



“You have to get off the island to see the island”: Perspectives of Mentoring and Leadership in Schools through the Internationalization of Teacher Education in Brazilian Basic Education

“É preciso sair da ilha para ver a ilha”: Perspectivas de Mentoria e Liderança em Escolas através da Internacionalização da Formação de Professores na Educação Básica Brasileira

“Tienes que salir de la isla para ver la isla”: Perspectivas de Mentoría y Liderazgo en Escuelas a través de la Internacionalización de la Formación Docente en la Educación Básica Brasileña

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Abstract: This study explores the role of responsible internationalization in Brazilian Basic Education, focusing on mentoring and collaborative leadership in schools. The objective is to analyze how the exchange of good practices between different educational realities, such as the Irish and Brazilian, can strengthen the development of teacher leadership. The methodology is based on qualitative research, centered on the authors' experiences during the professional development program held in Ireland between 2023 and 2024 by CAPES. Preliminary results highlight the importance of collaborative professionalism in addressing common school challenges, including resistance to change and limited resources. It concludes that responsible internationalization can enhance educational transformation.

Keywords: internationalization; leadership; collaboration; mentoring; basic education.

Resumo: Este estudo explora o papel da internacionalização responsável na Educação Básica brasileira, focando na mentoria e liderança colaborativa em escolas. O objetivo é analisar como a troca de boas práticas entre realidades educacionais distintas, como a irlandesa e a brasileira, pode fortalecer o desenvolvimento de lideranças docentes. A metodologia baseia-se em uma pesquisa qualitativa, centrada nas experiências vivenciadas pelas autoras no programa de desenvolvimento profissional realizado na Irlanda, entre 2023 e 2024 pela CAPES. Os resultados preliminares destacam a importância do profissionalismo colaborativo para enfrentar desafios comuns nas escolas, incluindo a resistência à mudança e os recursos limitados. Conclui-se que a internacionalização responsável pode potencializar a transformação da educação.

Palavras-chave: internacionalização; liderança; colaboração; mentoria; educação básica.

Resumen: Este estudio explora el papel de la internacionalización responsable en la educación básica brasileña, enfocándose en la mentoría y el liderazgo colaborativo en las escuelas. El objetivo es analizar cómo el intercambio de buenas prácticas entre diferentes realidades educativas, como la irlandesa y la brasileña, puede fortalecer el desarrollo del liderazgo docente. La metodología se basa en una investigación cualitativa, centrada en las experiencias vividas por las autoras en el programa de desarrollo profesional realizado en Irlanda entre 2023 y 2024 por CAPES. Los resultados preliminares destacan la importancia del profesionalismo colaborativo para abordar los desafíos comunes en las escuelas, incluida la resistencia al cambio y los recursos limitados. Se concluye que la internacionalización responsable puede potenciar la transformación educativa.

Palabras clave: internacionalización; liderazgo; colaboración; mentoría; educación básica.

Introduction

The concept of internationalization in education, traditionally associated with higher education – where academic mobility, knowledge exchange, and the adaptation of global practices have been more prominent –, has gradually expanded into the field of Basic Education. This change reflects a growing understanding that the exchange of ideas, practices, and leadership models is valuable beyond the university context and can offer significant insights for earlier stages of schooling [Hatsek; Woicolesco; Rosso, 2023]. In this regard, internationalization in Basic Education involves the sharing of effective knowledge between countries, with the aim of enhancing school management and leadership [Egekvist; Lyngdorf; Du, 2017]. The focus lies in nurturing collaborations that enable the exchange of experiences and alternatives across diverse educational contexts, creating a space where both local and global perspectives can inform and enrich one another.

The core idea is that responsible internationalization, when implemented thoughtfully, can have a transformative impact on school leadership and teacher development, as it exposes educators to strategies and diverse challenges, enriching their professional growth. Kennedy [2005] posits nine models of professional development, many of which were adopted as methodologies, and indeed explored, during the program in Ireland. These are: training; award-bearing; deficit; cascade; standards-based; coaching/mentoring; community of practice; action research; transformative – further developed in the Collaborative professionalism Section of this text.

This study is motivated by the need to reflect on internationalization in the context of Basic Education, moving beyond the paradigm that associates this process solely with higher education institutions. The reality is that schools, too, stand to benefit from the collaborative, intercultural, and professional development opportunities that internationalization brings. The participation of teachers and principals in international programs contributes to the improvement of pedagogical practices, while also enhancing leadership skills that can be shared and replicated within their own contexts. This paper draws on the experience of the first author as one of 30 Brazilian teachers who participated in a professional development program on school leadership and mentoring, held in Ireland between August 2023 and June 2024, and the second author, who served as the program coordinator at Mary Immaculate College. This partnership between the Brazilian Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel [CAPES] and Mary Immaculate College [MIC] in Limerick, Ireland aimed to offer professional development in school leadership and mentoring, with a strong emphasis on international collaboration through the Public Call nº 43/2022 [Brasil, 2022].

Participation in this program brought to light several key considerations regarding the internationalization of Basic Education, particularly in relation to the intersection of local and global contexts. While the program allowed the participants to immerse ourselves in the Irish educational system, it also provided a platform to reflect on the diverse realities of Brazilian education, spanning municipal, state, and federal levels. The exchange of experiences was not unidirectional; Brazilian educators contributed with their own knowledge, challenges, and successful practices, creating a reciprocal learning environment. This process emphasized the potential of responsible internationalization to promote mutual growth and development by both learning from others and teaching and sharing local practices.

In a globalized world, the internationalization of education has emerged as a powerful tool for improving educational practices and leadership. Engaging with global perspectives can foster deeper insights into local educational challenges and opportunities. As José Saramago [1998, p. 41] stated, "You have to get off the island to see the island." This metaphor captures the essence of

internationalization: stepping outside one's familiar environment is crucial to gaining a clearer understanding of one's own context.

The experience of participating in an international teacher education program in Ireland offered Brazilian educators the chance to step away from our everyday realities and reflect critically on our own practices of leadership and mentoring. By engaging with different educational systems, we were able to see our own 'island' – the Brazilian Basic Education system – with fresh eyes, recognizing both its strengths and areas for growth. This process of gaining new perspectives through internationalization, while also contributing to global discussions, has the potential to transform educational leadership and mentorship in Brazil. As a consequence, it emphasizes the importance of looking beyond local boundaries to improve school leadership, ultimately benefiting students and teachers alike in a responsible way.

Responsible internationalization, as defined by [Stallivieri and Vianna \(2020\)](#), involves five key dimensions: balance, accountability, sustainability, inclusion, and compliance. These dimensions ensure that international collaborations are equitable, transparent, and sustainable over time, while also being inclusive of all stakeholders. In the context of Basic Education, these principles are particularly important, as they promote a model of leadership that is both globally informed and locally grounded. Internationalization, in this sense, is not about imposing a standardized model across different contexts but rather about facilitating the exchange of perspectives in a way that respects and incorporates local specificities.

Despite its many benefits, the process of internationalization in schools is not without challenges. Common obstacles include resistance to change, limited financial resources, and the tension between standardization and individualization of practices. These challenges highlight the importance of collaborative professionalism, a concept discussed by [Hargreaves and O'Connor \(2018\)](#), which advocates for a form of collaboration that goes beyond superficial collegiality and promotes a deeper, more meaningful professional engagement among educators. Collaborative professionalism encourages educators to actively contribute to the school's identity and leadership, promoting a sense of shared responsibility for creating a positive learning environment.

Thus, this paper aims to contribute to the ongoing discussion on internationalization in Basic Education by providing insights from the field, highlighting the importance of mentoring and leadership in fostering a collaborative educational environment. The findings presented here are grounded in the belief that internationalization, when approached responsibly and inclusively, can be a powerful tool for enhancing educational practices and leadership development at the Basic Education level.

Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative approach ([Holanda, 2006](#)), rooted in the need to deeply explore the complexities of internationalization in Basic Education, particularly in relation to leadership and mentoring. In this sense, the present study draws on the experience of the first author as one of 30 Brazilian teachers who participated in a professional development program on school leadership and mentoring, held in Ireland between August 2023 and June 2024, and the second author, who served as the program coordinator at Mary Immaculate College. This program, a collaborative initiative between CAPES and MIC in Limerick, Ireland, was designed to offer a comprehensive understanding of international best practices in school

leadership and mentoring, while encouraging the exchange of knowledge between Irish and Brazilian educators. The participants were professionals from diverse regions of Brazil, representing various levels of the Basic Education system (municipal, state, and federal).

The data generation method for this research involved a combination of reflective reading of papers suggested during the *lato sensu* diploma course in Leadership and Mentoring in Schools and the authors' notes. During the duration of the program in Ireland, the authors kept a reflective journal, documenting key learnings, challenges, and moments of insight. These readings and notes served as a rich source of data, offering a personal account of how the internationalization process influenced our understanding of leadership and mentoring in schools. Additionally, the notes were coded by core topics which represent a variety of regional contexts, professional background, and our individual experience in Ireland, the possibilities of application of the program's teachings to educational settings, and our perspectives on the potential impact of internationalization on Brazilian schools.

The notes were also utilized as a method for exploring collective experiences and shared challenges. They were centered on the implementation of leadership and mentoring practices in the schools, the reception of these practices by the colleagues, and the challenges encountered in adapting foreign ideas to the Brazilian context. These reflections facilitated a collaborative exchange of perspectives, enabling us to reflect on how our experiences in Ireland informed our approach to leadership and mentoring within the schools [Brookfield, 1995].

The data analysis followed a thematic approach, guided by the five dimensions of responsible internationalization as outlined by Stallivieri and Vianna [2020]: balance, accountability, sustainability, inclusion, and compliance. These dimensions provided a framework for reflecting on our experiences and for identifying key themes related to the internationalization of education. Thematic analysis allowed for the categorization of recurring patterns, such as impressions on overcoming resistance to change, managing limited resources, and addressing the tension between standardized and individualized educational practices [De Paor, 2019]. Each of these challenges was examined through the lens of the internationalization process, with particular attention paid to how leadership and mentoring strategies could be adapted to address these issues.

The methodology was designed to be both reflective and collaborative, aligning with the core principles of internationalization and professional development. By focusing on the authors' lived experiences, the research aims to provide an in-depth understanding of how international collaborations can influence leadership and mentoring practices in Basic Education. The qualitative nature of this study allowed for an exploration of the challenges and opportunities presented by internationalization, offering insights into how schools can navigate these complexities in ways that are both responsible and transformative. The use of reflective journals and notes provided multiple perspectives on the same phenomenon, ensuring an understanding of the experience. This methodological approach highlights the value of internationalization in enhancing both educational leadership and culture of collaboration and continuous improvement within schools.

Development

The Thing about Internationalization

Internationalization, particularly in the context of education, is often perceived as a phenomenon reserved for higher education institutions, where student exchanges, global research collaborations, and international partnerships are more commonplace.

However, in recent years, the notion of internationalization has expanded beyond universities, gaining traction within the Basic Education system in Brazil. This change recognizes the interconnectedness of educational practices across borders and the importance of fostering a global perspective among students and educators alike, even at the earliest stages of formal education. In Basic Education, internationalization involves the sharing of practices, pedagogical approaches, and leadership strategies between countries, with the goal of enhancing educational quality and addressing global challenges in schooling.

At its core, internationalization in Basic Education is about creating opportunities for collaboration between educators and schools from different cultural and national contexts. This collaborative effort allows for the exchange of ideas, encouraging innovation in teaching methods, curriculum design, and school management. Internationalization is not just about adopting foreign models of education, but creating a two-way exchange where local practices are also shared, contributing to a global pool of knowledge. By participating in these exchanges, schools can develop leadership and pedagogical strategies that are informed by a broader understanding of global education, while also adapting these strategies to meet the specific needs of their local contexts [Opfer; Pedder, 2011].

As Saramago [1998, p. 41] poetically expressed, "You have to get off the island to see the island". This metaphor captures the fundamental principle of internationalization – only by stepping beyond our known surroundings can we genuinely gain insight into our own systems, practices, and challenges. As an example, the professional development program in Ireland illustrated this concept. By departing from the familiar landscape of Brazilian Basic Education, participants were given the opportunity to engage with global practices, critically evaluate our leadership and mentoring roles, and return to schools with renewed perspectives.

This "getting off the island" enabled Brazilian educators to comprehend the educational dynamics of other nations while also gaining a clearer understanding of our own context. We came back equipped with perspectives for tackling issues such as leadership, resource constraints, and cultural diversity, having broadened our views by observing how these challenges are addressed in Ireland and other international contexts. In the realm of responsible internationalization, this exchange of approaches and practices is reciprocal.

The responsible internationalization framework proposed by Stallivieri and Vianna [2020] provides a valuable lens through which to view this process. They outline five key dimensions that should guide internationalization efforts: balance, accountability, sustainability, inclusion, and compliance. Balance refers to ensuring that international partnerships are mutually beneficial, with both parties contributing to and benefiting from the exchange. In Basic Education, this balance can be achieved by designing programs that allow for the sharing of both local and international best practices, ensuring that each school involved in the collaboration has an opportunity to learn and to teach [Timperley, 2015].

In addition to that, accountability is crucial in ensuring that the goals of internationalization are met, and that the partnerships are evaluated based on the impact they have on student outcomes and teacher development. Sustainability is concerned with the long-term viability of these partnerships, ensuring that they are not dependent on short-term funding or fleeting interest, but are embedded into the fabric of the school's operations. Moreover, inclusion emphasizes the importance of making these international opportunities accessible to all educators and students, regardless of socioeconomic background. Finally, compliance ensures that international partnerships adhere to both local and international educational standards, and that they contribute positively to the educational goals of all participants.

In the context of the professional development program in Ireland, these dimensions of responsible internationalization were evident in the way the program was structured and delivered. The program emphasized the importance of mutual learning, with Brazilian and Irish educators sharing our experiences and practices in a way that balanced the strengths of both educational systems. The program was also designed with sustainability in mind – with the initial plan to implement it across three different groups of Brazilian professionals in Basic Education –, encouraging participants to implement the leadership and mentoring strategies we learned in our own schools upon our return to Brazil. This approach ensured that the program had a lasting impact not just on the participants but also on the schools and communities we work with. We took part in the second group of this program from August 2023 to June 2024.

The inclusion of educators from various regions of Brazil, representing diverse socioeconomic and educational backgrounds, was another key element of the program. By bringing together thirty professionals from different parts of the country, the program facilitated a rich exchange of perspectives that went beyond the international context, allowing participants to learn from one another's experiences within Brazil. This diversity also ensured that the practices learned in Ireland could be adapted to a wide range of local contexts, from urban to rural schools, and from well-resourced to underfunded educational environments. The program's accountability was ensured through assessments related to each module and a final report to CAPES, where participants reflected on our learning and provided feedback on the program's content and delivery. This feedback was used to refine the program in real-time, ensuring that it met the needs of the participants.

The modules of the Leadership and Mentoring in Schools course at MIC were closely aligned with the concept of responsible internationalization and have a significant impact on public Basic Education in Brazil. The course motivated a deep understanding of leadership styles and policy, encouraging participants to apply international and national trends in educational leadership to our local contexts. We attended 8 modules, 4 per term, encompassing core and elective disciplines. The first module was "National and International Trends in Education and the Implications for School Leadership and Mentoring". Its main idea was to reinforce the international dimension of the course, enabling students to analyze how global educational trends impact local leadership practices. By integrating insights from both national and international policy discussions, Brazilian educators were equipped to lead schools with a global perspective while addressing local needs. During this module we were also introduced to programs and initiatives that are unique to Ireland but could be replicated in Brazil, for example Ireland's approach to inducting and mentoring Newly Qualified Teachers [NQTs].

The programme is

led at a school level by a Professional Support Team (PST) consisting of the principal, mentor(s) and other member(s). Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) in Droichead schools have support from by a mentor and other members of the PST in the identification of their professional learning needs and in planning opportunities to address these needs, including opportunities to observe and be observed by other teachers [Banks *et al.*, 2015, p. 1].

Also known as Droichead [meaning 'bridge' in the Irish language], the mentoring induction programme was designed to provide support, guidance, and professional development to NQTs as they begin their careers. The details of the mentoring program may vary slightly between different educational institutions and schools, but there are some general principles related to the duration of mentoring, support, and assessment. NQTs mentors are often experienced in-service teachers and they are chosen based on their subject expertise or other relevant factors. The mentoring period

usually spans the NQTs first year of teaching, and it may extend into the second year, depending on the specific requirements of the school or education authority. This group of mentors and mentees usually meets to discuss the NQTs progress, challenges, and goals [O'Reilly; Colum, 2021].

Mentors often observe NQTs in the classroom to provide constructive feedback on teaching methods, classroom management, and other professional skills. Feedback is an essential component of the mentoring process, helping NQTs reflect on their practice and make improvements. Additionally, the chosen leaders may assist NQTs in navigating administrative aspects of their role, such as understanding school policies, curriculum requirements, and assessment procedures. Some mentoring programs include a formal assessment process to evaluate the NQTs progress and provide recommendations for further development [Teaching Council, 2017].

This strategy can help Brazilian pre-service teacher education in micro and macro levels not only when investing in reinforcing newly teachers' confidence during their professional development [micro level], but also as an establishment of a continuum practice of reflection that question their social choices as citizens in the contexts they are inserted [macro level]. Therefore, the encouragement of professional improvement may empower Brazilian Basic Education.

Similarly, the "Policy: Leadership Styles and Perspectives on Leadership" module encouraged critical engagement with leadership theories, including distributed and transformative leadership, which can be instrumental in reshaping leadership approaches within Brazilian schools. This aligns with responsible internationalization by promoting leadership styles that are inclusive, sustainable, and adaptable across different cultural and educational settings. Moreover, the module named "Leadership and Management Portfolio Development" inspired students to critically reflect on our own leadership and management practices, linking theory with practical experience. This reflective practice ensured that Brazilian educators could assess and improve our leadership strategies in a way that aligned with both international best practices and the specific challenges of Brazil's public education system, while also analyzing threats and weaknesses and enhancing the identification of opportunities and successful practices.

In addition to that, the module "Understanding Teachers' Professional Learning and Development" highlighted the importance of promoting professional growth within schools, which is essential for enhancing teaching quality in Brazilian public education. The focus on peer review, self-reflection, and collaborative learning practices contributed to the development of a more supportive and professional learning environment. This mirrors the goals of responsible internationalization by ensuring that educational practices borrow from global trends while also incorporating localized, context-sensitive approaches that promote sustainable improvements in education.

The "Teacher Learning and Mentoring" module played a crucial role in deepening students' understanding of how teachers grow professionally and the role schools can play in encouraging this learning. It emphasized the idea that teacher development is a continuous process that extends beyond pre-service teacher education, highlighting the importance of mentorship and professional learning communities within schools. This module also encouraged participants to explore how mentoring can be an effective tool for supporting teachers at all stages of their careers, whether they are novice educators or experienced professionals. By focusing on mentoring, reflective practices, and peer collaboration, this discipline equipped leaders to create a culture of continuous improvement in our schools. In the context of Brazilian public Basic Education, these concepts are relevant as they promote a transition from isolated teaching practices to a more collaborative and supportive professional environment in order to address the diverse challenges that educators face.

On the other hand, the module called "Leading and Curriculum Change" addressed the complexities of school leadership, particularly when it comes to implementing curriculum reforms. In many educational contexts, including Brazil, curriculum change is a constant challenge, requiring school leaders to navigate policies, evolving student needs, and shifting educational priorities. This module provided students with strategies for leading these changes, ensuring that curriculum reforms are not just implemented at a surface level but are integrated meaningfully into the school's teaching and learning practices. It explored the leadership skills necessary to engage teachers, students, and the broader school community in the process of change, emphasizing the importance of clear communication, strategic planning, and collaborative decision-making. For public Basic Education in Brazil, where curriculum reforms such as the implementation of the Common National Curriculum Base (BNCC) are ongoing, this module offered insights into how school leaders can guide our communities through these transitions while maintaining a focus on improving student learning.

Ultimately, the process of internationalization in Basic Education, as experienced through the modules of this program, highlighted the potential for global collaborations to enhance leadership and mentoring practices in schools. By engaging with educators from different cultural and national contexts, participants were able to broaden our perspectives on school management and pedagogical leadership, while also recognizing the importance of adapting these global approaches to meet the unique challenges of our local contexts. The responsible internationalization framework provided a guide for how these collaborations can be structured in a way that is equitable, sustainable, and impactful, ensuring that the benefits of internationalization are felt by all involved.

I'm Not a Principal, Can I Be a Leader/Mentor?

A key insight from the professional development program in Ireland was the recognition that leadership in schools is not confined to formal administrative roles. While the traditional view of leadership often focuses on school principals, heads of departments, and other managerial figures, there is a growing understanding that leadership can, and should be, distributed among the school community. This concept of distributed leadership [Harris; DeFlaminis, 2016] aligns with the idea that teachers, even those without official titles or positions of authority, can take on leadership roles within their schools. By doing so, they contribute to the overall improvement of the school environment and play a crucial role in mentoring their colleagues and guiding students.

The notion of teachers as leaders and mentors challenges the hierarchical structure that has traditionally dominated school leadership. In many cases, teachers are the ones who have the most direct contact with students, and their influence on the day-to-day functioning of the school is profound. Teachers who embrace their role as leaders and mentors enhance their own professional growth while contributing to the development of a more collaborative and supportive school culture. In this sense, leadership becomes a shared responsibility, with teachers taking initiative to improve teaching practices, support their peers, and drive positive changes in the school environment [Timperley, 2015].

Mentoring, in particular, is a key aspect of this distributed leadership model. As experienced educators, teachers are in a unique position to mentor less experienced colleagues, providing them with guidance, support, and feedback as they navigate the complexities of the teaching profession. Mentoring relationships can take many forms, from formal mentoring programs where teachers are paired with new colleagues, to informal, peer-to-peer mentoring where teachers share their expertise

and insights in a more casual setting. Regardless of the structure, mentoring plays a critical role in promoting a culture of continuous professional development within schools (Vinatier, 2013).

A challenge for teachers who wish to take on leadership and mentoring roles is the perception that leadership is the domain of administrators. This perception can create a barrier for teachers who may feel that they lack the authority or formal recognition to act as leaders. However, the professional development program in Ireland emphasized that leadership is not about titles or formal positions, but about influence and initiative. Teachers who take the initiative to mentor their colleagues, lead professional development sessions, or contribute to school-wide decision-making processes are engaging in leadership, regardless of their official job title.

The concept of distributed leadership (Harris; DeFlaminis, 2016) also aligns with the idea of building a more inclusive and collaborative school environment. When leadership is shared among teachers, it creates opportunities for a wider range of voices to be heard in the decision-making process. This inclusivity can lead to more innovative and effective solutions to the challenges schools face, as teachers bring their unique perspectives and expertise to the table. Moreover, by encouraging teachers to take on leadership and mentoring roles, schools can build a stronger sense of community, ownership and shared responsibility, which in turn can lead to improved outcomes for both students and educators.

However, it is essential not to absolve public authorities and civil society of their responsibility regarding education. In varying degrees, all stakeholders must be engaged in the processes that encompass educational action and the pedagogical space. As Laval (2019) asserts, schools are not companies; they are community spaces that require the active participation of all involved to cultivate an environment conducive to learning and growth. The neoliberal perspective often seeks to overly hold teachers accountable for the success or failure of educational outcomes, ignoring the roles of other actors (Teles, 2023). This collective effort ensures that the responsibility for education does not rest solely on educators, but is shared among all members of the community.

In the context of internationalization, the idea of teachers as leaders and mentors takes on added significance. The professional development program in Ireland provided participants with the opportunity to engage with international best practices in leadership and mentoring, which we could then bring back to our schools in Brazil. By sharing what we had learned with our colleagues, participants were able to act as leaders within our own schools, guiding others in the implementation of new strategies and approaches. This process of sharing and mentoring benefited the participants' colleagues while contributing to the overall improvement of the school environment, as new concepts and practices were integrated into the daily functioning of the school.

All in all, the role of teachers as leaders and mentors is a key component of the broader effort to improve schools through internationalization. By embracing our role as leaders, teachers can help to create a more collaborative, innovative, and supportive school environment. In doing so, they contribute to our professional development as well as to the overall success of the school and its students. The professional development program in Ireland provided an opportunity for participants to explore this aspect of our professional identity, and the insights gained from this experience have the potential to engage school professionals across Brazil.

Collaborative Professionalism

Collaborative professionalism has become an important concept in education, transforming the way teachers, administrators, and school staff approach professional development, school leadership, and student success. As defined by Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018), collaborative

professionalism goes beyond the superficial aspects of teamwork or forced collegiality, where educators might work together in a limited, task-oriented way. Instead, it promotes deep, purposeful collaboration that focuses on shared goals, mutual respect, and collective responsibility for school improvement. This concept requires a cultural transformation within schools, where the focus is not just on individual teacher performance but on the strength of the entire professional community, working together to enhance teaching and learning.

At the core of collaborative professionalism is the belief that educators can achieve far more together than they can individually. This framework recognizes that every teacher brings skills, experiences, and perspectives to the table, and that the collective strength of the school lies in its ability to harness these diverse contributions. The emphasis is on professional dialogue, where educators engage in ongoing conversations about their practice, challenges, and successes, while critically reflecting on how they can improve their approach. This interaction helps to build a shared sense of purpose, where everyone is invested in the success of the school as a whole, not just in their individual classrooms.

Kennedy's [2005] nine models of professional development offer a comprehensive framework for understanding how different approaches can support the development of collaborative professionalism and leadership. Each model reflects varying degrees of engagement, from transmissive approaches to more transformative, reflective practices.

1. *The Training Model*: This model focuses on skill acquisition through direct instruction, often from external experts. In the Leadership and Mentoring in Schools program, structured modules provided essential leadership and mentoring skills, aligning with the education model. These sessions allowed us to build foundational knowledge in leadership, creating a shared language for collaboration.

2. *The Award-Bearing Model*: Professional development linked to formal qualifications, such as the certificate participants earned through Mary Immaculate College, aligns with this model. The formal recognition of the learning experience helped validate the skills gained and ensured accountability in applying these skills to our schools upon return to Brazil.

3. *The Deficit Model*: This model seeks to address specific gaps in teachers' knowledge or skills. In the program, participants were encouraged to identify areas where our leadership practices could be improved, receiving targeted support to bridge those gaps. The mentoring approach in the course helped participants focus on continuous improvement and personal growth.

4. *The Cascade Model*: The cascade model involves training a small group of educators who then share our knowledge with others in our school or region. A key aspect of the program's sustainability was the expectation that participants would return to Brazil and disseminate what we had learned, building leadership capacity within our schools and districts.

5. *The Standards-Based Model*: This model focuses on aligning professional development with external standards or benchmarks. While the Irish program was not primarily focused on standards, participants were exposed to international best practices in leadership, encouraging us to reflect on how these could meet or exceed the educational standards within our own schools.

6. *The Coaching/Mentoring Model*: Central to the program, this model emphasizes professional growth through supportive, reflective relationships. Participants have observed how mentors supported their mentees, creating a network of shared learning. This model encourages deep professional relationships that transcend geographical boundaries and promote long-term collaboration.

7. *The Community of Practice Model*: A key feature of collaborative professionalism, the community of practice [CoP] model involves teachers working together regularly to solve problems and share strategies. In the international program, participants formed cross-cultural communities of practice, where we engaged in continuous professional dialogues about leadership and mentoring strategies observed during the course. These discussions extended beyond the formal sessions, with participants drawing on each other's experiences to adapt global practices to our local contexts.

8. *The Action Research Model*: This model encourages teachers to engage in inquiry-based learning, investigating our own practices to bring about improvement. We were encouraged to reflect critically on our own leadership practices and apply action research methods to adapt what we had learned to our specific school contexts. This reflective practice aligns with the transformative aspects of leadership, encouraging participants to challenge existing norms and implement new approaches in our schools.

9. *The Transformative Model*: The transformative model of professional development encourages educators to critically examine and challenge existing structures, with the goal of driving systemic change. The program in Ireland adopted this model by empowering participants to think beyond our immediate roles and consider how we could contribute to broader educational reforms within our own schools and communities.

By cultivating a culture of reflection and collaboration, the program helped participants develop the leadership skills necessary to enact meaningful change. These nine models, integrated into the Leadership and Mentoring in Schools course, helped create a professional development experience that was both structured and reflective, combining skill acquisition with critical engagement. The program's focus on peer mentoring, collaborative dialogue, and reflective practices reinforced the importance of professional communities where teachers share responsibility for school improvement.

Additionally, collaborative professionalism promotes a culture of trust and transparency. In many traditional school environments, teachers may work in isolation, feeling the pressure to manage their classrooms independently and solve problems on their own. This can create bubbles within a school, where collaboration is limited to administrative meetings or superficial exchanges of perspectives. In contrast, collaborative professionalism encourages teachers to break down these barriers and engage in more meaningful partnerships with their colleagues. Teachers are encouraged to observe each other's classes, offer constructive feedback, and discuss areas for improvement. This type of collaboration helps to build a culture of trust, where teachers feel comfortable sharing both their successes and their challenges, knowing that their colleagues are there to support them.

A benefit of collaborative professionalism is its impact on student learning. When teachers work together to improve their practice, students benefit from the collective expertise of the entire teaching staff. [Hargreaves and O'Connor \(2018\)](#) have shown that schools with strong cultures of collaboration tend to have higher levels of student achievement, as teachers are more likely to implement strategies, reflect on their effectiveness, and make adjustments as needed. Moreover, collaborative professionalism helps to ensure consistency across classrooms, as teachers align their approaches to instruction and assessment, ensuring that all students receive equitable learning experiences.

In the context of the international professional development program in Ireland, collaborative professionalism was a central theme. The program brought together educators from different regions of Brazil, and we engaged in classes with teachers from not only different

parts of Ireland but also other countries, such as Uganda, Spain, the United States, and India, creating a rich environment for professional collaboration. We were encouraged to engage in professional dialogues about the leadership and mentoring practices we observed and how these could be adapted to our own schools. These conversations extended beyond the formal sessions of the program, as we continued to reflect and share insights informally during our time in Ireland. The program emphasized the importance of building professional communities where educators could rely on one another for support and feedback.

One of the most important aspects of collaborative professionalism is the balance between individual autonomy and collective responsibility. Teachers, by nature of their profession, often value the autonomy they have in managing their classrooms. However, collaborative professionalism does not seek to undermine this autonomy; rather, it encourages teachers to see their individual work as part of a larger, interconnected system. In this model, teachers maintain the freedom to innovate and adapt their teaching to meet the needs of their students, while also contributing to the overall goals of the school through its culture [Barth, 2002]. This balance allows for both personal and collective growth, as teachers learn from one another and support each other in their professional journeys.

A key challenge in implementing collaborative professionalism is the change in culture required from educators and school leaders. In schools where a more traditional, hierarchical model of leadership prevails, there may be resistance to the idea of shared leadership and collaboration. Some teachers may be hesitant to open their practice to critique, fearing judgment or competition from their peers. School leaders, too, may struggle with relinquishing some control and allowing teachers to take a more active role in decision-making processes. However, for collaborative professionalism to thrive, it is essential that both teachers and leaders embrace the idea of shared responsibility and recognize the value of collective expertise.

Collaborative professionalism also aligns with the idea of distributed leadership [Harris; DeFlaminis, 2016], where leadership is not concentrated in the hands of a few individuals but is spread across the entire school community. In this model, teachers are empowered to take on leadership roles in various capacities, from mentoring their colleagues to leading professional development sessions or initiating school-wide projects. Distributed leadership fosters a sense of ownership among teachers, as they feel more involved in the decision-making process and more accountable for the outcomes of the school. This type of leadership is essential for creating a collaborative culture, as it encourages all educators to contribute their insights and expertise to the betterment of the school.

In practice, collaborative professionalism can take many forms, from structured CoP to more informal, peer-to-peer mentoring relationships. CoP [Wenger; Snyder, 2000] are common structures used to facilitate collaboration, where groups of teachers come together regularly to discuss student data, instructional strategies, and areas for improvement. These groups provide a space for teachers to engage in professional dialogue, share resources, and collectively problem-solve challenges they encounter in the classroom. Peer mentoring [Vinatier, 2013], on the other hand, offers a more personalized approach, where experienced teachers provide guidance and support to their less-experienced colleagues, such as the Irish NQTs induction and mentorship. Both approaches are valuable in cultivating a culture of collaboration, as they encourage continuous professional development and a focus on student outcomes.

Ultimately, collaborative professionalism represents a reorientation in how we think about professional development, leadership, and school improvement. It emphasizes the importance of relationships, trust, and shared responsibility, and recognizes that the collective strength of the

school lies in its ability to harness the talents and expertise of all educators. By nurturing a culture of collaboration, schools can create a more supportive environment, where both teachers and students thrive. In the context of this internationalization, collaborative professionalism provided a framework for educators to engage in meaningful cross-cultural exchanges, learning from one another and bringing those insights back to our own schools.

through this process, schools can become more adaptive, responsive, and effective in meeting the needs of their students in a globalized world. Collaborative professionalism can lead to what Albert [Bandura \[1997\]](#) calls Collective Teacher Efficacy. Research shows that when teachers share the belief that through their collective actions they can positively influence student outcomes, student achievement increases [[Donohoo; O'Leary; Hattie, 2020](#)].

Final thoughts

The idea of responsible internationalization in Basic Education has revealed insights into the potential for enhancing school leadership and mentoring practices through collaborative professionalism. This discussion emphasizes the importance of recognizing that internationalization is not solely a domain of higher education, but a vital component of educational systems at all levels. The findings indicate that when educators engage in international partnerships and share our practices across borders, we enrich our understanding of effective teaching and leadership strategies. These collaborations cultivate a culture of continuous learning and adaptation, which is crucial for addressing the complex challenges faced by schools today.

A key takeaway from this study is the transformative potential of collaborative professionalism. By creating an environment where teachers view ourselves as leaders and mentors, schools can cultivate a sense of shared responsibility for student success and school improvement. The professional development program in Ireland highlighted how educators can benefit from engaging in dialogues with peers from different educational contexts, facilitating the exchange of concepts and practices that enhance both teaching and learning. This collaborative approach encourages educators to reflect on their practice critically, share successes and challenges, and collectively seek solutions.

This act of "getting off the island" to gain new insights about it is fundamental to educational transformation. Internationalization, when practiced in a balanced, sustainable, and inclusive way, is not about importing ready-made models but creating spaces for mutual exchange, where both local and global practices are enriched. In this way, collaborative learning and collective professionalism emerge as central pillars for addressing contemporary challenges, such as resistance to change and limited resources.

[Kennedy's \[2005\]](#) models of professional development are also important in this context. Her typology suggests that professional development can take various forms, from the training model, which focuses on skill acquisition, to the transformative model, which encourages a critical examination of established practices. In the program in Ireland, these approaches were intertwined, creating a collaborative learning environment where educators not only acquired new skills but were also encouraged to reflect critically on how to apply these insights in our local contexts.

The responsible internationalization framework, as outlined by [Stallivieri and Vianna \[2020\]](#), provides valuable guidance for educators and school leaders as we navigate the complexities of international partnerships. The dimensions of balance, accountability, sustainability, inclusion, and compliance serve as essential principles for ensuring that international collaborations are equitable and beneficial for all parties involved. These dimensions emphasize the need for

mutual respect and shared learning, reminding educators that our individual and collective growth can have an impact on our schools and communities. By adhering to these principles, schools can create meaningful partnerships that contribute to the development of inclusive and high-quality educational experiences for all students.

While the benefits of internationalization and collaborative professionalism are clear, it is important to recognize the challenges that educators may face in implementing these practices. Resistance to change, limited resources, and the pressure to conform to traditional models of leadership and teaching can hinder progress. However, the insights gained from the international program underscore the importance of embracing a posture of adaptability and openness to new approaches. Educators must be encouraged to take risks, experiment with new approaches, and support one another in our efforts to improve practice. School leaders play a crucial role in shaping this culture by providing opportunities for professional development, facilitating collaboration, and modeling the behaviors we wish to see among our staff.

Additionally, the role of mentorship emerges as a vital component of the internationalization process. Experienced educators can provide guidance and support to their colleagues, helping them navigate the complexities of implementing new strategies and practices. This mentorship benefits the mentees while also strengthening the overall capacity of the school community. By cultivating a culture of mentorship and collaboration, schools can create an environment where all educators feel empowered to contribute to the collective goals of the institution.

The intersection of local and global contexts is another significant theme that emerged from the study. Engaging with educators from diverse backgrounds allows for an understanding of the multifaceted nature of education. Participants in the international program were able to learn from the Irish educational system while also reflecting on our own experiences in Brazil. This cross-cultural exchange cultivates a deeper appreciation for the unique challenges and strengths present in various educational settings. It also reinforces the idea that while there may be commonalities in educational practices across countries, the solutions must be adapted to the specific needs of local communities.

As the field of education continues to evolve in response to globalization and technological advancements, it is imperative for educators to remain open to new perspectives and practices. The concept of collaborative professionalism encourages a shift away from isolated practice towards a more interconnected and supportive framework. Schools that prioritize collaboration and shared learning will be better equipped to adapt to the changing educational landscape and to meet the diverse needs of their students.

In conclusion, this study highlights the critical role of responsible internationalization in enhancing leadership and mentoring practices in Basic Education. By enhancing collaborative professionalism and embracing the principles of responsible internationalization, educators can work together to create a more inclusive educational environment. As schools continue to navigate the complexities of modern education, the commitment to collaboration and shared growth will be essential in ensuring that students receive the education they deserve. The process of responsible internationalization is continuous, and by adopting these principles, educators and stakeholders across various levels of responsibility can work collaboratively to implement improvements in education and address the needs of students and communities.

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The authors declare that the paper was written without the use of any generative artificial intelligence tools.

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