

Professional relationships both within and outside the school: barriers and opportunities from an intergenerational perspective

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper draws on data from a research project that examined the professional relationships that existed between teachers of different generations within an educational setting, including both those inside and outside school.

Design/methodology/approach – A qualitative approach was adopted to better understand participants' intergenerational relationships. Data were collected via semi-structured interviews conducted online. Data analysis was carried out using Atlas.ti 22 software. This focused on participants' professional relationships, generationally-influenced professional relationships, links to the school and connections with their environment.

Findings – The paper shows that commitment to the profession and work climate were among the key aspects referred to by the interviewees. The different age groups agreed that they had experienced intergenerational feedback and that there was closer contact between peers of the same generation, which led to greater levels of affinity. The shared responsibility that comes with teaching and the sense of belonging were essential links to the school. The generational groups underlined the importance of building bridges and participating in collaborative networks to form connections with their environment.

Originality/value – Although several studies have considered various factors influencing professional relationships from an intergenerational perspective, this paper adds value to the existing literature by providing new data and analyzing the barriers and opportunities experienced by teachers of different generations (novice, veteran and retired) in their professional work within and beyond the educational setting.

Keywords Professional relationships, Intergenerational relationships, Teachers, Educational research

Paper type Research paper

What does this paper cover?

This paper uses findings from a funded research project entitled “Intergenerational Professional Development in Education: Implications for Teacher Induction Programs”, conducted in Spain (see acknowledgments section for more information).

The aim of the study presented here was to explore the professional relationships between teachers of different generations in an educational setting, including both those inside and outside the school.

Before delving into the theoretical framework, it is described how the concept of “generation” is used in this study, specifically referred to the diverse set of generations that currently coexist in schools. In particular, this concept will be analyzed with regard to schools in Spain, where the research was carried out. The following questions were raised: Which generations are working together in Spanish schools at present? Which generations have retired/left teaching? Which ones have not yet started in the world of work?

Generation is viewed as a group of people born in the same historical period (Geeraerts *et al.*, 2021). The educational workforce is composed of professionals from different



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generations. Schools have more than one generation employed at the same time, including the *Baby Boomer Generation*, *Generation X* and *Generation Y*, who all work together in schools. The *Baby Boomer Generation* (born 1949–1968) is characterized by having experienced a period of peace and demographic explosion in Spain; *Generation X* (born 1969–1980) is marked by the crisis of 1973 and the Spanish transition from dictatorship to democracy; and *Generation Y* (born 1981–1993) witnessed the onset of digital technologies first-hand in their early life. The members of the *Silent Generation* (born 1930–1948), largely influenced by war, have mostly retired, whereas much of *Generation Z* (born 1994–2010), whose life span coincide with the massive expansion of the Internet, are not yet old enough to start their working life.

In this context of intergenerational learning, it is worth mentioning the mentoring process in the field of education. A teacher's initial years on the job are the most critical and often the most difficult. Akiri and Dori (2022, 129) stated that “the first years of teaching are crucial for novice teachers' integration into and retainment in the education system. The support they receive from experienced teachers impacts their professional development.” New teachers bring energy, enthusiasm and commitment to their classrooms but at the same time face “daunting challenges” that must be addressed (Fernet *et al.*, 2016). Beginning teachers need opportunities to be with other teachers, observe them, make joint lesson plans and have time to build relationships with experienced teachers and mentors (Mansfield and Thompson, 2017).

Today, the definition of mentoring has been expanded to include group mentoring and mentoring networks, in which novice and experienced teachers can develop and learn from each other's challenges and experiences or acquire new knowledge together (Tal *et al.*, 2021). Induction programs are prevalent worldwide to support novice teachers, a process that aims to help new teachers in the early days of their profession, which is when the main reality check occurs (Voss and Kunter, 2020). Alexopoulos *et al.* (2022, 39) noted that:

The way schools welcome their teachers is a factor that significantly affects the latter's organizational assimilation into the new school environment and their willingness to go above and beyond when it comes to providing teaching and pedagogical guidance to students.

There is evidence that induction and reception period of newly appointed teachers can deeply impact the quality of teaching and improve learning outcomes (Kearney, 2021; Kyrou *et al.*, 2020; OECD, 2019).

Another relevant question in this regard is the transfer of knowledge that takes place in educational spaces between different generations, an aspect that has attracted the attention of educational research in recent years. The direct consequence of this transfer is that different generations can *learn from each other*, with the ensuing opportunities that unfold. In this regard, intergenerational learning has a great potential in order to exchange experiences and knowledge.

According to Çelik and Polat (2022, p. 12) “one important area where transfer of experience can be realized is by appointing experienced teachers to act as consultants to teachers from the younger generation who are new to the school.” Blanuša *et al.* (2020) argued that the complexity of the educational profession and the professional development of teachers require continuous education and lifelong learning. However, Karlberg and Bezzina (2022, p. 638) concluded that “both beginning and experienced teachers identify four main areas in which they require training, namely special education, technology-enhanced learning, handling behavior concerns, and teaching migrant children.”

Looking through the lens of professional relationships within and outside school

Collaboration is a key factor in predicting the type of professional relationship that exists between teachers. Collaborative professionalism and the power of collective efficacy have

recently come of age and yielded clear results (Hargreaves and O'Connor, 2018; Donohoo, 2016). Even for those who are in the process of training to become teachers, being part of a collaborative culture from the beginning is something that can make a difference in their professional future in schools.

Osmond-Johnson and Fuhrmann (2022) recently explored the support mechanisms of teacher candidates to become collaborative teaching professionals and concluded that they demonstrated an enhanced sense of collective efficacy and an understanding of the importance of collaborative professional cultures on their continued growth as members of the teaching profession.

The literature supports that there is a significant relationship between school climate and the degree of collaboration and knowledge sharing that takes place between teachers, both inside and outside of school. Miesner *et al.* (2022) confirmed that school climate (social dynamics and interactions among members of school communities) influences collaborative practices and can support or impede school-based collaboration. Kazak and Polat (2018) concluded that a positive intergenerational atmosphere within a school can prepare the ground for the sharing of knowledge and experience among its teachers. The research by Sindić *et al.* (2022, p. 125) aimed to “examine the perspective of preschool teachers on the factors of intergenerational learning important for their own professional development”, professional cooperation being one of them. Vallejo *et al.* (2021) referred to the impact of building relationships between teachers, paying special attention to collaborative relationships of different generations and their effects on learning.

However, intra-school collaboration is not enough, and the external contribution has not yet become fully explored (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2020), leading to the conclusion that external links are not carefully considered. While there has been increasing attention paid to them in the early stages, they are still to be developed further.

Method

Study approach and design

A qualitative methodology was adopted, as it allows for an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences in real-world contexts and accessing how they understand their world (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018). The study is situated within a constructivist–interpretivist approach, according to which the participants construct these meanings in interaction with their context, and the researcher must access the meaning of these subjective understandings by interacting with them. Its design corresponds to what Merriam and Tisdell (2016) identified as a basic qualitative study. According to the two criteria proposed by Flick (2018), it is a comparative, cross-sectional (or snapshot) study, which focuses on the comparison of individuals and groups at a single point in time.

Participants

Selection of participants was performed using purposive sampling. Information richness was employed as a major criterion of participant selection in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomena under study (Emmel, 2013; Patton, 2015). A combined sampling strategy was used (Patton, 2015). This strategy included homogeneous sampling, as teacher participants were sought from one of three homogeneous groups: novice (young beginning teachers: YBT), veteran (mature veteran teachers: MVT) and retired (older retired teachers: ORT). Maximum variation sampling was employed, as diversity of variation among these homogeneous groups of teachers was needed in order to both document their diversity and identify any common patterns among them. Matched sampling was then used, as consistent differences are needed across the subgroups in some dimensions of interest to

further understand what factors could explain possible differences. These differences were not only found in age and teaching experience but also in educational stage: early childhood education and primary education; secondary education and vocational training.

The decision to recruit retired teachers was based on the evidence of continuity and even development of professional identity that went beyond retirement (Shlomo and Oplatka, 2020). A national trade union and several associations of retired teachers were used to identify potential participants. The researchers' personal networks and social networks were also resorted for recruitment purposes. The final number of participants ($n = 60$) was adjusted to sample sizes suggested in the literature (Sim *et al.*, 2018), including those proposed to reach a suitable level of saturation (Hennink and Kaiser, 2022). Table 1 lists all study entry criteria.

The most important characteristics of the selected participants are shown in Table 2. This information was collected through a short electronic questionnaire, the content of which was checked directly during the interviews.

Data collection

Data were collected via semi-structured individual in-depth interviews. This method is particularly suitable for accessing information focused on the aspects of interest in a broader and more detailed way and from a more personal perspective for each of the participants. It was chosen because it reveals not only the perceptions and beliefs about the issues at stake, but also the emotional experiences of the participants, by incorporating characteristics such as their flexibility to adjust to the interviewer and the establishment of a more personal relationship.

| | YBT | MVT | ORT |
|-----------------------------|---|--|---|
| Age and teaching experience | Born after 1990. Teaching experience: not more than six school years | 50 years of age or older. Teaching experience: 10 school years or more | Retired teachers (by either voluntary or compulsory retirement) |
| Stages | Early Childhood Education (2nd level) Primary education Secondary education | | |
| Type of school | Publicly-funded schools | | |

Table 1.
Inclusion criteria

| | YBT ($n = 20$) | | MVT ($n = 20$) | | ORT ($n = 20$) | |
|----------------------------------|------------------|-----|------------------|-----|------------------|-----|
| | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | Mean | SD |
| Age ^a | 27.7 | 2.1 | 56.2 | 3 | 67.9 | 5.5 |
| Teaching Experience ^b | 2.3 | 1.7 | 26.1 | 7.1 | 35.6 | 5.5 |

| | YBT | | MVT | | ORT | | Full sample | |
|---------------------------|----------|----|----------|----|----------|----|-------------|----|
| | <i>n</i> | % | <i>n</i> | % | <i>n</i> | % | <i>n</i> | % |
| School stage | | | | | | | | |
| • Elementary ^c | 10 | 50 | 10 | 50 | 10 | 50 | 30 | 50 |
| • Secondary | 10 | 50 | 10 | 50 | 10 | 50 | 30 | 50 |
| Gender | | | | | | | | |
| • Female | 14 | 70 | 16 | 80 | 9 | 45 | 39 | 65 |
| • Male | 6 | 30 | 4 | 20 | 11 | 55 | 21 | 35 |

Note(s): ^aAge in years as of 31 December 2021; ^bYears of experience counted when answering the initial electronic questionnaire; ^cThis category includes early childhood education (2nd level) and primary education

Table 2.
Characteristics of
participants

Protocols and guidelines developed jointly by the research team were followed in conducting the interviews. These were piloted and then improved and generally applied to the study as a whole. The guidelines incorporated a small set of core questions, each accompanied by a range of probes and follow-up questions to obtain more comprehensive and accurate information if not initially provided by the participants. These included: (1) what is your view of the teaching profession based on your current or past experience (if the participant was a retired teacher)? (2) Why do you have this view? (3) How have you come to see teaching as a profession? And (4) with whom do you share and/or have you shared a view of the teaching profession? Why?

Due to the risks of the pandemic for a number of the participants, the interviews were conducted by the researchers via videoconferencing. The length of the interviews ranged from 28 to 136 min, the average length being 66.3 min. They took place from April to December 2021.

Data analysis

Consent was obtained from the participants to record the interviews, which were also transcribed verbatim by a professional transcription service provider. The transcript was then reviewed by the researchers. A reflexive thematic analysis was conducted, which emphasizes the reflexivity or critical reflection of the researchers on their assumptions, decisions and actions (Braun and Clarke, 2021). It was used in combination with the method of constant comparison analysis, which favors reflection by cyclically comparing data, codes and themes and introducing corresponding improvements in the analysis (Leech and Onwuegbuzie, 2008; Tracy, 2019).

Drawing on the model proposed by Braun and Clarke (2021), the analysis consisted of a series of overlapping and recursive phases, which involved a process of reflection. The process began with familiarization with the data (e.g. by taking a questioning approach in reading the transcripts and taking notes on aspects of potential interest). It continued with the generation of a set of codes to apply to the data. This process prioritized the combination and balance between data-driven and theory-driven analysis. Priority was also given to the application of the salience analysis proposed by Buetow (2010), according to which the object of attention are not only codes that are identifiable as recurrent, but also those that are relevant for interpretation, despite not being recurrent. Coding was collaborative, based on conversations, discussions and a joint process that took place in the course of scheduled *ad hoc* meetings and frequent contacts. The process was supported by ATLAS.ti 22 software. The analysis continued with the search and generation or construction of themes. The codes, together with the data representing them, were reviewed to identify significant shared features that would allow clustering around central organizing concepts to which, in turn, other concepts or sub-themes could be associated. Potential themes were reviewed and checked against the data to determine whether they represented them appropriately (against parts of the data at the beginning and against the whole data at the end). Before the report was produced, the naming and definition of themes was finalized, as both processes started early with tentative names and definitions.

Findings

The results of the qualitative interviews are presented below, according to the four categories analyzed: professional relationships, generationally inflected professional relationships, links to the school and connections with their environment.

Professional relationships

Retired teachers had a high degree of commitment to their profession and were interested in maintaining professional relationships beyond the termination of their employment

contracts. They remained linked in some way to the world of education, of which they have been a part throughout their professional career (D11:62).

Veteran teachers understood that the professional relationships produced by teaching teams in a school, especially at secondary level, are very much mediated by the departments to which they belonged, according to the discipline they taught. This meant that teaching took place on a subject-by-subject basis rather than as part of interdisciplinary projects, which provide more opportunities for collaboration and a closer professional relationship between colleagues (D1:20 and D1:21). Veterans also recognized that professional relationships improved when there were greater exchanges and personal relationships, which created a more comfortable working environment (D4:8):

When you have a good rapport with the rest of your colleagues, you can do a lot of things. Sometimes there are meals, get-togethers, short moments we share outside [...] I think those times are nourishing for us, you build into a totally different relationship with the people you have around you on a day-to-day basis, much more than just rushing along the corridors.

Generally speaking, all generational groups agreed on the importance of having a good working environment in order for professional relationships to flow in a positive way. Conversely, when the atmosphere was negative, it had a dangerously contagious effect that contaminated part of the teaching staff. In the perception of new teachers, it was important not to be influenced by this negative effect (D13:21):

I have good relationships, I think there are colleagues who are doing interesting things and from whom one can learn a lot. And then there are also colleagues who, let's say, I see have a low predisposition when it comes to teaching and sometimes this is contagious. When I see colleagues who are in a spiral of complaints, I try not to spend too much time in that environment, because in the end it is contagious and you also end up complaining about things that can be seen from a different point of view.

Generationally inflected professional relationships

Retired teachers had the impression that the members of their generation felt closer together than current generations, a fact that they associated with the political circumstances experienced during the transition from dictatorship to democracy in Spain (D15:99):

Well, I think my generation was atypical because we had to live through the change from Franco's dictatorship to democracy. At that time we were all excited, we wanted to experience things, to share, we did not care about ideologies, and we put them aside. That time was magical for us because we broke down barriers by feeling close to each other. All of this played a role.

The participating retired teachers said that young people bring freshness to the school and have a proficiency in subjects such as ICT and languages (English), but they are not more enthusiastic than older people (D3:3 and D57:41). In turn, the beginning teachers interviewed recognized the added value of the help offered by the veterans, which enabled both groups to learn together (D2:4, D9:47 and D10:30), since teaching is an intergenerational form of work in which they are constantly in contact with each other (D39:6). For their part, retirees mentioned the importance of mentoring young people (D7:29), answering their questions (D16:62) and supporting teachers who are starting out in the profession in matters such as teaching programs (D23:32), which tend to cause a great deal of concern for beginning teachers in their early years. At the same time, beginners received advice from veterans, including ensuring that they did not take too much work home with them (D42:137).

The veteran teachers who were interviewed felt that many older people lagged behind and asked younger people for help in catching up on technology issues, for example (D26:209). In this sense, the veterans reported that they learned from the resources and methods used by

beginning teachers, and beginners in turn looked at how veterans dealt with families and solved certain problems in which they had no experience (D57:5). The beginning teachers who were interviewed also felt that older teachers found it harder to adapt to change than younger ones (D46:61). Retirees also recognized the need to work on empathy between generations, while affirming that the clash between generations was inevitable (D16:22). In this sense, the retired participants assumed that smoothing the edges and ironing out the differences between generations was a process in itself (D70:34). Additionally, the younger teachers in the study considered that veterans had less energy but more experience, because they had been through all levels and had their own tricks for attracting students' attention and keep them focused on the learning process (D24:30).

Veteran participants believed that professional relationships were positive precisely because they involved different generations, which enabled them to pool their skills (D14:51):

Sometimes you work with some people and sometimes you work with others. When there are colleagues who are struggling, you can lend them a hand. And it does not matter if they are young or old, because the older ones may be good at drawing pictures and making diagrams and the young ones are very good at translating that into an application, you know?

In addition, the veterans stated that in informal coffee gatherings there were no major differences in conversation between generations, as everyone interacted with everyone else (D22:97).

I think that, generationally, I can have a coffee in my high school cafeteria with a 25-year-old colleague and a 54-year-old colleague in exactly the same way, and I can have same type of conversation at that relaxed moment.

However, when it comes to deeper, more meaningful conversations about the state of education or venting to a peer about a particular issue that affects or concerns them, veterans say that they tend to do this with members of their own generation, with some exceptions (D48:26):

Newcomers connect more with newcomers. We veterans connect more with veterans. When it comes to letting off steam or talking about the state of education, we connect with our group.

The beginning teachers interviewed also agreed that they interacted more with colleagues of their age (D13:33). Veterans also admitted that they had closer relationships between teachers within a similar age range (D13:32) and believed that the younger generation complained more than senior teachers; however, in their opinion, beginning teachers should be grateful for the work they do, and they should be more involved in their teaching.

Links to the school

The participating retired teachers alluded to the importance of the whole teaching staff taking joint responsibility for what happened in the school (D8:25). Similarly, they emphasized the overtime they had worked in mutual agreement with colleagues at the school to carry their educational project forward. They also stressed that they had a personal link to the school, which they tried to maintain beyond retirement (D18:75):

The 20 or so teachers who retired from the school in the last few years meet every few years and every two or three months we schedule a lunch, visit the school, see what progress has been made, talk to the leadership team [...] So we contribute what we can and at the same time it gives us personal satisfaction to see the fruits of our labor in what has been our place of work for many years.

Retirees also thought that it was more difficult to maintain the connection with the school when beginning teachers have to constantly move from one school to another because they have not been assigned to a specific school and the uncertainty as to where they will be teaching the following year is hanging over them (D18:116):

I started working at a school and I have been in that school the whole time. However, other colleagues have spent three months in one school, six months in another [. . .]. And those on temporary cover positions who have not yet passed the competitive exam do not know whether they will stay in the same school next year.

The retired participants also assumed that the sense of belonging to a school was an important issue to be taken into account (D23:75):

There should be a strong feeling of belonging to the school; at least in our school it has always been like that, it cannot function without that.

Connections with the environment

The retired participants pointed to the need to connect the school with the neighborhood, with families and with the wider educational community (D7:20). It is worth highlighting the predisposition of this group to collaborate and work as part of a network, with the intention of continuing to contribute the wisdom and experience accumulated over time as experts in the field (D11:13):

Now that we have retired, this group of teachers from our district (which has about 20 schools) meets once a month, have pedagogical discussions and are part of an exchange network.

The knowledge from these forums and experiences is transferred on to school management teams with the aim of establishing links and implementing proposals for improvement that may be useful for schools (D11:17 and D11:64). Following the same argument, the retired teachers mentioned the existence of local community networks in addition to networks between schools (D11:15):

Perhaps the challenge is not so much to create school networks, which is something that has become too small, but now the challenge is to create community networks, by areas, which can be called educational networks. This involves bringing together all the actors in an area who are involved in education (sports centers, libraries, cultural organizations, neighborhood associations, etc.) and coordinating all of them.

The retired participants also highlighted the importance of the collaboration/cooperation with and openness toward the neighborhood, associations, day centers, town councils, etc. (D15:22). This included reaching out to their environment and take advantage of the resources provided by the area in which the school is located (D15:64).

One of our pioneering experiences was that every Friday we had an outing: we went to the market, to see the shoemaker, to visit the dealership [. . .] we learned everything that was happening in the neighborhood. Then we were lucky to be very close to the countryside too, so we would go out to the orchards to see the strawberries, cotton, etc.

The novices agreed with their older counterparts that the collaboration of all educational and social agents was essential to ensure that no students were left behind (D10:46). In this sense, the retirees also talked about breaking the isolation of schools, bringing them closer to their surrounding environment and connecting the schools that were close to each other in the same geographical area. They argued that building links between teachers worked very well; they reported that, while each school was an island before, now this is changing (D18:18). They also noted that it is important to make connections between schools and businesses (D18:85), as schools educate future generations who will go out into the labor market and, therefore, must be prepared for the demands that society will make of them.

The veterans also agreed with the retirees and newcomers on the importance of collaboration with associations, foundations, non-governmental organizations [. . .] (D56:25),

as well as on the need to increase cooperation mechanisms and foster relations between schools (D66:17).

In the past, students did not go on end-of-year trips. We used to get together and do other kinds of activities, or we would take them to school concerts, or visit a different school once a year [...] That meant the children in the area got to know each other, you know? They became quite close because of their ages. Organizing it was a huge effort, but the truth is that pedagogically level it was a major contribution, because it also gave us the opportunity to contribute things to colleagues from other schools and exchange ideas with them.

Novice teachers were concerned about the transfer of knowledge from school to society and the impact of education on people's lives (D13:5).

Teaching a subject, teaching any content to younger children, transmitting knowledge, teaching healthy habits to these children, visiting a center for the elderly and showing the benefits of doing physical activity, in other words, going beyond the school boundaries [...] Ensuring that these lessons provide meaningful learning that is echoed in homes, in society.

Finally, the generational groups considered here will serve as a common thread for the discussion and conclusion section that follows.

Discussion and conclusion

Working relationships in education are inexorably intergenerational. While generations of young people are bringing new knowledge into different educational institutions, older generations are reaching the end of their working lives and retiring. This is a never-ending cycle that continues year after year, school year after school year. The interactions that occur between the generations that have just joined the school, those with decades of experience and those that are about to retire require attention from educational research.

Starting with the categories of analysis, regarding *professional relationships* in the *field of education*, the interviewees in the study focused on the commitment to the profession, the limitation of professional relationships by school organizations (which sometimes results in the fragmentation of teaching, as in secondary education, which can be a barrier), and the working atmosphere. In relation to the latter, [Low et al. \(2022\)](#) studied schoolteachers across six career stages, from beginning teachers to those close to retirement, and found that positive work relationships were essential for enabling teachers' career-long commitment to their profession. [Alexopoulos et al. \(2022, p. 48\)](#) stated that a positive school climate can "enhance opportunities for cooperation and teamwork inside and outside the classroom." In the study conducted by [Williams and Rodriguez \(2021\)](#) in Florida, United States, teachers' visits to their colleagues' classrooms, not only in their own school building but also in other neighboring schools, proved to be advantageous in improving school climate and increasing teachers' job satisfaction with their teaching tasks.

In terms of *generationally-inflected professional relationships*, the different age groups agreed that the opportunities to give feedback and transfer of knowledge between generations are the main benefits. They were also of the opinion that when closer contact between the generational groups leads to higher levels of affinity and complicity. Knowledge transfer between generations was also highlighted by [Bratianu and Leon \(2015\)](#), who confirmed that it contributed to increased levels of organizational knowledge and diminished knowledge loss.

Regarding the *links that teachers have to their school*, the shared responsibility that comes with teaching, the bond with the school and the sense of belonging were among the main concerns of the participating teachers. It is clear that teachers' connection with their environment has a lot to do with their sense of belonging to the educational institution where they work. [Lozano et al. \(2018\)](#) concluded that a school's links to its environment is reflected in the development of sustainable relationships, through which a sense of acceptance, belonging, worth and involvement is perceived between the school community and its setting.

In relation to *the connections that are created in the environment/context beyond the school*, the generational groups pointed to the need to build bridges between different educational and social agents that go beyond the boundaries of the school. They also highlighted the importance of participation in collaborative networks to better connect the resources of the community of which the schools are a part. Support networks between educational and social agents that share common goals through collaborative processes is one of the lines of research that is significantly growing, due to the value that these networks have proved to have for education from the point of view of school change and collective efficacy, as well as their impact in terms of quality and equity (Azorín and Fullan, 2022).

In summary, new entrants to the profession need support from their experienced colleagues to ensure that their adaptation to the school or other educational institution they join is as smooth as possible. It seems obvious, therefore, that there should be induction programs aimed precisely at making this process more manageable. Several experiences from around the world have corroborated the usefulness of this type of practice (Akiri and Dori, 2022; Alexopoulos *et al.*, 2022; Kearney, 2021; Kyrou *et al.*, 2020). In particular, in Spain, after passing the competitive examination for entry to the teaching profession as a civil servant, there is a one-year traineeship as an introduction to teaching (Eurydice, 2018). However, Prats *et al.* (2019), among others, have raised concerns that this year becomes reduced to a merely bureaucratic process and lacks any educational purpose. Furthermore, a meager 19% of Spanish teachers are trained through peer learning and observation-based activities, compared to 44% of the average TALIS participant (OECD, 2019). Manso and Garrido (2021) analyzed the process of supporting new teachers in schools and, on the basis of the data presented, confirmed that the induction process is still an unmet challenge in Spain. The planning, coordination, induction, support and follow-up activities that schools provide for their new teachers says a lot about these educational institutions. The main concerns of and barriers for newcomers to the profession are uncertainty, questions due to inexperience, the possible “stage fright” that may arise, and worries about how they will do their work inside and outside the classroom. However, it is also true that they incorporate ideas, proposals, updates and pedagogical innovations that undoubtedly enrich the educational organizations they join and the transfer of knowledge from which the rest of their colleagues can benefit.

Veteran teachers, who are responsible for mentoring new teachers, are key players in welcoming them into the school’s organization. Veterans have a greater knowledge of the culture of the school, they have mastered which actions to take in certain situations and they have the wisdom that comes with experience. However, they might need to learn about new ideas from the point of view of lifelong learning, especially in areas in which beginning teachers are highly proficient such as technology applied to education or the English language, among others. Bjursell (2015) noted that older workers generally had greater experience to share, while younger workers contributed new knowledge and useful skills to the organization. According to Šindić *et al.* (2022), teachers learn ICT skills from their younger colleagues, and community building, self-regulation from their older ones. Along these lines, we agreed that whereas older people possess wisdom and knowledge gained through years of experience, younger people follow modern trends and information technologies. Generally speaking, with some exceptions, this group is willing to share their knowledge about the teaching craft, but also to learn from the new generations, who bring freshness to the day-to-day running of their institutions.

Retirees, for their part, have accumulated experience that is a great source of enrichment for both veteran teachers and novices. They have lived through different historical and political circumstances and they may notice the intergenerational clash (barrier) the most, especially with beginning teachers. At the same time, both in active service and once their working life is over, retired teachers are willing to transfer their knowledge by maintaining contact with the institutions to which they were attached during their career. They participate in exchange, support and volunteering networks to remain connected

with their schools and contribute their invaluable professional capital (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012) to the education system and, therefore, to society as a whole.

Limitations include the lack of previous studies in the literature on intergenerational relationships between teachers and the complexity of the phenomena addressed, which justifies the exploratory nature of this research and reinforces its importance. It should be noted that the sample size was limited by the requirements of access to sources and the qualitative research process itself. In addition, the nature of the Spanish educational system may have had an effect on the results. The context in which the findings were gathered may be different than that of other teachers. However, some of these results converge with evidence from studies conducted in very diverse settings. Therefore, it may be useful to investigate further what aspects are emphasized by teachers of each generation in other countries and any related similarities and differences. A further limitation concerns the methodology of the study. This is a cross-sectional study characterized by data being collected from participants associated with different generational groups at the same time point (i.e. a narrow time interval). Qualitative cross-sectional studies such as this one could, however, be complemented by longitudinal or retrospective studies to specifically examine the influence exerted by the shared experience of certain past events and circumstances that occurred at similar ages.

The paper can have a clear impact on in-service teacher education, as it raises issues related to three generations of teachers and presents differences between the understandings of teachers from these particular generations. Future research could possibly investigate the role of stereotypes in teachers' beliefs, as well as possible biases and behaviors derived from them.

Finally, the role of "connection to the environment" by generational teachers has important implications for research, practice and society. The vast amount of resources (not only material but also human), experiences and knowledge that remain latent, untapped or underutilized in schools, education systems and society at large are compelling reasons to focus on increasing connections with the wider environment (Ainscow, 2015). In this sense, as shown in this paper, different generations of teachers have a lot to contribute in terms of weaving networks that have a positive impact on improving education, building bridges and crossing boundaries that can truly make a difference both within and outside the school.

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