the school last year ... Since then, he has not been very interested in any schoolwork.

According to the data, conflicts can also negatively affect teacher motivation and classroom performance, which has obvious negative consequences for the students.

It negatively affects teacher performance ... if students are aware of conflicts, teachers will set a bad example for students.

Teachers become unhappy, their performance decreases ... students are affected negatively.

Culture and Teacher Relations

The interviewed teachers highlighted that the relationships shape the main agenda of the communication between the teachers and thus reveal the behavioural norms and cultural context of the school.

What they talk about with each other is an important indicator ... What's on the teacher's agenda ... Thanks to what I hear, I can understand what issues or whom I should be cautious about.

Teachers become an expression of the culture of that school by what they do and what they talk

about ... I think it is necessary to carefully read what flows in the communicational veins of the school ... A careful reading gives you important implications and strategies.

In summary, the interviewed teachers described the decisive impact of the inferences from the teacher dialogues on behaviour and dispositions, and ultimately on organisational culture.

Discussion

The compatibility of schools with the informational economy depends on contemporary teaching practices (Zhang, 2023). In addition, a well-educated population improves the cognitive potential of countries and increases economic development (Bold, Filmer, Martin, Molina, Rockmore, Stacy, Svensson & Wane, 2017). Teacher relationships and collaboration are easily accessible resources that facilitate continuing professional development and also improve teaching practices (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). In this sense, it is important to explore the nature of problematic interactions and perceptions that make teacher collaboration inefficient. The findings of the research shed light on some of the trends that make teacher relationships inefficient and need to be considered for meaningful collaborations. The general impression obtained from the research data was that teacher relations showed micropolitical intensity, two main areas arising from personal attitudes and interpersonal interaction perceptions. Another important result was that the transformation of conflict and tension in areas of intense micropolitical activity into collective narratives within the organisation has the potential to produce cultural results by creating a third and broader micropolitical area. We now deepen these micropolitical areas and their organisational cultural implications by relating them to the relevant literature. The first of the intense areas of micropolitics that caused conflict in teacher relations, especially in collaboration processes, was the non-negotiation, or reactive autonomy situation, which stemmed from the teachers' desire to put their own experience, knowledge, interests, and experiences into practice. Accordingly, teachers who show reactive autonomy as a personal attitude can both damage collaboration and lead to the emergence of problematic teacher relations by exhibiting the factors that impose their individual preferences and priorities on the collaboration processes. Koestner and Losier (1996) conceptualised individual and isolated teacher attitudes, which can be summarised as being closed to persuasion and influence from others, as reactive autonomy. Such a sense of autonomy expresses the feelings of teachers who do not trust other teachers, are closed to their influence, and idealise their own knowledge and experience (Vangrieken, Grosemans, Doch & Kyndt 2017; Vangrieken & Kyndt, 2020), representing one of the important

teacher-induced obstacles of collaboration processes. As a result, resentment, conflict, and jealousy occur (Little, 2007). It can also lead to excessive trust of teachers in their own decisions and judgments (Benson, 2017), causing individualisation and isolation to take root in teacher practice (Wilches, 2007).

The interviewed teachers described three micropolitical spaces that stem from perceptions of interpersonal interactions in the collaborative process. The first of these is self-serving behaviour. In any process, the self-serving behaviour of individuals to actualise their own advantages against others cause organisational deviance (Guo, Yao & Zhang, 2023). Our findings reflect the conflicts that arise when a distribution logic characterised by self-serving behaviour replaces the collective spirit required by collaboration processes. The general impression here was that collaboration processes are evaluated with the logic of division of labour. Division of labour occurs when the work is divided from various parts and these parts are matched with the subjects. That is, each individual is only concerned with how the job relates to themselves. The concept of collaboration has a different meaning from the division of labour and requires more simultaneity, interpersonal relationality, commitment, collectivity, and a holistic approach (Başaran, 2017). The participants highlighted tensions and perceptions of unfair distribution over the sharing of responsibilities, benefits, and praise. Attempts to manipulate processes in a self-serving way were the main cause of conflict. Hochwarter, Kacmar, Perrewé and Johnson (2003) describe self-serving behaviour toward personal goals as being political behaviour. Perceiving the self-serving behaviour of the other creates the motivation for political behaviour in the person. Considering processes related to division of labour may draw attention to distribution processes, self-serving behaviour and opening up a set of organisational political perceptions.

The interviewed teachers described a second micropolitical space that stems from perceptions of conflicting interpersonal interactions emerging in the collaborative process. Regarding common forms of teacher collaboration in the field, numerous studies reflect formal and informal types of collaboration (e.g. Avalos-Bevan & Bascopé, 2017; Eschler, Hallam & Brown, 2023; Estrada et al., 2023; Hargreaves, 2019; Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018; Weddle, 2022). Thanks to its micropolitical focus, in this study, in addition to formal and informal collaboration, we found the forms of collaboration that emerge in conflict and their cultural consequences. These process, as reflected by the findings, spread political games, such as favouritism, inequality, concealment, lobbying within the organisation or accusing others of playing such political games. As a result,

interpersonal relations and collaboration deteriorate (Chernyak-Hai & Rabenu, 2018). The third and final micropolitical space that stems from perceptions of interpersonal interactions in the collaborative process is worldview conflict. This refers to the motivation to defend one's own view against others' underlying worldview conflicts (Brandt, Crawford & Tongeren, 2019), and has the potential to paralyse deep collaborations that require discussion of different beliefs and understandings. When left unmanaged, worldview conflict causes social distancing, prejudice and conflicts (Brandt & Crawford, 2020). The most important cultural consequences of problematic micropolitical strategies, as stated by the interviewed teachers, are that individualism and commitment relationships become normative, leading to the increase of uncertainty and insecurity. People who perceive the political behaviour of others develop various adaptive behaviours in order to protect themselves (Al-Abrow, 2022; De Clercq & Pereira, 2023; Hochwarter, Rosen, Jordan, Ferris, Ejaz & Maher, 2020), creating a circuitous network of relationships within the organisation.

Threats or conflict perceived or experienced by individuals or groups often get into circulation within the organisation in the form of non-objective and even prejudiced narratives. As emphasised by the participants, teachers may prefer to disseminate perceived or experienced injustices, tensions, or conflicts by telling others for reasons such as proving their righteousness or manipulating the truth. This situation may cause people who are not directly addressed by threats or conflict to be affected by, and even adopt, these collectivised narratives for various reasons. However, an important point to note is that, apart from being a kind of expression of what is happening, collective narratives lead to the emergence of unproductive and dysfunctional relationships because they are biased and often manipulated (Moghaddam, 2021). This is because, according to Harré (2012), individuals may prefer to behave according to local norms of appropriateness and accuracy, which they derive from collective narratives and are specific to that organisational culture, rather than reasons such as educational ideals, organisational goals, or professional standards.

To summarise, justified by collective narratives, and local norms that have the potential to foster dysfunctional relationships and behaviour may also create social acceptance throughout the organisation (Schein & Schein, 2017). Furthermore, although some types of individualisation that may occur in such problematic organisational contexts encourage overwork and being more creative (e.g., ambitious individualisation category). According to Hargreaves (2019), such efforts cannot fully

produce desirable results because they cannot be institutionalised at the system level.

Recently, the collaborative professionalism approach has been on the agenda due to its positive contributions to student success, school effectiveness, and professional development (García-Martínez et al., 2021; Hollweck & Lofthouse, 2021; Washington & O'Connor, 2020). This brings a new set of professional standards to the teaching profession and represents a significant shift in understanding. Accordingly, teaching is no longer an activity that teachers do alone in the classroom, but one open to collective evaluation, development, and work (OECD, 2016). However, teacher relationships do not always carry professional values that encourage the improvement of teaching. Contrary to what is believed and expected, the ties between teachers can be quite fragile. In many contexts where informal forces, interests, competencies, and status differences make them felt explicitly and implicitly, relationships take the form of micropolitical strategies (Hargreaves, 2000). The results of the research reveal micropolitical issues such as perception of autonomy that is not balanced with collaboration, self-serving behaviour, conflicting, worldview conflict, fragmented, and tense sub-cultures due to individualisation, isolation, tortuous teacher relations stemming from the search for support, and the discursive circulation of what is happening within the organisation. The findings provide deep insights into the functioning of micropolitical factors in organisational life, which negatively affect teacher relationships and undermine meaningful collaboration. These factors, and their possible intersections, undermine teacher relationships and collaboration. Hence, teachers involved in collaboration processes need to develop an understanding of the complex structure of human relationships and the collective spirit that collaboration processes require. Breaking this vicious circle requires careful steps in the broader context, from teacher attitudes to designing and maintaining collaboration processes. Otherwise, as revealed by the research findings, collaborations that are attempted to be realised without providing the necessary conditions and developing understanding can create problematic relationships and cultures and create permanent negatives rather than benefits. This is because negative workplace interactions have significant psychological costs (Schuster, Hartmann & Kolléck, 2021) and permanent negative effects on organisational life (Tuikka, 2020). In this sense, bringing an understanding of expertise and professionalism to informal teacher relations, making arrangements for this at the system and administrative level, increasing inclusiveness by designing fearless interest-sharing processes, normalising differences

of opinion, referencing scientific standards, designing teacher training programmes that will develop positive attitudes towards success, improving teacher relations and collaboration, fostering ability of school principals to read and manage the complex dynamic of teacher relations, as well as making facilitating interventions, can all be listed as important and necessary steps.

Conclusion

In a centralised and bureaucratic education system like in Türkiye, teacher interactions generally take place in the form of formal and informal collaboration. Deep collaboration that can create radical improvements in teacher practices remain at a very limited level (Yılmaz, 2022). In this research we examined the social-relational elements underlying this situation with micropolitical and cultural approaches. The most important goals of collaborative professional development are a culture of solidarity and being responsible for the learning and development of others. In this sense, a culture of trust, harmony, openness, and solidarity among teachers creates a basis for collaboration. In conclusion, with this study we identified conflicting perceptions among teachers that may arise in educational contexts where these tendencies are not adequately internalised and the collective nature of the functions and outcomes of collaboration processes is not sufficiently understood by teachers. Accordingly, teachers' excessive focus on personal gains and hardships emerges as a factor that damages the collective spirit of collaboration and collegial relationships and so cause conflict. Excessive commitment to individuality in relationships that require interdependence carries the danger of triggering political behaviour that can spread within the organisation to become a feature of relationships and communication culture in the long run. It is difficult to play an active role in these processes without an appropriate understanding of, and attitudes toward collaborative processes, and negative experiences gained in these processes can have lasting unproductive effects. In future research, strategies for developing positive teacher attitudes and skills regarding collaboration and collegiality can be investigated. Moreover, as the results of this research confirm, long-term tensions in relationships can damage collegiality or create negative reputation mechanisms within the organisation. In this sense, the most important result of this study has been the consideration of the micropolitical features of teacher relations, making it possible to design collaboration and professional development programmes more appropriate to life's realities.

Authors' Contributions

E.T. – conceptualisation, data analysis, writing, reviewing and editing. G.Ö. – methodology, writing original draft, preparation, investigation. Both authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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