

PROMOTING SOCIAL JUSTICE BY MEANS OF WIDER EDUCATIONAL JUSTICE

Portuguese upper secondary teachers and
researchers reflect upon problem-based learning

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Presentation overview

- Research questions
- Concern: Action needed!
- Standpoint of this paper
- The underlying project - EduTransfer
- Methodology
- Data discussion
- Final remarks

Research question(s)

- Does teachers' implementation of Problem-Based Learning (PBL) as learning and teaching methodology promote educational and social justice?
- Does PBL make room for young people's citizenship?

Underlying concern: Action needed!

- Mainstream schools and Vocational Education and Training (VET) institutions – as alternative learning arenas – do not seem to join enough efforts to tackle early school leaving

Nouwen et al. (2016); Van Pragg et al. (2016)

- Policy-makers and educationalists (researchers and teachers) have to take into account NOT ONLY students' disengagement, lack of motivation to learn and disconnection from education as problems that are seriously affecting social justice and inclusion

Bernstein (2000); Czerniawski & Kidd (2011)

- BUT that these struggles come together - and are impacted by – students' socioeducational conditions of (in)justice, where macro and meso-institutional factors combine

Araújo, Macedo, Santos, & Doroftei (2019)

Standpoint of this paper

- By learning about - and engaging with - hands-on methodologies, such as PBL, teachers may contribute to:
 - young people educational citizenship
 - students' possibility to identify, reflect upon, be heard and taken into account, and act in matters that concern their lives Macedo & Araújo (2014)
 - challenge students' educational expectations, in order
 - to improve their relational, social and work competences, and rethink 'youth' place at meaningful schools Smyth & Hattam (2002); Bishton & Lindsay (2011)
- and
- the reversion of the educational stigma of alternative learning arenas and their educational offer National Education Council (CNE, 2017)



The underlying project

EduTransfer - Learning from diverse educational settings
Transferability of promising practices in the 2020 Horizon

Aims

- to understand the transferability potential of educational practices between mainstream and VET spaces that face educational issues, such as early school leaving – a two-way process

Explores

- the complexity of students' educational struggles and trajectories and ways to promote wider levels of social justice

Challenges

- young people's thoughts and relational, social and work competences, and their potential to explore and change their own realities alongside others - Teachers, supported by researchers

Implies

- the construction of educational citizenship
 - recognition, interdependence and equality of condition Macedo & Araújo (2014)
 - the enactment by students of pedagogical educational rights of inclusion, participation and enhancement Baker, Lynch, Cantillon, & Walsh (2004)
Bernstein (2000)
- taking the focus off test evaluation AND valuing “all students in the classroom” while “holistically embracing all aspects of the student” Mthethwa-Sommers (2014, p.22)

The project is in line with

- European educational concerns, debates and policies about the transferability of knowledge and key competences
 - “skills, such as problem solving, critical thinking, ability to cooperate, creativity, computational thinking, self-regulation are more essential than ever before in our quickly changing society.”
EU Council Recommendation (May 22, 2018, p.2)
 - the “need for new solutions in a rapidly changing world”.
 - student and teacher agency and transferability
 - high priority to knowledge, skills, attitudes and values in learning processes that can be transferred to other contexts
OECD (2018)

PBL is in this mindset

- justice, inclusion and democracy are core values of the wider project and of the current paper that
 - brings to the fore teachers' reflections upon their pilot work on PBL with students - part of their CPD

Method

- Inspired by an **intensive participatory research** (Mannay, 2016)
 - based on 'creative research methods' (Kara, 2015)
 - researchers and participants engage in the co-construction of data (Riessman, 2008),
 - making the plurality of voices heard (Jackson & Mazzei, 2009)
 - participants are citizenship construction authors (Macedo, 2018)
- **content analysis** focusing on educational and social justice and citizenship
 - teachers' reflective reports about the pilot implementation of PBL with their students
 - teachers' joint discussions during training about the implementation of PBL

Research settings and participants

- 4 institutions: 2 mainstream schools; 2 VET schools (1 Artistic, 1 Business school)
- 23 teachers in CPD
- around 200 youngsters from the 10th and 11th grades, aged 15 to 20 y.o.
- training workshop: 3 sessions about PBL + independent trial with students, in their settings + 2 sessions of teachers' presentation of their reflexive practices



Data discussion on Social and Educational Justice:
Peers views upon experience-sharing
&
teacher's reflection on their own practices



Peers views upon experience-sharing during
teachers' training



by means of curriculum's co-construction

PBL may open the grounds for...

an **"integrated curriculum"** where **different subjects combine:**

- "The complete **articulation with the students' curriculum** favoured the **transversality of learning** and highlighted the detail and rigor of the final product."

a **more personalized construction of the curriculum** with individual knowledges:

- "The table with pupils' strengths and skills was an extremely original way of sharing among peers **in which tasks they were best** at and on the contribution they could make to the project."



by means of the enactment of citizenship

Teachers relate the topic of **PBL with citizenship**:

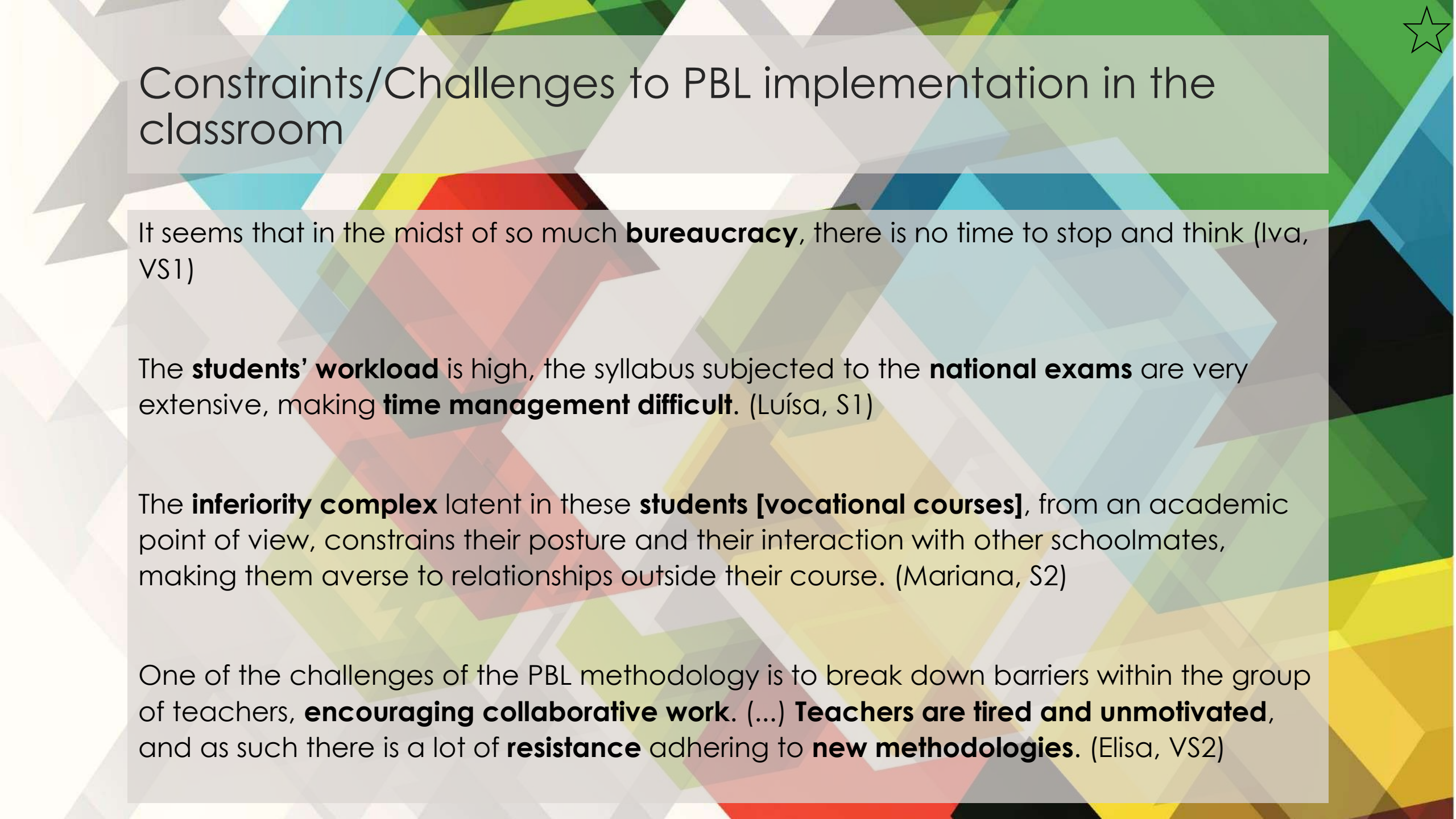
- “The relevance of the chosen topic for the personal and citizenship education of students.”

A **vague problem** provides space for students' voice:

- “The first question presented to the students challenged them to work on an apparently enigmatic topic.”
- “The students were responsible for selecting the theme”.



Teachers' reflections on their own practices
and educational struggles



Constraints/Challenges to PBL implementation in the classroom

It seems that in the midst of so much **bureaucracy**, there is no time to stop and think (Iva, VS1)

The **students' workload** is high, the syllabus subjected to the **national exams** are very extensive, making **time management difficult**. (Luísa, S1)

The **inferiority complex** latent in these **students [vocational courses]**, from an academic point of view, constrains their posture and their interaction with other schoolmates, making them averse to relationships outside their course. (Mariana, S2)

One of the challenges of the PBL methodology is to break down barriers within the group of teachers, **encouraging collaborative work**. (...) **Teachers are tired and unmotivated**, and as such there is a lot of **resistance** adhering to **new methodologies**. (Elisa, VS2)



Questioning their professional practices

Sometimes, I was called to support [students'] decisions, forcing myself to **omit my opinion, directing them to questions** that would help them to understand, for themselves, which is the best path. This **ability to not make judgments** or to **not share too much information** was not at all easy. (Mariana, S2)

As a teacher, the biggest challenge I felt was **not giving answers to the students** (...), I had to fight against this temptation and overcome these impulses several times, finding more questions to point them out a path whenever they reached a deadlock. (Iva, VS1)

The application of the PBL methodology implies a **change in the teachers' role, but also in the students**. Students are required to have a more active and dynamic participation while the **teacher** takes on **the role of facilitator and advisor**. (Luísa, S1)



Openness to implementation of hands-on methodologies, connection to students' struggles and voice

It brought the **technical-pedagogical team closer to the trainees (...)** **deepening the culture of proximity** (Carla, VTC)

I learned that PBL is a great "tool" for achieving **consolidated knowledge** and for acquiring **essential skills to their future life (...)**, mobilizing (taking advantage of) their **capabilities**. (José, S2)

I clearly recognize in this teaching method relevant potentialities regarding the formation of **more interventional and proactive individuals**. (Mariana, S2)

I also emphasize, (...) the subtle impact on their **interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence**, as they expose themselves in discussions, presentations and debates, justifying their positions and **making decisions**. (Mariana, S2)



Engaging students in participatory methodologies, development of XXI century competences and empowering them to become authors of their own learning

It was clearly observed that students developed (...) **research, assessment, communication, autonomy and critical thinking [skills]**. (José, S2)

The student has the possibility of being the **author and protagonist of his/her learning**. (Peter, VS1)



Supporting students' engagement in processes of change

From my point of view, one of the most enriching aspects of this first experience is based on the **answers to the problem found by the students**, as there are several **feasible proposals** with an impact on the **school community**. (Iva, VS1)

“It was interesting, as it gave the opportunity to **change the school with our ideas**.” This comment reveals what most contributed to the involvement and enthusiasm of students, their effective role in improving what is also their space for action and learning. (Iva, VS1)

The fact that this methodology requires students to **work on a real problem**, which, in this proposal, specifically concerned their lives, contributed to the **transformation of their citizenship practices**. (José, S2)

Final remarks

- The struggle against school disengagement is in the horizon of the promotion and identification of promising practices in each educational institution and acknowledge their potential of transferability
- Teachers' reflection on practice may lead to the improvement of the educational offer to students, when a shift is introduced in the pedagogical relation and rationality
- Teachers were encouraged
 - to reflect upon their own practices and educational struggles
 - be more open to implement hands-on methodologies and to connect to students' struggles and voice
 - be more open to changes proposed by the students, concerning the school and the community
 - be more able to support students in the development of a set of competences:
 - knowledge, skills, attitudes and values



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Thank You!



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