Curricular Articulation in English Teaching Between the 1st And 2nd Basic Education Cycles: Perceptions of Teachers[*]

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Abstract: The educational sequentiality and students' success depend on the curricular articulation between cycles, as this reveals itself as relevant and facilitating in educational transitions. However, in practice, what the normative documents recommend are not applied. In this sense, the general objective of this study is to analyse the perceptions of English teachers in the 1st and 2nd Cycles of Basic Education (CEB) regarding the process of curricular articulation as a promoter of professional development in this case study, the qualitative methodology was chosen, employing structured interviews. The WebQDA software was used for data processing and for its descriptive and interpretative analysis. It was concluded that the English teachers of the 1st and 2nd CEB, despite admitting little knowledge of the legal normative documents, demonstrated to practice articulation, as far as the accomplishment of common activities is concerned and listed constraints. Interviewees recognized the advantages and the need for curricular articulation in the transition to promote students' educational success.

Key words: articulation; curriculum; English; educational success; transition

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1. Introduction

The Curricular Articulation (CA), concerning Education, is a relevant and current topic through to the voices of different actors, not always being in agreement, due to the social context, the observation and interpretation of the researcher facing the facts. In other words, "an investigation is neither neutral nor apolitical" (Vasconcelos, 2013, p. 14), there being a political-social dimension, by the discovery of theoretical and/or practical fields that shape the object of study

In Education, the term Curricular Articulation is associated with curriculum development, and its relevance stands out "due to the sense of globality and sequentiality it carries" (Barbosa, 2010, p. 11). In other words, CA is "an interconnection of knowledge from different fields, in order to facilitate the acquisition, by the student, of a global, integrating and integrated knowledge" (Morgado & Tomaz, 2009, p. 63).

In Portugal, authors of several studies refer it is in the transition years of the teaching cycles, mainly when associated with the change of teaching establishment, that the greatest problems of an emotional nature, are reflected at a behavioural level and on the educational success of students. In this sense, it is of great importance

that teachers from different teaching cycles are aware that the educational and learning process is continuous and, therefore, it presupposes a sequenced and articulated educational practice, which requires each one to know and respect the previous and subsequent levels (Serra, 2004; Aniceto, 2010; Barros, 2010; Leite, 2012; Aragão, 2013; Oliveira-Formosinho, 2016). Thus, CA has been recognized as a very important practice, being frequently mobilized in terms of discourses aimed at changing and improving schools' success (Morgado & Tomás, 2010).

Being the 1st CEB, the first binding stage of school life, it is necessary to establish a schooling unit that is sequentially articulated at a normative, organisational, curricular and pedagogical level (Alarcão, 2008), so that the school functions as a whole, and being fundamental to a successful educational path, as stated in the legal documents.

This study aims at knowing and evaluating the perceptions of the teachers of the English group, regarding the curricular articulation between the 1st and 2nd CEB, of a Group of schools, in Porto district. It is a case study, using sources and instruments of the qualitative methodology and a descriptive and interpretative approach in the analysis of the collected data.

2. Curriculum and Curricular Development

In the specific literature, no consensus was found concerning the definition of curriculum. For this reason, curriculum is a controversial, polysemic and, at times, an ambiguous and comprehensive concept. Thus, the curriculum is a pedagogical practice resulting from the interaction and confluence of diverse cultural, social, political, administrative, economic, school structures, among others, and on the basis of which concrete interests and shared responsibilities interact, the teacher is assigned the role of "Decision maker and manager of the curricular process" (Roldão, 1999, p. 38), emerging the student as an active and reflective agent of his learning. In this line of thought, the curriculum rises as the basis of a project that "must necessarily be appropriated by the school, by each school" (Serra, 2004, p. 32). It is through the Educational Project that each school assumes its curricular options, considering its context and through intentional planning. Based on this document, educators/teachers build their class project to respond to the specificity of their group / class and its dynamics.

Curriculum development expresses a complex and active practice whose process takes place in four components: theoretical justification; elaboration and/or planning; operationalization and evaluation (Pacheco, 2006). Thus, curriculum development is a challenge to individual capacity, with the subject's involvement in its teaching and learning process being important. To summon previous knowledge, it is necessary that the acquired knowledge make sense in relation to the knowledge to be acquired (Roldão, 2003).

The Ministry of Education, as a centralizing power, draws up curricula and curricular programs. In the 2017/18 academic year, Dispatch No. 5908/2017, July 5th, allowed, under a pedagogical experience regime, the implementation of the autonomy and curricular flexibility of basic and secondary education project in some schools. In the following year, the experience was expanded at a national level. The legal framework aims at giving schools and teachers more freedom to make curricular adaptations according to the context, consenting to change the order of contents and to make small changes while respecting the core contents and competences (Marques & Roldão, 1999).

2.1 Curricular Articulation, Progressive Sequentiality, Educational Continuity and Transition

Literature review on Curricular Articulation (CA) shows that no clear definition is found on the topic. Researchers works carried out crisscrossed several concepts: curricular articulation, sequentiality and educational

transition, which does not favor its conceptual delimitation (Ferreira, 2002; Serra, 2004; Rodrigues, 2005). Transposing the definitions found to school context, it is clear that CA is the response found "by teachers, to promote the transition between different cycles" (Serra, 2004, p. 75) that form the whole of the educational system.

Progressive sequentiality is related to CA, so it is "a form of articulation between the different levels or stages of schooling so that each one of them is structured in order to the progress achieved in the previous level(s) is determinant, the subsequent level is determined" (Pires, Fernandes & Formosinho, 1989, p. 24).

It is important to emphasize that despite some contributions in the area (research and legislative documents) the sequentiality has relapsed, since each teaching cycle has been organized according to what it thinks is necessary for the next level and not taking the previous one into consideration (Pires, 1987; Ferreira, 2001; Abrantes, 2001; Roldão, 2008). This way, the objectives of basic education, which covers nine years, in a perspective of globality, unity, articulation and sequentiality are compromised, because it is given more importance to schooling than to education (Ferreira, 2002).

Educational continuity is related to the way in which knowledge is organized and sequenced, throughout the various levels of education, taking into account "the development of children and their learning capacities at each educational level" (Serra, 2004, p. 75). Therefore, the educational continuity between the 1st and the 2nd CEB does not bring any of the cycles to the forefront, but that the first is the "preparation for the next level", on a perspective of "helicoidal evolution", where the next moment is necessarily grounded in the previous one so that it "gives meaning to education as a global and globalizing process, unifying and consolidating the individual's learning" (Pipa, 2011, pp. 12-13). In summary, for the success of basic and compulsory education at school, it is important that teachers have a broad vision of teaching, promote curricular flexibility, differentiate and adapt the curriculum in search of meaning and significance for the path of Basic Education without forgetting the appreciation of the child skills acquisition, in various contexts, that prepare them for the next cycle (Abrantes, 2001; Roldão & Almeida, 2018).

3. Teaching English in the 1st Cycle of Basic Education

To meet the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEECRL) on the need for early teaching of other languages in the different member countries of the European Union (EU), the National Council of Education (CNE, 2014) in Portugal has integrated the teaching of English in the curriculum of the 1st CEB, because it is seen "as a means to better understand the other and to build their own identity (…) and because it is easier to learn at these ages" (idem, p. 10). In this sense, the generalization of the early teaching of English began with the implementation of Order nº 12 591/2006, integrated in the Escola a Tempo Inteiro program, covering the 3rd and 4th years of the 1st CEB in curriculum enrichment activities and in the families support component in pre-school education. In 2008, its offer was extended to the entire 1st cycle, being mandatory, but with an optional frequency. In the academic years 2015/16 and 2016/17 the teaching of English became part of the curriculum, respectively for the 3rd year and the 4th year of the 1st CEB, contributing to the final evaluation of the students.

Taking into account the compulsory teaching and learning of the English Language in the 1st CEB, it was imperative to determine the Curricular Goals for English (MCI) that aim to "establish the articulation between the Curricular Goals for English of the 1st cycle of basic education (…) and 2nd and 3rd cycles" (Bravo, Cravo & Duarte, 2015, p. 2). Supporting documents were also created in the interest of the 1st Cycle, namely the Support

Notebook for MCI. This Notebook presents a set of activities "grouped into five sections: Rhymes, Chants and Poems; Let's sing; Story time; Let's start speaking and Let's start writing" (Bravo et al., 2015a, p. 3), combining with the Profile of Students Leaving Compulsory Education (PASEO, 2017) and the Essential Learning for the 3rd and 4th years of schooling published in July 2018 (Decree-Law No. 55/2018, 6th of July).

Consulting the English Curriculum Goals (MCI, 2015), the reference to sequentiality is verified throughout the three cycles of basic education, the first two being interesting for this study. Thus, by carefully reading the MCI, it is possible to see that the lexical and grammatical contents do not differ much. The vocabulary used in the 1st CEB is the one considered to be essential to develop the learning of the English language. In other words, the most important thing in this cycle is the development of communicative skills.

The teaching work in horizontal and vertical articulation must be developed between the teachers of English of the 1st and 2nd CEB, respectively. In this sense, developing the teaching work in articulation, as foreseen in the normative documents, will imply carrying out a joint, interdisciplinary planning, providing an effective intracurricular communication, which, in the case of English, will lead it not to be limited only to its teaching time, but that extends and also relates to other curricular areas, such as Plastic Expression, Environmental Studies and Mathematics, for example, promoting more meaningful learning for students.

4. Empirical Study

As already mentioned, this study aims getting to know and evaluate the perception of the English teachers in the 1st and 2nd CEB, regarding the process of curricular articulation (CA) between them and as a promoter of their professional development.

Configuring a case study by observing a specific phenomenon within its real context (Yin, 2009), interviews of the 8 participating teachers with various functions were analyzed, so that different voices could be heard. This polyphony makes it possible to find answers to the questions formulated in the investigation (Creswell, 2007). Data analysis focuses on "your organization, division into manipulable units, synthesis, looking for patterns, discovering important aspects and what should be learned and deciding what will be passed on to others" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2018, p. 205). In this sense, the qualitative methodology in the collection and data analysis data was privileged.

Then, the categorical analysis was applied "in order to enable a reasoned interpretation of the results obtained, which would answer to the starting question of this investigation" (Alves, 2017, pp. 201-202, cit. por Alves, Coimbra & Martins, 2019, p. 784). For the analysis of the content of the perceptions, the online application webQDA was used, a qualitative data analysis software that assists researchers in different necessary tasks such as transcription, writing, annotation and text interpretation (System of Sources: Internal, External and Notes), coding (Free Codes, Tree Codes, Descriptors and Classification) and various types of functions such as content analysis, speech analysis and data mapping (Reis, Costa & Souza, 2016). It should be noted that this process started with a fluctuating reading of the interviews, for an initial appropriation of the content (Bauer & Gaskell, 2008) and, after several steps, the text was broken down into categories and subcategories by forming semantic groups (Flick, 2011; Stake, 2016).

4.1 Results Analysis

4.1.1 Teachers' Perceptions of Curriculum Articulation

The voices of the interviewees about the curricular articulation are shown in Table 1, which is presented

below. As it can be seen, the "Curricular Articulation" category is divided into 2 Subcategories: concept and importance. The information was taken from the textual corpus, after analyzing the discursive content (Bardin, 2011; Edwards & Holland, 2013).

Table 1   Teachers Perceptions About Curricular Articulation

First category	Subcategory	Teachers interviewed							
		Director	C1	C2	C3	P1	P2	P3	P4
Curricular Articulation (CA)	Concept	1	3	2	6	3	5	2	3
	Importance	7	2	5	3	4	3	3	4

When analyzing Table 1, it is observed that interviewee C3 has more references in the subcategory the concept of CA (6 Ref.), Followed by P2 with 5 references, with an equal number of references (3 Ref.) C3, P1 and P4. Two interviewees, C2 and P3, collect 2 references each and the Director was the one who gathered the least amount of references (1 Ref.). Regarding the concept of CA, interviewee C3 addresses it, in several references, understanding that: "Articulation is working on the same themes, gaining experiences" (Ref. 2); "That is why it is to work together, in partnership, sharing ideas" (Ref. 1); "it is to make learning meaningful and spiral of content for teachers" Ref. 5); "Is to give meaning to the construction of learning, from the perspective of the Student Profile" (Ref. 6). In the same sense, P2 states that "I think that the curricular articulation is to articulate content in a smooth and playful way" (Ref. 1), to "develop a collaborative work in view of the Profile of the students" (Ref. 4).

In turn, P1 understands that "it is to perform collaborative work between teachers of various cycles" (Ref. 1) and P4 states that "it is the articulation of contents and strategies that strict collaboration between all teachers, articulating contents and strategies at the same time. throughout the different cycles among all teachers" (Ref. 1).

The Director made a broader and more complete reference, according to specialized literature (cf. 2). Thus, mentioned that: "Curricular articulation is the strict collaboration between all teachers, articulating content and strategies throughout the different cycles. It is to perform collaborative work for a better student learning and sequential learning, it is to know the work of others and make mine known. In other words, the curricular articulation aims to share knowledge, ideas to develop learning in view of the student's Profile (Ref. 1).

In this context, the interviewees also refer that the articulation presupposes collaborative work between teachers from different cycles, both in the planning of activities and in the content. An example of this are the following opinions: "That is why articulation is about working together, in partnership, sharing ideas" (C3, Ref. 1); "The articulation of contents and strategies is the strict collaboration between all teachers, articulating contents and strategies throughout the different cycles" (P4, Ref. 1); "The curricular articulation is the realization of common activities that contribute to the development of the language, taking into account the different teaching cycles" (P1, Ref. 1). These perceptions are in line with studies that show the importance of collaborative work between different levels of education as a facilitator of children's adaptation to a different level of education and teachers' awareness of its importance (Serra, 2004; Aniceto, 2010; Silva, 2013; Mesquita, 2014; Oliveira-Formosinho, Monge & Oliveira-Formosinho, 2016). In other words, the analyzed set converges in the statement that teachers, as a rule, indicate more the strategies they have found for their realization than a concept that is delimited from a theoretical point of view (Serra, 2004).

Regarding the second subcategory, Importance of CA, it appears that the Director has 7 references, followed by C2 with 5 references, P1 and P4 with 4 references each, C3, P2 and P3, with 3 references each and, finally, C1

with 2 references. From the Director's various references, the following is transcribed: "the fact that it allows teachers to learn about the other cycles, also allowing collaboration and better knowledge among all" (Ref. 3: 1.68%); "Teachers get to know the dynamics of the 1st cycle better, encouraging collaborative work and sharing experiences" (Ref. 5: 1.68%); "Transmits sequentiality to the teaching/learning process and promotes collaborative work" (Ref. 2: 1.24%). It is inferred that the Director, for working in a top management position of the group of Schools, has a more in-depth knowledge about the importance of CA, hence having a speech with a greater number of references.

It can also be seen that coordinators and teachers are aware of the importance of CA, as can be read in the following words: "I think it will be very important between the 1st and 2nd cycles because there is more distance, helping teachers to get to know each other better and collaborate more "(C2, Ref. 5); "(…) It is fundamental for the smooth transition between cycles and gives a sequence to what the students are learning" (P4, Ref. 4); "The curricular articulation is very important, as it can facilitate the integration of students in the new cycle" (…) "providing better knowledge of the next cycle even during the previous cycle" (P1, Refs. 3 and 4).

These principles agree with the idea that activities promoted in schools must be important and assume the purpose of facilitating the transition between cycles, since the promotion of educational success is based on the organization of knowledge, across the various educational levels (Serra, 2004). In addition, there is a concern with the development of children and their learning capacities at each level and school sequentiality and flexibility (Cosme & Trindade, 2017).

From the above, it is possible to infer that, CA is considered, in general, as a factor of great importance in the teaching/learning process since it "allows greater" comfort "for the student at the moment of transition" (P2, Ref. 3), for engaging collaborative work between teachers from different cycles, a better relationship between all, contributing for professional development, taking into account that it makes it possible to "know the work of others and make mine known" (Director, Ref. 1), enabling the transition process between cycles and the sequentiality of learning, taking into account that "it enhances the development of the objectives of the Grouping Educational Project, promoting sequentiality, giving a perspective of continuity of learning" (C3, Ref. 1).

In the interviewees' speeches, the importance of CA for the development of collaborative work among teachers is obvious in order to facilitate the educational transition and help in the professional development of all (Early Years, 2014; Peters, 2010; Petriwskyj et al., 2005, cite by Oliveira-Formosinho et al., 2016), stating that the success of the transition between levels of education is found not only in the child, in his ability to "be ready", but also "(…) depends on the contexts and reception processes" (Vasconcelos, cite by Oliveira-Formosinho et al., 2016, p. 8), which includes family, school and the community.

From the above, it can be concluded that, despite the various functions of the interviewees, there is a unanimous perception about CA. In other words, it consists of a set of procedures that contribute to the resolution of common problems, the promotion of joint activities engaging teachers and students and facilitating the transition process between the 1st and 2nd CEB, allowing to find bonds between cycles. This high level of agreement was also verified in the study by Aniceto (2010) and is in line with the concept of CA defined by Serra (2004), in which it is in every way characterized by points of union between cycles, through different strategies and contextualized and adapted mechanisms, which promote a progressive transition of students to a new cycle and reducing individualization in the teaching culture (Fialho & Sarroeira, 2012).

Thus, it is reinforced that teachers of each level of education must establish a reasoned and articulated praxis of their work, where continuity and sequentiality of education are foreseen, despite the specificity of each level of

education. Sharing "contributes to a common thread in learning" (P4, Ref. 2), since the confrontation of different ideas allows creativity to be reborn. The convergence of these vectors allows the group to evolve in terms of dynamics and learning (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2001). In fact, for the transition between the different educational levels to take place in a natural way and contribute to a good adaptation of students to the new reality, it is essential that, as advocated by Oliveira-Formosinho et al., (2016), it is created a quality environment in the interactions between the various actors and in educational transitions that lead to the creation, in the student, of a fundamental positive self-image at the moment of transition.

4.1.2 Interview Analysis by Word Triangulation

When using WebQDA's features for word triangulation, in the Questioning system, in the "Text Search" subsystem, the terms underlying the CA were searched for the analysis of occurrences by each interviewee.

Table 2   Terms Search on Interviews

Terms search									
	P 1	P 2	P 3	P 4	C 1	C 2	C 3	Director	Total oc
Collaborative work	1	3	1	0	0	5	1	4	15
Sequentiality	3	1	1	4	1	1	2	2	15
Transition	4	5	1	3	2	4	6	1	26
Activities & English	2 1	1 3	1 1	1 3	1 1	1 4	1 5	5	103

(Own source).

Looking at Table 2, created from the collection of data from the WebQDA text search, it appears that the highest number of occurrences (oc.) appear in the words "Activities and English" (103 oc.); followed by the word "transcript" (26 oc.); and with the same number of occurrences (15 oc.) the terms "sequentiality" and "collaborative work".

The most found words "activities" and "English", are not surprising considering that the content of the interview related to this study was the English discipline. However, the remaining words lead to the conclusion that the concept of CA is current in the speeches of the interviewed teachers (including the principal who is also a teacher).

Data analysis leads to the conclusion that the teachers of this School Group have not yet understood the true meaning of Curricular Articulation. For the interviewees, the AC is, above all, the transition in level or teaching cycle and the sequentiality between cycles. Therefore, it appears that, probably, they feel pleased just by analyzing both cycles teaching plans and checking common contents.

I am pleased to refer to the Curricular Autonomy and Flexibility Project (AFC, 2017), which emerged in an attempt to create conditions for schools to manage the national curriculum, taking into account the context of students and the opportunity to make content management flexible, either from one level of education to another, or within the same level of education, using more appropriate methods, according to individual characteristics, so that all students are given the opportunity to learn. In this sense, the flexible management of the curriculum allows the school to leave its usual routine and to hear more and more about group work, classes planned together, more frequent meetings between the members of the class council, significant changes in the dynamics of schools. It is important that teachers change their attitudes, leave their classrooms, and stop considering their discipline as sovereign (Roldão, 2003, cite By Santos, 2012, p. 53). Teachers must join forces and make the set of disciplines as

a whole, with cohesion, improving Essential Learning (AE, 2018) preparing students to become a citizen ready to know how to act in any circumstance of life (Santos, 2012).

5. Conclusion

Considering the objective of the study, the following conclusive synthesis is carried out. Thus, with regard to the category of CA, it was observed that the participating subjects, despite their different roles at school, consider that CA enable the development of collaborative work between peers, in the horizontal and vertical sense, intra and inter teaching cycles. They also believe that CA promotes sequentiality, the educational success of students and facilitates the transition process between cycles, as recommended by PASEO (2017), and Essential Learning (AE, 2018), as well as by authors referenced in the literature review (Aniceto, 2010; Serra, 2004). It is concluded that the majority of the participants consider the articulation between the two levels of education to be important, showing that, both teachers and management members, seem to be properly aware of its importance, answering, thus, to one of the specific objectives "to identify the conceptions of English teachers in the 1st and 2nd cycles on the curricular articulation between cycles".

During the study, by collecting, processing and analysing data, the researcher noticed a certain change taking place in the Language Department, with a focus on English. Not only the 1st CEB teachers managed to contemplate the sequentiality with the contiguous cycles, but also the 2nd ECB teachers were doing it too. It is important to highlight that, until recently, there was only concern with the transition of students to the subsequent cycle, and now they are beginning to glimpse the previous cycle and to be concerned with understanding methods, strategies and curricular programs of the 1st. CEB.

As a final summary, in the context under study and based on the purposes of this research, although it is not possible to assess its impact on the effective promotion of Curriculum Articulation practices, it is believed that the various phases of the research carried out, namely the conduct of the interviews, triggered in the subjects interviewed, processes of analysis and reflection on their practices, was a contribution to their professional development. The idea that it is essential that professionals from both levels of education engage and dialogue, promoting joint reflection, minimizing the negative effects that the transition may have on children's development and learning, defended throughout the literature (Aniceto, 2010; Barbosa, 2010; Carvalho, 2010), comes out, thus reinforced. In addition, this dialogue can facilitate the implementation of common activities. It will undoubtedly be easier if teacher's concerns involve knowing the previous and subsequent levels.

The results of this study are a potential contribution to the understanding of the importance of Curricular Articulation, as they allow participatory reflection around the problem by all the stakeholders, with a view, in the future, to the development of more effective articulation processes, in the context in which the study took place.

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