Dourado, Caroline Berlese Mello (2023) *Tackling educational inequity through collaborative approaches: exploring empirical cases and reflecting on some insights for the Brazilian reality.* [MSc]

https://dissertations.gla.ac.uk/id/eprint/571/

Deposited: 12 December 2023

TACKLING EDUCATIONAL INEQUITY THROUGH COLLABORATIVE APPROACHES: EXPLORING EMPIRICAL CASES AND REFLECTING ON SOME INSIGHTS FOR THE BRAZILIAN REALITY

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Dissertation submitted in part fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Education, Public Policy, and Equity

University of Glasgow
07th August 2023

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABSTRACT

Traditional reforms in education have not been contributing to better quality and equity. In this scenario, collaborative approaches have emerged as alternative paths for educational improvement. There is evidence showing that cooperation and sharing of knowledge and resources can enhance the outcomes for students from disadvantaged backgrounds in a sustainable way. This study aims to answer whether these collaborative approaches can effectively contribute to a more equitable educational system, and what are the conditions and barriers when implementing it. Through a systematic literature review methodology, twenty empirical cases of educational systems that applied collaborative approaches are analysed. The findings indicated positive outcomes in terms of equity in education through collaborative approaches. The implementation of these approaches requires conditions related to school culture, the goal-setting process, institutional capacity, and context-based initiatives. Barriers that might be faced are associated with a lack of resources, power imbalances, resistances, and deficit mindsets, among others. Recommendations to reduce the opportunity and achievement gap in Brazilian education are made in three major areas: policy, research, and practice. The conclusion reinforces the importance of policymakers, politicians, researchers, and practitioners giving more attention to collaborative approaches in education in Brazil.

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CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

Data show that both the decline in intergenerational mobility and the growth in economic inequality have been happening, with the increase of the gap between the wealthy and poor people. These phenomena strengthen the formation of highly inequitable societies, leading to alienation, mistrust, and unfairness, which might destroy social cohesion (Stiglitz, 2013). Inequalities in education are associated with that. They are one of the most lasting problems nowadays and are characterised by the fact that people from the most privileged realities, which inherit their socioeconomic position from previous generations, have access to better opportunities (Codiroli Mcmaster and Cook, 2019).

The huge opportunity and achievement gap existent in educational systems (Eizadirad et al., 2022) are related to processes of symbolic inclusion but material exclusion (Ishimaru, 2018), where even with discourses of inclusiveness, schools are still reproducing the inequalities present in society (Storz, 2008). However, students' outcomes in education should not be defined by their race, gender, origin, and/or disability (Berg and Gleason, 2018). All these aspects must be considered in any educational reform to effectively close the achievement and opportunity gap (Clark et al., 2016), otherwise, they will continue to negatively influence the way students in marginalised groups experience schools (Howard, 2019).

In the last decades, multiple educational reforms have been implemented in different countries. Despite so many reforms, so minor change was identified (Fullan, 2006). According to Apple (2004), these reforms involved accountability mechanisms, such as testing and external supervision, competition, and imposing curricula, which indicated a mistrust in practitioners. The emphasis was on top-down policies, a one-size-fits-all strategy (Peurach and Glazer, 2011), and the 'what works' approach (Ainscow, 2020, p.1). These strategies are not context-based and are unlikely to be appropriate for the reality of practice (Bryk et al., 2015, as cited in Lenhoff et al., 2022). Furthermore, it was reported that while these reforms should be helping the most disadvantaged students, they were having a negative impact on them (Apple, 2004). This unfavourable scenario has contributed to rethinking the paths for equitable school transformation.

The Fourth Way is a recent perspective on how educational systems should resemble. It is based on professional development, institutional capacity building (Elmore, 2016), the establishment of partnerships among diverse stakeholders (Hargreaves and Shirley, 2009), and teachers' qualification by "learning continuously through networks, from evidence, and from each other" (Hargreaves and Shirley, 2009, p.107). This approach has been instigating the pursuit of school improvement through alternative ways, such as collaborative improvement.

Underpinned by the idea that "educational change is technically simple but socially complex" (Ainscow et al., 2019, p.4), collaborative improvement approaches facilitate the development of common understandings of problems and allow structures where different actors (e.g., districts, community, and researchers) can work as partners to fix them, on the same direction (Lenhoff et al., 2022). Evidence shows that collaboration has positive impacts in terms of equitable educational opportunities, with improvements in students' achievements, socioemotional abilities, and behaviours (Griffiths et al., 2020). Although challenges in educational change might be associated with resistance and bad intentions of stakeholders, the greater barriers are regarding planning and coordinating such a complex and multilevel social process (Fullan, 2007).

In this scenario, the relevant research question that arises is **whether these collaborative approaches can effectively contribute to a more equitable educational system, and what are the conditions and barriers when implementing it.** On the one hand, this alternative approach does not seem to be a priority topic for most academics and policymakers, either because it is a long-term initiative or because it requires strong relationship-building. On the other hand, there is evidence showing that cooperation and sharing of knowledge and resources can improve the outcomes for students from disadvantaged backgrounds in a sustainable way. This study aims to address the research question to contribute to increasing the literature available about the relationship between equity in education and collaborative approaches, allowing more evidence to subsidise the decision-making process when planning an alternative educational reform.

To do that, this dissertation is organised as follows: first, a literature review is presented addressing the topics of educational inequities, educational system

improvement, and collaborative approaches in education. Second, the systematic literature review methodology used to conduct this study is explained with a focus on its design, limitations, and ethical considerations. Third, the findings of the systematic literature review are introduced in three parts: the sample characterisation summarising the contexts of the twenty empirical cases analysed, the findings producing comparative views of the collaborative approaches, their conditions and barriers for implementation, and their equity outcomes, and a final discussion that highlights and reflects on the principal aspects and lessons identified through the systematic literature review process. After, an association between the findings and the Brazilian reality is made, bringing up some policy, research, and practice recommendations. Lastly, the conclusions are reported stating the importance of policymakers, politicians, researchers, and practitioners giving more attention to collaborative approaches in Brazilian education, and a few suggestions for further research are mentioned.

CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents a literature review of the principal concepts associated with this dissertation topic, giving the basis to understand the following discussion. First, it better analyses what educational inequities are; then, it explains the ways for pursuing educational system improvement; after, the collaborative approaches in education are presented; lastly, some conclusions are drawn.

2.1. Educational inequities

Educational inequity can be understood as the reproduction, by schools, of inequalities present in society, such as social class, gender, disabilities, geographical origin, and race (Storz, 2008). This phenomenon happens because of the diverse allocation of opportunities, financial and human resources, pedagogical practices, school processes and routines, and curriculum content covered (Storz, 2008). Other drivers of these inequalities, which are not directly associated with the educational field, are access to adequate housing and nutrition and the prevailing institutional biases regarding society (Easterbrook and Hadden, 2021). These disparities prevent underprivileged groups to access high-quality education and impact their "rights to access knowledge, to think critically, and to participate in democratic societies under the same conditions as other groups" (Lichand et al., 2022, p.1). Consequently, students from disadvantaged realities have more challenges and fewer chances of achieving success in school and greater outcomes in the future (Storz, 2008), undermining individuals' potential (Easterbrook and Hadden, 2021).

According to Arkhipenka et al. (2018), educational equity is associated with inclusion and fairness. The first refers to all students achieving a minimum set of skills. The latter to the fact that students' characteristics and background cannot determine their opportunities and outcomes. For Cameron et al. (2018), it can be both equality of opportunity, where everyone should access the same opportunities to succeed regardless of background characteristics (e.g., wealth, location, gender, or race), and equality of condition, with an equal and universal distribution of educational inputs for all. Omoeva et al. (2021) also defend the idea of adequate conditions available for achieving equity in education, those associated with instructional materials and environment, school physical infrastructure, and qualified teachers. In contrast, the Coleman Report, which focused on understanding equity in students' achievement,

identified that the most important influence is families and that school resources do not really matter to improve equity (Hanushek, 2016). Lastly, the Capabilities theory, of Sen Amartya, values the heterogeneity among students in terms of abilities, difficulties, learning process, and talents, for example. It advocates that real equity and well-being can only be achieved by offering diversified treatment to distinct needs and interests through changes in a narrow curriculum, restricted pedagogy styles, limited assessment types, and teachers' training (Unterhalter, 2009).

This study is underpinned by the understanding that equity is beyond equality or impartiality ideas, so governments must distribute inputs, opportunities, outcomes, and treatments unequally, to compensate for disadvantages faced by underrepresented groups. It is also important to point out that a minimum of conditions in terms of schools' infrastructure and students' skills should be established, but equity should not be reduced to that. For analysis purposes, in Chapter 4 two concepts associated with equity in education are used: the opportunity gap and the achievement gap (Eizadirad et al., 2022). The first one consists of the processes involved in the educational sector, such as the existing opportunities for students (e.g., social and cultural capital, access to good education, and access to government support policies), the conditions available in each school (e.g., infrastructure, teachers' qualification, and accessibility), and the application of the capabilities theory (e.g., personalised treatment, pedagogical practices, and curriculum). The last one can be seen as the results reached because of the processes mentioned above and is represented by students' achievements, such as conclusion and dropout rates, assessment scores, access to higher education, and placement in good jobs.

Educational inequities represent long-term challenges but require immediate action. One of them is increasing representativity in power positions, so minority groups can amplify their perspectives and see themselves achieving anything. Another one is to stop reproducing negative stereotypes about minority groups, as they were inferior or less capable of doing remarkable things (Easterbrook and Hadden, 2021). Reducing the gap between high and low-income students when accessing better educational opportunities and outcomes (Lichand et al., 2022) is also another mechanism to decrease these inequalities.

When pursuing educational system improvement, equity must be central, where fairness is a concern, all students have equal importance (UNESCO, 2017), and the learner is the focus of the actions and decisions taken (Chapman and Fullan, 2007). It is not possible to talk about quality in education without having equity, otherwise, the quality will be just a privilege of a few students. In this sense, keeping the available knowledge and resources in only some schools is not acceptable. Strengthening social capital is a fundamental aspect to promote equity in education (Ainscow, 2016). The variation among schools can be reduced through partnerships and collaboration, allowing them "to share resources, ideas, and expertise, and exercise collective responsibility for student success" (Ainscow, 2016, p.7). Additionally, as mentioned previously, equitable outcomes for students rely not only on inside-school aspects (e.g., teachers' practices) but also outside (e.g., poverty and family involvement), so the solutions need to be built through collaborative approaches within, between, and beyond schools (Ainscow, 2016).

Equity in education requires engagement not only with distinct levels in the educational system but also with other sectors, such as health, child and youth protection services, and social welfare (UNESCO, 2017). A more decentralised management structure has shown better results regarding equitable education, which relies less on top-down policies and more on context-driven solutions (UNESCO, 2017) and social capital. Evidence indicates that school-to-school collaboration can respond in a more adequate way to diversity among students, especially those more marginalised, through the reduction of polarisation between schools and the new perspectives teachers gain with the exchanges of practices (UNESCO, 2017). To achieve a more just society, authenticity, disruption, honesty, competence, and equity are needed (Castagno, 2019), characteristics that are much more associated with collaborative approaches than the traditional ones used for implementing educational reforms.

2.2. Educational system improvement

The 21st century is characterised as fast, flexible, and vulnerable, and the old ways of implementing educational change are not suitable anymore (Hargreaves and Shirley, 2009). According to Hargreaves and Shirley (2009), there are three old ways of thinking about education and nowadays we are going in the direction of a fourth way. The first way refers to professional freedom and innovation but with a lack of

consistency. The second way is the one of educational standardisation and market competition with no autonomy for professionals. The third way looks for balancing market and state, and autonomy and accountability, with a focus on targets, testing, and using data. So far, these three ways have not allowed deeper transformations in education quality and equity, then a fourth way has been claimed. The fourth way consists of public spirit, transparency, democracy, inspiration, and sustainability (Hargreaves and Shirley, 2009).

Currently, the most common strategy for improving the educational system is replicating, on a large-scale, policies and projects considered successful in some regions, where the policymakers design and the practitioners implement them. Due to its replication and prescription characteristics, the actual system reforms are "reduced to bullet points rather than contextualized to a specific country" (Louis, 2019, ix) and value research evidence over teachers' and headteachers' expertise (Ainscow, 2020). The implementation of these "what works" and top-down policies usually fails because of some reasons. First, research is just able to present what worked, which does not mean it will work again and somewhere else. Second, educational practice is much more than only applying specific techniques. Third, the strict emphasis on evidence-based can limit the chances to use participative tools in decision-making. In this scenario, the exclusive focus on "what works" is likely to not be effective (Biesta, 2007).

Another explanation for the failure of these types of policies is that since the practitioners are not involved in the design process, they receive the proposals "as distractions from their 'real work,' and therefore interpret them to fit their need" (Weatherly and Lipsky, 1977, as cited in Louis, 2019, xi). Successful implementation relies on the willingness and capacity of frontline professionals, which commonly have problematic and mistrustful relations with the policymakers (Rinehart Kathawalla and Mehta, 2022). These frontline workers in public service are also known as street-level bureaucrats (e.g., social workers and educators). They are at the bottom of organizational hierarchies, interact with customers, have an expressive margin of discretion, and are not included in the decision-making process about policy (Zacka, 2017). However, it is not possible to implement public policy without them and they play a crucial role in shaping policies while they carry them out (Zacka, 2017).

Education reforms nowadays have been promoting division between people through intense competition among schools, instead of connecting them. Consequently, they have not been able to achieve the intended aims. The adoption of a collaborative approach is an alternative to this traditional way of doing educational reforms. It "sought to avoid the trap of attempting to identify a 'magic bullet,' offer predetermined solutions, and apply a one size fits all philosophy" (Chapman et al., 2016, p.184) and instead uses frameworks that allow more autonomy and participation for change (Lowden et al., 2021). This approach understands the complexity of social relationships in education and considers teachers professionals with valuable knowledge who must participate actively in the improvement process. It is based on the idea that transferring knowledge from one field to education or from one reality to another might not be suitable and it is needed to engage different stakeholders to collaborate in partnerships with communities, families, and local authorities, playing "a more empowered role in tackling educational inequity" (Lowden et al., 2021, p.92).

The collaborative approaches focus on democracy and professionalism theories of change rather than on bureaucracy and market ones and it had been identified as a positive characteristic of educational systems that improved their quality and equity (Ainscow, 2016). It is underpinned by three major features: context-based, capacity-building, and partnership among many stakeholders. The context-based is related to the flexibility of adapting solutions to local realities, "being contextually sensitive" (Ainscow et al., 2019, p.3). The policymakers must allow the practitioners to decide on the details of the implementation without central regulation (Ainscow, 2020). Capacity building is associated with "'deep instructional practice,' and strategies for 'raising the bar and closing the gap' in student achievement" (Fullan, 2009, p.110). The partnership among many stakeholders starts from the premise that education is "relational rather than procedural" (Louis, 2019, xii), the expertise within the system is valuable (Ainscow, 2019), and the non-school factors (e.g., poverty and parent education) also must be considered (Fullan, 2009).

This approach recognises the education improvement process as chaotic and messy instead of straight (Ainscow et al., 2019) since "education systems are 'arenas of conflict' rather than machines" (Reimers and McGinn, 1997, as cited in Ainscow et al., 2019, p.4). The essence of education consists of connecting and allowing joint work among people with diverse backgrounds, expertise, and mindsets. Given that

"implementation is something you do when you already know what to do and learning is something you do when you don't yet know what to do" (Elmore, 2016, p.531) and that the stakeholders involved in the education process are unlikely to know the answers to the challenges faced when they work in isolation, the best and most sustainable way to improve educational systems seems to be through collaboration, taking advantage of the plural expertise within the system, and being more aligned with the premisses of the fourth way of educational change.

2.3. Collaborative approaches in education

The basis of the collaborative approaches in education is the understanding that schools are systems and not isolated units that must work in an integrated way and have collective responsibility for every student (Hargreaves and Shirley, 2009). It aims to establish strong relationships between the different actors and levels involved directly or indirectly in the education process, such as national and local government, school staff, school community, NGOs (non-governmental organizations), universities, the private sector, and other public agencies beyond education (Ainscow et al., 2019). This is a key point not only to implement but also to maintain the improvements in a sustainable way, especially in schools that "serve learners from disadvantaged and minority backgrounds" (Ainscow et al., 2019, p.1).

When talking about collaborative approaches in education, there are some central characteristics to be aware of. Firstly, it is associated with **intersections between policy, research, and practice,** using evidence and enquiry. The use of diverse evidence contributes to developments because it helps with reflections on practice and the replacement of existing ways of working that might not be effective (Ainscow, 2016). The researchers value the "knowledge teachers acquire in their own classrooms" (Ainscow et al., 2019, p.156), and they are "engaged researchers instead of mere spectators" (Ainscow et al., 2019, p.5) who help to inform the decision-making process with research knowledge. Secondly, it is based on the idea of **moving knowledge around** (Chapman, 2019) through the establishment of partnerships among diverse stakeholders, using a receptive approach to listening and empowering people, allowing spaces for sharing expertise, and creating a mutual understanding about a small number of priority problems (Chapman, 2019). Thirdly, it **focuses on a specific context or reality**, is flexible, and relies on elevated levels of social cohesion. "In

systems where regulation is low but social cohesion is high, an egalitarian culture tends to be the norm. […] Self-improving organisations work laterally, […] collaborating with each other in networks to support joint improvement" (Chapman, 2019, p.557).

There are eight principles that underpin collaborative improvement approaches (Penuel et al., 2020). They include the support to stakeholders' work through the partnership in research, the definition of the roles of each partner according to their expertise, the problem as being central and relevant for the actors involved, the focus on a specific context, the capacity to offer concrete value to participants and/or organizations, the analysis of the gap between what was intended and what was achieved through the collaborative initiatives, the establishment of plans to understand the problem, and to design and test solutions, and the creation of value for others out of the partnership. In summary, the collaborative approaches are associated with having a collaborative nature at its core, having a strong focus on problems, using design, testing, and evaluation to solve problems, and stating its research commitments (Penuel et al., 2020).

Penuel et al. (2020) presented four types of collaborative approaches. All of them follow the eight principles introduced previously but might differ in some features and supportive methodologies used. Table 1 summarises these four approaches.

Table 1: the four types of collaborative approaches

Approach name	Key features
The Strategic Education Research Partnership	• Joint efforts of policymakers, researchers, and practitioners for achieving effective, and outstanding work in school districts. • Build and test ideas to complex problems in schools. • An organization to work as a backbone for the network.
Design-Based Implementation Research	• Try to solve existent problems through diverse perspectives and expertise. • Committed to iterative process. • Develop knowledge, and practical tools through systematic enquiry. • Focused on capacity development to enable sustainable changes.

Improvement Science in Networked Improvement Communities	• Based on a systematic enquiry that defines a persistent problem, investigate what is behind the reproduction of the problem, establishes an aim with progress measurements, and creates a framework for trying solutions. • A network is likely to be a powerful tool to work over common problems and test solutions.
Community-Based Design Research	• Collaborative design and enquiry. • Seeks to democratize the process of solving complex problems including usually excluded stakeholders, such as youth and their families. • Focus on expanding participation in design, combating historical inequities, and changing institutional relationships.

Source: elaborated by the author based on Penuel et al. (2020).

To implement a collaborative approach some supportive methods can be used. Some examples are collaborative enquiry, network learning approaches, joint practice development, collaborative problem-solving methods, and research-practice partnerships, among others. **Collaborative enquiry** consists of cycles of enquiries in groups of professionals to develop knowledge and practice, that can be used within, between, and beyond schools and prevent "individuals or groups from taking an inward or myopic viewpoint" (Chapman et al., 2016, p.181). **Network learning approaches** allow professionals to work horizontally and vertically with different areas and levels of education to get the latest ideas and perspectives (Chapman and Fullan, 2007). **Joint practice development** "is conceptualised as the process of learning new ways of working through mutual engagement that opens up and shares practices with others" (Fielding et al., 2005, as cited in Madrid Miranda and Chapman, 2021, p.6). **Collaborative problem-solving methods** support the analysis of the problem's cause and the "co-construction of meaning from evidence for a common understanding among partnership members" (Lenhoff et al., 2022, p.1495). And **research-practice partnerships** are the collaborative work between researchers and practitioners to define problems and look for solutions to improve schools and use evidence to inform decision (Coburn and Penuel, 2016).

It is worth highlighting several benefits of using collaborative approaches in education. One is the focus on professional development. The quality of a teacher is one of the

most crucial elements to improve students' attainment and contribute to school improvement (Muijs et al., 2004). According to Barber and Mourshed (2007), in three years, the performance of students can differ by more than 50 percentile points depending on the quality of their teachers. In this sense, the collaborative approach is a valuable tool to develop teachers' abilities, through methodologies that allow them to be aware of the weaknesses of their practices and mindsets and share good practices with their peers (Barber and Mourshed, 2007). Another benefit is the sustainable change this approach can promote through established collective ownership and professional development. The collective ownership and commitment of policy and practice contribute to a good school climate, are based on a genuine culture of collaboration, and recognise that "structures [by itself] cannot deliver desired outcomes" (Bell and Donaldson, 2021, p.168). A last benefit is the articulation amongst various levels of stakeholders. According to Chapman (2019), these approaches can be applied within schools (e.g., teaching and learning, professional development, use of data to inform), between schools (e.g., support to overcome challenges, reduce competition), and beyond schools (e.g., partnership with other public agencies to tackle poverty and have an integrated approach). It "has enormous potential for fostering system-wide improvement, particularly in the most challenging contexts" (Ainscow and West, 2006; Chapman et al., 2007, as cited in Chapman and Fullan, 2007, p.207) and can help to diminish the dispute in the education system "by both transferring existing knowledge, generating context-specific 'new' knowledge, and contributing to capacity building" (Chapman and Fullan, 2007, p.207).

On the other side, it is important to have in mind that the theory usually is not perfectly translated into practice. There are pitfalls that might prevent the collaborative approaches to achieve their full potential. For instance, it will not be a democratic approach if it does not involve all the stakeholders, such as students and parents as well. Also, even when the participation of diverse stakeholders is happening, it might not be contributing to changing the existing unequal dynamics of power and promoting real parity in terms of who takes the decisions. In this sense, it is necessary to be careful when designing the implementation of the collaborative approach and to consider the need to tackle a deficit mindset – especially in the government – to allow genuine co-creation of policies.

2.4. Conclusion

Educational inequities are persistent both because of institutional and systemic characteristics and Capitalism legitimisation. On the one hand, Capitalism is based on making profits through exploitation and inequality, then educational systems serve capitalist production and reproduction (Hill et al., 2012) by perpetuating social relationships and power structures, and applying a meritocratic perspective, which reinforces and legitimate diverse types of inequities, such as class, race, and gender (Swartz, 2003). On the other hand, the features of educational systems impact directly their levels of inequity (Zapfe and Gross, 2021). For instance, school segregation, levels of standardisation, teachers' training, and institutional biases are a few examples of the characteristics that will determine educational inequities.

Although evidence indicates that collaboration among schools is more likely to reduce educational inequities, responding better to the challenges faced by the most marginalised students, the prevailing strategies used for educational improvement nowadays are still prescriptive and top-down policies, based on the "what works" approach. It goes in the opposite direction of the democratic aspect of education, which is based on connecting people to help each other, taking their expertise and perspective into account, and where there is no winner or loser. Thus, the collaborative approaches emerge as a "new" way of thinking about doing education, shifting from a competition to a collaborative mindset.

The engagement with collaborative approaches allows shared spaces among professionals that help create trust and build better relationships, which leads to reflecting on current practices and ideas by school leaders and teachers (Ainscow et al., 2019). Researchers are seen as "critical" partners of school and district staff, challenging assumptions, and using evidence to inform the decision-making process, through local perspectives (Lenhoff et al., 2022), since schools are in a specific region with its own features "instead of a vacuum" (Kerr and West, 2010, as cited in Chapman et al., 2016).

The policies should not be universal but rather fit specific realities using diverse evidence and multiple stakeholders' perspectives (Ainscow, 2016). Whereas practitioners are not only participants in this process but are the actors that shape the local policy process, the context-based feature allows the flexibility for them to choose

the best ways to deal with their local context challenges with the recognition of policymakers and the support of researchers (Hadfield and Ainscow, 2018).

Collaborative approaches have more synergies with the educational field and can contribute to the improvement of educational systems. Its potential in reducing education inequities, as presented in evidence, is also positive. However, the literature available has a gap in terms of presenting empirical cases of educational systems that were able to tackle educational inequities through collaborative approaches. In this sense, this study will focus on a systematic literature review to answer two questions: **can collaborative approaches effectively contribute to a more equitable educational system? What are the conditions needed and the challenges to overcome?**

CHAPTER 3 - METHODOLOGY

This study is a systematic literature review that aims to collect and analyse evidence to answer two research questions:

RQ1. Is it possible to achieve a more equitable educational system through collaborative approaches?

RQ2. If so, what is needed and what challenges are involved in the implementation process?

The focus is to explore the questions from theoretical and empirical perspectives, presenting the findings from real cases of educational systems implementing collaborative approaches. The literature search showed that evidence about these approaches is becoming more popular and getting more relevant in the academic field, however, it is still existing only a little research that explores empirical cases of implementing collaborative approaches in basic education and its contribution to promoting equity. The systematic literature review results are organised into three main sections: (1) the sample characterisation, (2) the findings (presenting each approach, their conditions, barriers, and the equity outcomes identified), and (3) a discussion highlighting the main aspects and the key lessons. After, a reflection is made about the implementation of collaborative approaches in Brazilian reality. In this chapter, the research paradigm is introduced, the methodology used to realise this review is explained, the ethical considerations are presented, and the methodological limitations are discussed.

3.1. Research paradigm

A research paradigm is understood as a way of seeing the world, guiding thinking and action. It is composed of ontology and epistemology concepts (Chilisa and Kawulich, 2012). The former is associated with the nature of reality (e.g., whether there are one or multiple realities, and if it is objective or socially constructed). The latter is based on the nature of knowledge and its relationship with the researcher (Mertens, 2019). In the field of education and psychology, there are four major research paradigms: constructivism, post-positivism, transformative, and pragmatic (Mertens, 2019, p.8).

This study is underpinned by the Transformative paradigm (or so-called Critical Theory). It means that marginalised groups and the inequities associated with them (e.g., race, gender, socioeconomic class, disability, region, sexual orientation) have vital importance here, where changing asymmetric power relationships is key for social transformation (Mertens, 2019). The ontological beliefs comprehend that there are many versions of reality, and they are based on social positioning, with an awareness of privileged versions and their consequences to society (Mertens, 2019). Thus, it is necessary to examine how what is considered real is contributing to "perpetuating oppressive social structures and policies" (Mertens, 2019, p.32). The epistemological beliefs are related to interactive relationships between researchers and participants, where issues of trust and power are central, and knowledge is situated in terms of social and historical perspectives (Chilisa and Kawulich, 2012).

When it comes to the transformative paradigm, the methodologies used to generate knowledge in research should be focused on including voices that are usually silenced, addressing existing power inequities in the "planning, implementation, and reporting of the research" (Mertens, 2019, p.33), and enabling the results to be connected to social action and change. Although the methodology applied in this dissertation does not explicitly implement these aspects, since it is a systematic literature review, the papers selected for analysis consider these features in their processes and collaborative approaches have these elements in their core, which justifies the use of this research paradigm.

3.2. The methodology

A systematic literature review seeks to put together and summarise in only one source the evidence that meets established criteria to answer specific research questions, and so, support the decision-making process with evidence (Paré and Kitsiou, 2017). According to Tranfield et al. (2003), the systematic literature review can be conducted through three main stages: (1) planning the review (identifying its need, its aims, and the criteria to select the studies), (2) conducting the review (selecting the studies, data collection and synthesis), and (3) reporting and dissemination (discussion, recommendations, and putting evidence into practice).

Using explicit methods reduces bias and increases reliability by reviewing various research evidence. A summary of the findings in an accessible way helps practitioners

and policymakers in decision-making since research evidence usually can be numerous, hard to locate and interpret, and would take the limited time they have to collect and analyse it (EPPI Center, 2019). A critical engagement with research is made to construe what was found and not only to describe it, and some recommendations are suggested to improve policy, practice, and research (Hart, 2019). This review has a qualitative characteristic and focuses on content analysis (Paré and Kitsiou, 2017). It is based on the following four supportive methods, according to Totterdell et al. (2004): defining studies, search strategy, screening studies, and in-depth review.

3.2.1. Defining studies

To define which studies would be part of this review, this first method is based on explicit criteria that allow to map, identify, select, and choose eligible studies (Paré and Kitsiou, 2017). The criteria established were the following:

a. To have been published in the last 10 years (from 2013). The reasons behind this decision are both because the most recent papers have more up-to-date information in a field that has been developed and received more attention in the last years and because around 70% of the studies found were published as from 2013.

b. To be peer-reviewed if journal articles. This criterion is relevant because peer-review practice helps ensure the research has validation and high quality, is significant, original, and is suitable for being published (Kelly et al., 2014).

c. To show relevance to the research question, with both theoretical and empirical perspectives. Since this study aims to answer the research question, the cases selected must be aligned with that. Just theory is not enough because its purpose is to understand the practical implications and impacts of the implementation as well.

d. To focus on basic education (primary and secondary) only. There are many papers about this theme in other fields, such as health, and technology. Also, there are those who focus on higher education. This dissertation seeks to comprehend specifically how to implement collaborative approaches in basic education because it is a mandatory stage in Brazil, where the basis for future outcomes is created.

e. To be written in the English language, but with no limitation in terms of countries. This decision was made because around 97% of the publications found were in English. Beyond that, choosing one language helps to optimise and accelerate the process, instead of having more than one.

3.2.2. Search strategy

The information needed for this study is about empirical educational cases of collaborative approaches implementation, its impacts in terms of equity in education, and the challenges and conditions for implementing it. Then the keywords used in the search strategy were *education, inequity, collaborative, gap, equity, system, implementation, real, and case.* The databases consulted were EBSCOhost (British Education Index, ERIC, Teacher Reference Center, and Professional Development Collection), ProQuest Academic, and the University of Glasgow Library. The main resources utilised were journal articles, books, and theses, with additional citation searching (bibliography of these resources for further search), and recommendations of references from experts. Lastly, in terms of data management, it was organised through the platform Endnote and an Excel sheet.

The first search did not include the words *system, case, implementation*, and *real*. It found 1,210 papers on EBSCOhost, 1,559 on ProQuest Academic, and 1,662 on the University of Glasgow Library. After including these words and applying the filters (publications from 2013, peer-reviewed papers, only the school sector, and basic education stage only), the numbers decreased considerably, with 214 papers on EBSCOhost, 90 papers on ProQuest Academic, and 591 on the University of Glasgow Library. Through the screening process, which is described in the next section, the papers were chosen for the in-depth review. Table 2 summarises the final numbers found through the search strategy presented and how many studies were included in this review.

Table 2: Numbers from the search strategy

Database	Date	Keywords	Number of hits	Number included in the review
EBSCOhost	07/06/2023	educat* N4 (inequ* OR gap OR equ*) + (search with AND) collabor* + (search with AND) system* + (search	214	13

		with AND) case* / real* / implement*		
ProQuest Academic	07/06/2023	educat* N/4 (inequ* OR gap OR equ*) + (search with AND) collabor* + (search with AND) system* + (search with AND) case* / real* / implement*	90	4
University of Glasgow Library	07/06/2023	educat* N4 (inequ* OR gap OR equ*) + (search with AND) collabor* + (search with AND) system* + (search with AND) case*	591	3

Source: elaborated by the author (2023).

3.2.3. Screening studies

After the preliminary results (the number of hits presented in Table 2), the scoping of the studies was narrowed based on the abstracts and research titles, since it gives a concise synthesis of the purposes and findings of a paper and allows deciding if it should be read in full (Hart, 2019). Additionally, the following questions were also used as a guide to check if the studies were relevant to the aims of this dissertation:

- Are the studies exploring empirical cases of implementation in basic education?
- Are the empirical cases about collaborative approaches?
- Does the material focus on equity impacts?

3.2.4. In-depth review

Based on the criteria of section 3.2.1 and on the questions presented in section 3.2.3, twenty (20) studies were selected for the in-depth review. The list that summarises these studies can be found in Appendix 1. It is important to mention that only six (6) studies matched all the criteria established for selection, and fully addressed the research questions. The other fourteen (14) papers presented greater relevance among all other studies related, however, they did not match completely the criteria and/or did not answer entirely the research question. Then some flexibility was made to increase the number of studies analysed, such as including empirical studies outside basic education, and that focus on a specific aspect of the collaborative approach, such as family engagement, instead of having a more systemic perspective.

They consist of empirical cases of different countries like England, Chile, Finland, Canada, the United States, Northern Ireland, and New Zealand, among others. They describe the implementation of different collaborative approaches to improve their educational systems, according to their priority needs. This in-depth review provides recommendations for policy, practice, and research, introduced in Chapter 5.

In the next chapter, the findings from the empirical studies will be organised to answer the questions below:

- Context Summary
    - Why did the empirical cases implement collaborative approaches?
- Collaborative Approaches
    - Which ones were used on the empirical cases?
    - What are their main mechanisms / supportive tools?
    - Was it applied within, between, and/or beyond school?
- Conditions Needed
    - What conditions favour each approach?
    - Do all approaches work in all contexts?
- Barriers Faced
    - What are they?
    - Are they the same for all approaches?
- Equity Issues
    - What are the outcomes found?
    - Is there one approach that contributes more to equity in education?

3.3. Ethical considerations

This systematic literature review is in line with the ethical guidelines of the University of Glasgow on the conduct of research. Since it is entirely based on previously published material, ethical concerns are mostly associated with giving credit to the authors and presenting the sources appropriately (Hulme et al., 2011). Regarding the method of citation, all academic sources used are referenced according to the Harvard style, receiving adequate credit. The literature used was selected from respected databases and up-to-date reports, and it had gone through a peer-review process. There is transparency in terms of the methodology applied, which contributes to the

evaluation of the quality of this review and allows for external scrutiny. Lastly, the critical analysis made over the collected evidence is carried out in a professional manner.

3.4. Limitations of Study

In this study, there are some limitations that were faced. Firstly, the topic of collaborative approaches in education is recent, its implementation is not very much spread among the world, and there is a limited number of publications presenting real cases associated with reducing educational inequity. Secondly, the English language as a criterion for defining the studies led to the fact that most of the empirical cases selected are from developed countries, which have different social, economic, and geographic contexts than Brazil and distinct realities in terms of inequalities. So, if more time were available for this dissertation, it would be relevant to search for papers in Portuguese and Spanish, for example, to get evidence of other realities. Lastly, the Brazilian reality is quite complex, and the discussion made here simplifies it to recommend some future policies. However, it is essential to be aware this is not prescriptive work, and the implementation of these recommendations relies on a deep context analysis combined with a collaborative construction about the most appropriate ways to do that. In a scenario with more time and resources available, this research could have used a longitudinal methodology in the Brazilian context, through the examination of the same individuals over a period, to collect more precise evidence in terms of barriers, conditions, and outcomes of collaborative approaches, since the systematic literature review methodology is limited to what exists and might not be fully useful for specific contexts.

CHAPTER 4 - PROMOTING EQUITY IN EDUCATION VIA COLLABORATION

This chapter presents the results of the systematic literature review to answer if the collaborative approaches can contribute to a more equitable educational system and, if so, how it can be conducted. The chapter is organised into three main topics: the sample characterisation, the findings, and a final discussion.

4.1. Sample characterisation

As explained in the methodology chapter, the sample consists of twenty (20) papers. In terms of countries where the papers are focused, ten of them are about school districts in the United States (e.g., California, Kentucky, Oregon, and New York). Two are empirical studies in England. One focuses on three New Zealand schools (one elementary school and two high schools). One is about educational improvement in Finland. One is in two of the most under-resourced communities in Toronto, Canada. One is in Portugal, through the Childhood Association that works with the Pedagogy-in-Participation. One is a case study about Germany. One is focused on Northern Ireland and its religious division in schools (Protestant, Catholic, and integrated schools). One is about Indigenous education in Australia. And the last one is in Chile, a university-school partnership to improve Initial Teacher Education. This geographical distribution of the papers is not random. As can be seen, the countries are mostly developed and located in the northern part of the globe. A few explanations for this might be the English language criteria used to select the empirical cases, the fact that developed countries have overcome basic challenges in their educational systems and are better prepared to pursue improvement through alternative approaches, and due to the different reality in terms of inequalities when compared to countries in development, which contributes to a more propitious environment for engagement and collaboration, especially of school communities, such as families and students. The implications of this biased distribution are that the findings presented here cannot be applied directly to other contexts and careful analysis must be made when planning to use this information, instead of trying to replicate them to realities with distinct levels of inequalities, educational systems characteristics, and economic and development scenarios.

The methodologies used in the twenty empirical cases can be categorised into four main types. The first one is a qualitative study or case study, used by eleven papers,

consisting of interviews, questionnaires, discussions, workshops, data and documents review, surveys, focus groups, and observations. A few of these qualitative studies were reports based on projects performed by the authors. The second one is a literature-based analysis and review, used by four of the papers. The third one, used by three of the empirical cases, is a mixed-methods design, including the analysis of social networks, content analysis, and participatory design research. And the last one is an ethnographic exploratory study, used by two of the papers.

When it comes to the context of these cases, they might differ, but all of them have in common the interest in promoting more equity in education. Some countries face a highly competitive and marketized environment, with low levels of trust, an inequitable culture, and the need for disputing over pupils for resources. There are cases focusing on the pandemic impacts such as the increasing demands for social services, that go beyond the school attributions and exceed the capacity of organisations. Another context highlighted is the disparities and inequalities in students' learning, which are associated with poverty, race, native language, disabilities, and with educational systems rooted in classism, racism, sexism, xenophobia, and their relations. The need to respond to a world based on quick transformations in technology and knowledge is also a context mentioned to be addressed. Some countries are facing demographic changes, such as a growing immigrant population, and an increasing number of English language learners and Latinos. It potentializes the challenge of having a curriculum that suits diverse cohorts of students and overcoming the "mass education" approach, which is underpinned by curricular uniformity and cultural homogeneity. Also, there is one context of years of political violence and the search for reconciliation through schools. Lastly, one of the countries here analysed is considered a model role in the educational field for its decentralised, information-led, collaborative mechanisms, and for not using standardised tests.

The main aims of the empirical cases to implement collaborative approaches were closing the gaps in terms of opportunity and achievement for black, low-income, and Indigenous students, reducing chronic absenteeism, improving teachers' quality, especially the initial training, preparing students to attend higher education and increasing the percentage of students going to that stage, and reducing power inequities between families and schools. To achieve that, the most mentioned ways were through family engagement, a collaboration between district leadership and

parent organisation group, school-university partnerships, cross-sector collaboration, collaborative action research, the setting of common goals, community-based programs, collaborative networks, and shared education. A summary of the sample used in this systematic literature review can be found in Appendix 1.

4.2. Findings

This section discusses the main findings of the Systematic Literature Review. Each of the four collaborative approaches is presented according to the information identified in the empirical cases that used them, contemplating a description and analysis of the conditions needed to implement these approaches, the barriers faced when implementing them, and the educational equity outcomes identified after the implementation. Lastly, a final discussion is made to highlight the key messages learned from the cases.

As presented in Chapter 2, according to Penuel et al. (2020), there are four types of collaborative approaches: the Strategic Education Research Partnership, Design-Based Implementation Research, Improvement Science in Networked Improvement Communities, and Community-Based Design Research. Table 3 presents a summary of how many empirical cases applied each approach. The total sum is twenty-one (21) because one of the cases was identified as using more than one approach. The choice made by the cases about which approach to use seems to be more related to both the aims of the collaborative project and the context of the educational system. In the next sections, each approach will be presented.

Table 3: Collaborative approach x Empirical cases

Collaborative Approach	Number of cases using
The Strategic Education Research Partnership	6 cases
Design-Based Implementation Research	3 cases
Improvement Science in Networked Improvement Communities	5 cases
Community-Based Design Research	7 cases

Source: elaborated by the author (2023).

4.2.1. The Strategic Education Research Partnership

The Strategic Education Research Partnership approach was used in six of the empirical cases. The major focus is supporting problem-solving through the

partnership between schools or districts, universities, and researchers (Meyer et al., 2020). Some partnerships included curriculum development for teachers and college opportunities for students (Gonzalez, 2022). Another very mentioned feature of this approach is its evidence-based focus, which supports the professional development of teachers (Kang and González-Howard, 2022), and increases understanding of the scenario, open conversations, and reflection (Arkhipenka et al., 2018). Its aim is that research becomes part of the way teachers think and act in their practice and in the school culture (Arkhipenka et al., 2018).

One example of a practical case is the use of networks among schools to collaborate in Northern Ireland, where students and teachers went to different schools to share experiences, with the support of the university research team (Gallagher, 2016). This project received specific funding for staff, equipment and other involved costs, and logistical support. It was comprised of joint work among Protestant, Catholic, and Integrated schools and aimed at promoting economic, educational, and reconciliation through collaborative links between schools and run-shared classes. Each school should submit its proposals for collaborative initiatives, which would be supported by the research team, which would review and assess what worked better and help in making the initiative as effective as possible (Gallagher, 2016).

The mechanisms and tools identified when implementing this approach are the creation of an enquiry team composed of different actors of the school that will lead the enquiry process (Meyer et al., 2020), the realisation of workshops for goal setting, problem-solving, sharing experiences, and planning (Meyer et al., 2020), the support of the university research team with evidence, approaches, evaluation, and acting as a critical friend (Arkhipenka et al., 2018), the establishment of principal pairs from different schools (Wilkinson et al., 2017), observations of the school and feedback on meetings (Meyer et al., 2020), the figure of specialist schools that act as the focal point for collaborative networks (Gallagher, 2016), the offer of a Masters' program in Collaborative leadership to teachers that are part of the enquiry group (Gallagher, 2016), and the application of the cycle Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycle (Meyer et al., 2020). For all six cases, the approach was used beyond schools since there is the involvement of the university research team as a partner. It was also identified as being used within schools, with the creation of the enquiry team to develop improvement inside (Arkhipenka et al., 2018). And the approach was also present between schools,

represented by cross-school workshops, seminars, principal pairs, and collaborative networks.

The goal-setting feature appears as a particularly important condition for collaboration to work in this approach. It means that it is necessary to set a clear common vision and goals for the partnership (Gonzalez, 2022), with the goals being aligned with the strategies, and justified and communicated to ensure commitment and collective responsibility (Meyer et al., 2020). Having a continuous process of feedback to maintain focus and follow the progress toward the goal through close monitoring is also relevant (Meyer et al., 2020). The school culture should be based on openness to change minds and preconceived ideas (Arkhipenka et al., 2018) and commitment to collaborative problem-solving, while the school routines must ensure efficient meetings based on data (Meyer et al., 2020). For this to be achieved, building trust, respect, and relationships (Kang and González-Howard, 2022), and maintaining regular, sustained, and close contact among partners (Gallagher, 2016) is essential. The availability of funding to support collaborative initiatives (Gallagher, 2016), the definition of roles, and the existence of high-quality teachers and leaders also are mentioned as necessary conditions (Gonzalez, 2022). Lastly, bottom-up decision-making, which addresses local challenges (Gallagher, 2016) and is based on 'parity of participation' among stakeholders (Wilkinson et al., 2017), combined with transparent leadership and a diverse faculty (Gonzalez, 2022), creates a more power-balancing context, and favours the implementation of collaborative activities.

The barriers identified during the implementation are associated with the existence of multiple and/or unrealistic goals (Meyer et al., 2020) and difficulty in combining schools' needs and researchers' interests (Kang and González-Howard, 2022). In terms of capacity and resources, the challenges found are the lack of staff capability to achieve the goals (Meyer et al., 2020), the logistical barriers, such as how to reorganise timetables and find time to plan and have effective communication (Gallagher, 2016), the uncertainty of funding for the initiatives or for allowing more time to teachers collaborate (Kang and González-Howard, 2022) and the fact that school funding is associated with students' performance on tests (Kang and González-Howard, 2022). There are also barriers in terms of beliefs and expectations, such as the existence of teachers who do not believe in better students achievement (Meyer et al., 2020) and have low expectations about them (Gonzalez, 2022), a deficit mindset

associated with students (Gonzalez, 2022), and contexts where staff felt their own expertise are unvalued and unrecognised (Meyer et al., 2020). Resistance to being out of their comfort zone and to compulsory initiatives (Meyer et al., 2020), and a context based on a risk-averse culture that avoids controversial or difficult issues (Gallagher, 2016) are other challenging aspects. Barriers associated with external influences and power issues include the focus on standardised tests and rankings, incentivising intense competition and amplifying inequities (Gonzalez, 2022), time pressure dictated by external accountability, with a focus on short-term initiatives and results (Arkhipenka et al., 2018), a dilemma between establishing relationships with schools, and being accountable with the other demands of a researcher (Kang and González-Howard, 2022), and lobbies motivated by personal or social agendas (Gonzalez, 2022). Lastly, projects that rely on individuals in isolation (Gallagher, 2016) and lack of thinking about the longevity of activities (Gallagher, 2016) impact negatively governance and the sustainability of collaborative approaches.

In terms of educational equity outcomes, it was reported that the school environment was improved with fewer disruptions (Meyer et al., 2023), better students' emotional and social well-being (Wilkinson et al., 2017), and changes to schools' practices and cultures (Arkhipenka et al., 2018). Leaders developed awareness about learners as a priority and the need for a more individualised learning process (Meyer et al., 2023). The attendance rates increased during the strategy implementation to address persistent absence (Arkhipenka et al., 2018). Teachers gained more voice, became more proactive, and strengthened their values and professional identity (Arkhipenka et al., 2018). The school community started learning how to deal with diversity in a positive way (Gallagher, 2016). All these represent an improvement in the opportunity gap and led to closing the achievement gap among diverse groups, with better outcomes in reading, mathematics, and writing - sustaining these advances throughout the project -, and with more positive grades, test scores, dropout rates, and completion rates.

4.2.2. Design-Based Implementation Research

The Design-Based Implementation Research approach was the one used in fewer cases, totalizing three. It is associated with professional development, research (Formosinho and Figueiredo, 2014), and collective efficacy (Miranda and Chapman,

2021), with the purpose of innovating and refining practice and building capacity (Miranda and Chapman, 2021). One practical example is the implementation of a context-based program in Portugal, which consisted of periods of action and reflection about the strategies proposed, aiming at building participatory educational teams able to promote quality education for children (Formosinho and Figueiredo, 2014). The program was strongly focused on developing effective pedagogical skills and the capacity to work with diversity across staff. The active involvement of every child in their learning process and the participation of the educational assistants in creating strategies were conditions that contributed to the program's success (Formosinho and Figueiredo, 2014).

The mechanisms reported to support the implementation of this approach are based on building a networked learning system able to address diverse challenges, such as curricula, different school years and stages, pedagogical practices (Miranda and Chapman, 2021), professional mentors, school visits, interviews (Wilkinson et al., 2017), joint practice development, research-informed professional learning, collaborative enquiry, and use of data (Miranda and Chapman, 2021). The approach was identified as being used within, between, and beyond schools, appearing more often within schools (teachers peers and students collaborating) and beyond schools (with external partners, such as universities and schoolteachers).

In terms of conditions that favours the implementation of this approach, the highlight goes to the idea of starting small, like a pilot project, since it helps in shaping and sustaining a culture that deals with risk-taking, focusing primarily on students' outcomes (Miranda and Chapman, 2021), and using local knowledge (Wilkinson et al., 2017). The goal-setting process is associated with a shared identification of the aims, and it can be conducted through the connection among professional development, research, and practice (Formosinho and Figueiredo, 2014). The school culture should allow a caring atmosphere (Miranda and Chapman, 2021) and consider every person as a learner (Formosinho and Figueiredo, 2014). Offering the conditions such as time and money for involvement with collaborative initiatives is essential (Miranda and Chapman, 2021). Lastly, mutual trust, openness to new perspectives of realising things, and the establishment of mutual understanding for better relationships (Miranda and Chapman, 2021) play a significant role in successful collaboration.

When it comes to the barriers faced by the cases, there is a conflict between theoretical (researchers) and practical (teachers) perspectives (Miranda and Chapman, 2021), a lack of investment to develop the staff capacity in diversity aspects (Formosinho and Figueiredo, 2014), and time and effort needed for development and involvement with new initiatives (Wilkinson et al., 2017). Furthermore, a mindset based on automatic actions and behaviours, used to repeat the same conduct (Miranda and Chapman, 2021), disturbs the implementation, as well as resistance to an open classroom for others to watch (Miranda and Chapman, 2021), and the lack of a safe environment for sharing and trust (Miranda and Chapman, 2021). Lastly, uniformity in practices, strong normative control on school management (Formosinho and Figueiredo, 2014), and lack of guarantee of continuity of staff (Wilkinson et al., 2017) are barriers associated with power issues and sustainability.

Through the implementation of this approach, the educational equity outcomes identified for reducing the opportunity gap were teaching improvement, with students' interests as key (Madrid Miranda and Chapman, 2021), a more participatory pedagogy, and a school culture that values humanity and democracy, and cultivates an environment where students feel included, respected, and answered, no matter their individual differences (Formosinho and Figueiredo, 2014). It was reported that these more propitious contexts allowed to decrease the achievement gap in terms of literacy and numeracy skills.

4.2.3. Improvement Science in Networked Improvement Communities

The Improvement Science in Networked Improvement Communities approach was used in five of the empirical cases. It consists of an iterative process of cycles to plan a change, implement it, collect data about the implementation, evaluate the process, and define the next steps (Burns et al., 2019). Through the promotion of facilitated networking among teachers, it aims at supporting teachers to reflect on their practice and identify improvement opportunities (Burns et al., 2019). One empirical example is the creation of a collaboration consortium composed of adult schools and colleges in California (U.S.) with the purpose of implementing a regional plan to qualify adult education and offer better immigrant integration (Watson et al., 2018). This plan was based on an iterative process, professional development for staff, and improved cultural responsiveness, which contributed to the growing educational capacity of the system (Watson et al., 2018).

The main tools for its implementation are the use of evidence, pre, and post-assessment, the establishment of school clusters, goal setting, classroom walk-throughs (Burns et al., 2019), the hiring of support specialists on the chosen problem (Watson et al., 2018), social networks analysis (Kolleck et al., 2019), the work through fishbone activity and driver diagram, the creation of an improvement team, the realisation of an equity audit, and the conduction of empathy interviews with community members to better understand the problem (Nelson, 2022). In terms of in which sphere this approach is more likely to happen, it appears frequently in the three of them: within schools, with the improvement team and iterative cycles (Nelson, 2022), between schools, with the school-to-school collaboration through school clusters (Armstrong et al., 2020); and beyond schools, with the interaction with external partners and the support of organisations to provide services not offered by schools, such as food security, housing support, and public benefits for instance (Watson et al., 2018).

The conditions needed most mentioned by the empirical cases are associated with resources, processes, and funding. It is essential to expand the amount of time available for teacher collaboration, have funding flexibility and financial incentive (Burns et al., 2019), establish a governance structure for collaboration (Armstrong et al., 2020) with a backbone organization (Kolleck et al., 2019), and implement processes that allow improvement, with testing, evaluation, and learning from the failures (Nelson, 2022). The partners should have high identification and high commitment to the goals established (Kolleck et al., 2019). The sense of belonging to the school by educators and the community, and the families' culture and how they deal with their responsibilities also impact the collaborative initiatives implementation (Nelson, 2022). The collaboration must be voluntary (Armstrong et al., 2020). A focus on leadership capacity and quality, which is concerned with relational factors, such as trust and clear communication (Armstrong et al., 2020), and is responsible for team building (Watson et al., 2018), is crucial. Lastly, when looking at the school context, is important to consider if it is urban (which has more geographical proximity to partners for collaboration), if it has a history of collaboration (Armstrong et al., 2020), and if it has a diverse staff team able to not only represent the population they serve but also to support the student's social, academics, physical, and mental health needs (Nelson, 2022).

The barriers to overcome revolve around conflicts in the goal-setting process (Kolleck et al., 2019), the existence of opposing agendas in the partnership (Kolleck et al., 2019), biases that contribute to maintaining systems of privilege (Watson et al., 2018), lack of capacity for implementation, including funding and resources (Armstrong et al., 2020), and resistance to change by status-quo supporters who fear loss of power (Watson et al., 2018). Lastly, some external influences also have a role in making the implementation more challenging. For instance, a marketised policy context, that fosters competition (Armstrong et al., 2020), and student conditions, such as mental health, physical conditions, poverty, housing, and food insecurity (Nelson, 2022).

This approach was reported to contribute to equity in education by decreasing the opportunity gap through professional learning of teachers, which promoted pedagogical intentionality, improved the use of research and evidence in their practice, and led to better support for students of colour and from low-income families (Armstrong et al., 2021). The establishment of a common equity vision within the district, with a focus on immigrant integration and the creation of student services culturally responsive (Burns et al., 2019), and strategies to motivate young people from disadvantaged realities to pursue higher education (Kolleck et al., 2020) also contributed to this improvement. One of the collaborative initiatives resulted in the reduction of absenteeism and the strengthening of retention of underrepresented groups (Nelson, 2022). The impacts reported in terms of reducing the achievement gap were the improvement in students' attainment and academic progress among specific cohorts (Armstrong et al., 2021).

4.2.4. Community-Based Design Research

The last approach, the Community-Based Design Research, was the one used in most of the cases, in a total of seven. It is based on the idea of a network composed of families, schools, community partners, and districts, with the aim to increase communication, shared decision-making, and opportunities for all (Perry and Geller, 2021). It is underpinned by the understanding that reforms are only legitimate if all the actors affected are involved in all the phases (Niemi, 2021), where the historical power imbalances are addressed, and low-income and coloured families are considered experts in a specific context (Ishimaru, 2017). One concrete example is the community school initiative in Canada, which established partnerships with nonprofit, for-profit,

teachers, and families to deliver an accessible math curriculum after school at a subsidised cost, helping the students that need it most and looking to reduce the achievement gap (Eizadirad et al., 2022). A key aspect was the fact that people from the staff had good relationships with the families part of the program. Also, coaches played a relevant role as mentors, contributing to the motivation of students and the connection among classroom skills, sports, and life in the community (Eizadirad et al., 2022).

To implement this approach, the most mentioned mechanisms were conferences and parent workshops (Ishimaru, 2014), an advisory team composed by parents, a family conference, monthly meetings with all the partners, school-based workshops (Ishimaru, 2017), training to address the main needs, use of evidence (Perry and Geller, 2021), a teacher education forum to meet the new challenges (Niemi, 2021), and the creation of a school inquiry group (SIG), which consists of a committee composed by teachers, parents, students, community members, and school administrators to plan and implement the transformation of the school (Ishimaru, 2018). This approach is, in its majority, applied beyond the schools, with the involvement of outside partners (Niemi, 2021), especially parents and families, but also with external support, investment, and a cross-sector collaboration among education, health, community, and other partners (Ishimaru, 2017).

Context-based and power balancing are the most important conditions needed when implementing this approach. In this sense, diversity is a key element where individuals need to feel they are being represented adequately (Niemi, 2021) and that their identities are known and respected by educators and staff (Eizadirad et al., 2022). Families are informed and prepared to take part in decision-making and curriculum planning (Perry and Geller, 2021), playing a proactive role and making power relations more balanced (Ishimaru, 2018). Other conditions that favour this collaborative approach implementation are creating an evaluation system for the actions (Fletcher et al., 2021), establishing shared priorities, and having a propitious political climate (Ishimaru, 2014). It is also important the school culture presents an open, collaborative, and welcoming environment (Fletcher et al., 2021) and focuses on working to shift deficit-based mindsets (Perry and Geller, 2021), characterised by low expectations for low-income and black students and by seeing nondominant parents as people who cannot contribute with school improvement (Ishimaru, 2014). Some

interesting conditions that appeared were the need to change the role of media in creating stories of a failed school (Ishimaru, 2018), the application of restorative justice practices to tackle behavioural issues (Ishimaru, 2018), and the idea of building youth leadership to improve trust and engagement among stakeholders (Fletcher et al., 2021). Lastly, in terms of resources, processes, and funding, it is important to have school administrators committed to collaborative initiatives, allowing time and funds, and support them (Fletcher et al., 2021), a team to coordinate and nurture the partnerships (Fletcher et al., 2021), and create an infrastructure with information flow for collaborating with families (Ishimaru, 2017).

Many barriers were presented by the empirical cases during the implementation. For example, peoples' own interests and cultures might prevent the development of a common vision (Perry and Geller, 2021). Also, deficit-based strategies to "fix" families, which can be seen as part of the problem instead of valuable sources for change (Ishimaru, 2014), and lack of resources with time limitations, weak leadership, and poverty in communities (Fletcher et al., 2021). Beyond that, it is worth mentioning power issues such as strong hierarchies based on top-down power structures with a lack of communication and legitimacy (Niemi, 2021), no alteration in power relations among practitioners, school managers, and students, and systemic barriers that impede civic engagement (e.g., lack of transportation, violence, and the need of having many jobs) (Perry and Geller, 2021). Finally, barriers associated with governance and sustainability aspects also require attention. Partnerships that are not formalised can make it difficult for knowledge management and evaluation processes (Fletcher et al., 2021). Turnover impacts the durability of school-community partnerships and initiatives must not rely on only one individual in a school (Fletcher et al., 2021). And a lack of integration among the strategies, the preparation of families, and teacher professional development, will impact an unsuccessful implementation (Ishimaru, 2017).

Regarding educational equity outcomes, the cases using this approach indicated that the opportunity gap was addressed through a more efficient and connected information flow (Niemi, 2021), by offering great opportunities that students could afford such as after-school activities (Eizadirad et al., 2022) and preparation for college and labour work, with better student support and resources to most vulnerable schools (Fletcher et al., 2021), and with more inclusive climates in schools and districts (Ishimaru, 2014).

These improvements in the processes impacted minimising the achievement gap, which was illustrated through the increase in graduation rates, the progress in 3rd-grade reading (Perry and Geller, 2021), and the cutback in outcome disparities between white and other communities of colour, and between middle-class students and low-income students (Ishimaru, 2019).

4.3. Discussion

The top-down legacy of educational systems challenges moving beyond hierarchies and bureaucracies to implement a collaborative approach that engages diverse stakeholders. Despite the discourse of school autonomy, the activities are usually centralised through accountability mechanisms and inspections (Ainscow et al., 2016). The use of regulation or laws to impose reforms (Chapman, 2019) is common, which goes against the collaborative idea.

From the empirical cases analysed in this study, it was possible to identify the main conditions that favours the implementation of a collaborative approach. Firstly, the goal-setting process, where the stakeholders establish a common objective for the initiative, such as combating chronic absenteeism, as exemplified in the United States case (Nelson, 2022). Secondly, the creation of tools for monitoring and evaluating initiatives, using data and evidence to track the need for changes, like the New Zealand case (Meyer et al., 2023), which had close monitoring of the project progress based on indicators associated with the goals. Thirdly, having propitious school routines and culture, with space for sharing knowledge and practices by practitioners. In the case of Finland (Niemi, 2021), their schools' routine has an efficient information flow, and their schools' culture is based on a collaborative mindset instead of control. The fourth condition is having good relationships and trust among partners. The Australian case (Wilkinson et al., 2017) demonstrates they value local expertise showing respect to practitioners, creating a fruitful environment for trust and healthy interactions. Fifthly, the existence of adequate resources, processes, and funding are the pillars of institutional capacity. One example is the case of California (Burns et al., 2019), which made available flexible funding to hire arts teachers to both provide classes for students and to allow weekly time for other teachers to work on professional collaboration. Lastly, the understanding of context-based and power balancing as central. The case in the West United States (Ishimaru, 2018) used a strategy where students were positioned as teachers' trainers to provide courses about institutional

racism, contributing to a change in power relations and using the students' experiences about the topic.

When it comes to the question if all four approaches can work in all contexts, what was possible to identify is that in contexts with high achievement gaps among diverse groups (e.g., low-income, black, and Indigenous students), high levels of inequities (e.g., race, gender, social class, disabilities, and origin), and with the increase of cultural diversity and immigrant population, different collaborative approaches were used and successful results were reported. However, in a very competitive society, characterised by low reliability and being market-oriented, the Community-Based Design Research approach does not seem to be a good choice, because it requires a more propitious scenario in terms of relationships and trust-building to be implemented, so a step back should be taken by these contexts in order to develop better these aspects before using this approach.

Regarding the barriers found during the implementation, they are similar for all approaches. Even though the concrete examples presented in the cases might differ due to the characteristics of each approach (e.g., the resistance to change by status-quo defenders who fear the loss of power on the Improvement Science approach and the resistance of teachers to open classroom for external visitors on the Design-based Implementation research), the main ideas behind the barriers are the same. Six major types of barriers were identified. One is the difficulty in common goal setting and shared interests among partners. In the case of Germany (Kolleck et al., 2020), they found that different partners had distinct levels of identification with the goal established depending on their positions in the network and on the core activities their organisations have. Another barrier is the lack of capability and human and financial resources to implement and scale collaborative initiatives. One of the United States cases (Ishimaru, 2019) mentioned that the structure of the partnership stimulated an atmosphere of competition for resources among project partners. Also, the beliefs and expectations of the stakeholders are sometimes biased by stereotypes and associated with low expectations for students of underrepresented groups. One concrete example is the case of New York (Gonzalez, 2022), where it was identified that some teachers, parents, and community members had negative views about students' potential depending on their race and socio-economic status, which is called deficit thinking. Additionally, the resistance to changing and maintaining the status quo is another

barrier. During the initiative in Chile (Madrid Miranda and Chapman, 2021), it was required that practitioners from schools and trainers from the university exposed their practices and opened their classrooms, which at first was challenging and relied on trust building to happen. There are also political and external influences and power imbalances, and the way systems are structured. It was reported in one of the cases in the United States (Watson et al., 2018) that a few stakeholders were afraid of losing their power and autonomy, which made them not willing to collaborate. The last barrier is the lack of attention to aspects of governance and sustainability. The Northern Ireland case (Gallagher, 2016) illustrates that with the fact that their activities had a short-term focus, instead of longer-term, demonstrating a lack of thinking about the sustainability of the initiative.

In terms of educational equity outcomes, the analysis was made through two main concepts: the opportunity gap, which is associated with educational processes, and the achievement gap, which is associated with educational results. Both are connected since the processes are the means to obtain the results aimed, and inequities in the processes will lead to inequities in results. Based on the empirical cases, it is not possible to say that there is one approach that contributes more to equity in education since the outcomes reported are similar among them and all presented positive contributions, even though it cannot be generalised and applied to all students involved. Then, the most relevant aspect to consider when choosing the approach is to understand which one fits better the aims and the context, and if it is the case, combining more than one.

To conclude this section, four key lessons from the systematic literature review process will be presented. First, there might have pitfalls when collaborating. These pitfalls can be either the case of partners "pretending" to collaborate or/and the so-called "price of nice." The former is when the stakeholders involved in the collaboration process fully agree with each other and there is no challenge. Hargreaves (2000) named it "contrived collegiality", which consists of "artificial arrangements that may lead to ineffective collaborative relationships" (Ainscow et al., 2019, p.160). In this scenario, there are no real changes, and the partnership is created only because it can be seen as something positive by society (Ainscow, 2016, p.6). The latter is associated with the idea that good intentions are likely to maintain educational inequities. Niceness is related to harmony, comfort, silence, passivity, avoidance, lack of conflict,

and to deficit mindset about students and school communities. It contributes to the perpetuation of the status quo and diverts attention far from discussions about oppression, inequities, and institutional dominance (Castagno, 2019). In this sense, it is necessary to be careful when implementing collaborative approaches to not fall into the trap of supporting existing power structures and compromising the authenticity of initiatives that look for effective changes with the justification of being nice.

Second, the meaning of equity in the empirical cases seems to be much more associated with the processes in education than with its results. The cases reported positive contributions towards more equity in education, both through addressing opportunity gaps and achievement gaps. However, most of these impacts identified were associated with educational processes or reducing opportunity gaps, such as professional development, mindset changing, the centrality of students in the learning process, improvement of school culture and environment, the focus on respect for diversity, and the offering of extra activities. The fact that most of the impacts were found on the educational processes and not on the educational results probably happens because the collaborative approaches require long-term initiatives to close the achievement gap, so the empirical cases would need more time to track the results aimed. Another probable reason for this is that education is influenced by diverse factors and establishing a direct correlation between better educational outcomes and collaborative approaches can be challenging.

Third, to implement collaborative approaches, policymakers, researchers, practitioners, and other stakeholders involved must have beliefs and values aligned with the rationale of collaboration. For example, the need to address power imbalances emerged frequently in the cases, especially those related to the Community-Based Design Research approach. If the actors believe that a specific group is more important or valuable than others, that power is and must keep being the privilege of a few, and only this small group can implement initiatives for educational improvement, they are not in agreement with the premises of collaborative initiatives and its implementation is likely to fail. Historically and culturally, reforms have been underpinned by top-down and centralised perspective, which influences these beliefs. Nonetheless, it is important to analyse if the stakeholders have the will to shift this mindset and try alternative ways. By doing that, better expectations about the implementation of collaborative approaches can be established.

Forth, regardless of whether collaborative approaches are the best option for tackling educational inequities, the idea that a silver bullet will solve the challenges in education seems to be outdated, as well as replicating practices that worked in one reality, since it does not mean it will work somewhere else. In this sense, one premise that should permeate any effort toward education improvement is to always consider local expertise before planning and implementing any initiatives. There is valuable knowledge in the field, which has been undervalued or even ignored by policymakers and researchers. This probably happens either because teachers make up a large group of people, which implies great challenges regarding the coordination of actions to promote their engagement, or because politicians and policymakers see it as a threat to the existing power structures. Instead of trying to find fancy solutions or reinvent the wheel, the appreciation and involvement of practitioners, combined with a context-based approach, must be central to any educational reform.

In summary, the empirical cases analysed in this study indicated positive outcomes in terms of equity in education through collaborative approaches; however, implementing these approaches is not a simple task. It requires balancing change, support, and system conditions. Social cohesion needs to be increased towards a more egalitarian culture, with fewer hierarchies and social control (Ainscow et al., 2019). Collegial working must be consistent, and its practices must be effective in benefiting students (Hargreaves et al., 2015, p.132). The educational system's culture, processes, structures, resources, leadership, institutional capacity, and accountability mechanisms must be aligned with the principles of collaboration to achieve a successful implementation (Chapman and Fullan, 2007, p.207).

CHAPTER 5 – POLICY, PRACTICE, AND RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS TO BRAZIL

Brazil has currently 47.4 million enrolments in basic education, which contemplates from early childhood to high school stage (Inep, 2023). The public sector serves 81% of this total, totalizing 200 days of school in a year, with at least four hours per day (Weller and Horta Neto, 2020). Education is mandatory and free at all levels between the ages of 4 and 17 (Weller and Horta Neto, 2020).

High-income students tend to attend private schools and low-income ones, public schools. Private schools are more likely to have a better school climate and more motivated teachers (Soares, 2004). Students from advantaged backgrounds usually have academic ambitions shared with their colleagues, and they tend to receive cultural capital from their families (Soares, 2004). According to Soares (2004), the phenomenon of school segregation contributes to the reproduction of inequalities, and socioeconomic status is the factor that most impacts students' achievements.

There are still great challenges in reducing educational inequities and qualifying public schools in Brazil. Adequate learning levels are not achieved by many students, and when it comes to black students the statistics are even worse (Soares, 2004). One example is that only 41% of black people conclude high school, which can be linked to discriminatory pedagogical practices in schools, institutional biases, and other barriers they face, such as economic and social ones (Lima, 2011). Additionally, the continental size of Brazil brings challenges associated with access to remote areas and, consequently fewer quality resources and support are available to these regions.

The recent educational reforms in Brazil have not contributed to improving this reality. They have been focusing on curriculum and testing standardisation, and on decentralisation, which in practice means transferring responsibilities to schools, acting like a business organisation model (Souza, 2003). These policies, in general, do not consider the complexity of the school, which has its own culture and characteristics. In addition, the school community is not included in decision-making and only acts as a legitimiser of the processes (Souza, 2003).

To reduce these socioeconomic, regional, and cultural disparities, an alternative way for Brazil is to start looking at collaborative approaches in education with more

attention. Since the Brazilian educational system is characterised by a competitive culture, with school rankings and bonuses policies in some states, and with low levels of trust between practitioners and policymakers, the Community-Based Design Research approach would not be recommended at first. Instead, either the Strategic Education Research Partnership or the Design-based Implementation Research, or the Improvement Science in Networked Improvement Communities approach would be more appropriate until relationship and trust building can be developed. Surely there will be exceptions, and there are municipalities and even states in the country that are prepared to use the Community-Based Design Research approach now, leaving this analysis and decision at the discretion of each location.

It is also significant to be aware that the large inequalities in Brazil only can be fully addressed through an intersectoral perspective. Poverty has multiple causes and diverse public bodies must be working together with the education sector, such as health, housing, social development, food security, economic development, sports, and culture. In this sense, all the collaborative approaches presented here were identified as helpful in establishing structured partnerships beyond schools. At the same time, Brazilian schools and practitioners have deep knowledge and expertise about what works better in their realities, making collaboration a powerful tool within schools (e.g., enquiry team with iterative cycles, teachers peers, classroom visits and feedback, and students collaborating) and between them (e.g., cross-school workshops, principals' pairs, and school clusters).

On the one hand, it is necessary to work on the conditions that favour the implementation of these approaches. For the Brazilian context, specifically, it is essential to focus on allowing the resources, processes, and funding, with available time and training for collaborative actions. Also, to build relationships and trust among the stakeholders through more balance in terms of power and with initiatives based on schools' context. Not least important, working on school culture and climate, and on deficit mindsets, such as the belief that marginalised students are not capable of having successful paths, are key for setting common goals and agendas and achieving system improvement. On the other hand, there are barriers likely to be faced that need to be tackled. They are related to the difficulty in establishing shared interests among partners, the lack of capability for implementation, the existing biases on the educational system associated with low expectations for specific cohorts of students,

the good intentions (or so-called niceness) that prevent the inequalities to be overcome, the resistance to change, the political influences, the power imbalances, and the lack of structures of governance.

To reduce the opportunity and achievement gap in Brazilian education, the following recommendations are made in three major areas: policy, research, and practice. In terms of policy recommendations, it is necessary to rethink teachers' initial training and professional development with a focus on equity, collaboration, and evidence. The government should give closer support to the schools that most need it, instead of using punitive and narrowed accountability mechanisms, working in partnership with them and not based on a top-down perspective. A bone organisation is required to coordinate collaborative projects. Political influences on education must be significantly reduced and the understanding that improvement requires long-term initiatives needs to prevail and be put into practice. Human and financial resources should be adjusted for the collaborative approaches' implementation, as well as the restructuring of school functioning, with more time for training and practice sharing among teachers. Lastly, new ways of monitoring and evaluating schools, practitioners, and students must be implemented, contemplating the diversity of students' abilities, and learning processes, with a focus on improvement and not competition. For the research recommendations, the first step is strengthening the formation of researchers and institutions on collaborative approaches, since nowadays this is not a priority theme in the academy in Brazil. In parallel, partnerships between universities and schools can be increased, with a focus on addressing local demands according to schools' needs. And the professional development of educational professionals should have a greater level of research and evidence elements. The practice recommendations revolve around creating schools' clusters for collaboration among schools according to specific criteria, expanding assessment types that do not rely only on summative ones and standardised tests, addressing deficit mindset and school culture issues, allowing elevated expectations for all students, and developing openness on practitioners for acting on collaborative enquiries with their peers and enabling visits to their classrooms.

Table 4 summarises the recommendations for Brazilian education to implement collaborative approaches and achieve a more equitable system. It is worth emphasizing that this is not a recipe and there is no silver bullet when it comes to

education, but it can serve as a guide for each school and educational system to rethink its ways.

Table 4: Summary of recommendations for Brazilian education

Type	Recommendation
Policy	• Rethink teachers' initial training • Strong focus on professional development • Technical support from the government • Bone organisation to coordinate collaborative initiatives • Human and financial resources • Restructure of school functioning • New ways of monitoring and evaluation • Less political influence
Research	• Focus on forming researchers and institutions on collaborative approaches • Partnerships between universities and schools, to address local demands • Professional development focused on research and evidence-based
Practice	• Creation of schools' clusters for collaboration • Expand assessment types • Address deficit mindset and school culture elements • Openness for collaborative enquiry, sharing practices, and exposing classroom

Source: elaborated by the author (2023).

CHAPTER 6 - CONCLUSION

Education should not be based on heavy competition, which is characterised by the existence of winners and losers. Education should be designed to attend to all students according to their specific needs and abilities. Nowadays, is common to find in educational systems "deficit frameworks [that] teach kids to adapt to systems that are broken rather than requiring broken systems to adapt or even be fixed" (Castagno, 2019, xvii). This scenario is allowing the emergence of new ways to pursue improvement in education, where collaborative approaches have been seen with exciting potential.

This study explores whether it is possible to tackle educational inequities through collaborative approaches by analysing twenty empirical cases. Positive outcomes in terms of equity in education have been reported by the educational systems that implemented them. Even though their contexts and goals can be diverse, they have in common the understanding that an alternative way to achieve social justice is by collaborating through a democratic and participatory process (Fletcher et al., 2021). The four collaborative approaches presented in this dissertation have specific features and each of them can be more suitable for some realities; however, they are interconnected, and a combination between them is a possibility for better results. The perspective of working in partnership beyond schools is essential when talking about equity because this is key for supporting mental health and addressing poverty and racism implications. Equitable and impactful partnerships between the school and its community cannot rely on an exceptional school leader (Perry and Geller, 2021), being necessary to create governance and structures able to engage families in the school routine in a sustainable way, enabling them to be part in taking decisions about policy and resource development.

I conclude by stating that collaborative approaches must receive more attention from policymakers, politicians, researchers, practitioners, and other stakeholders involved in education in Brazil. These actors need to create the environment and conditions and articulate the whole educational ecosystem to work truly collaboratively with equity in the centre. It is also fundamental to reduce the distance between policymakers and researchers to enable more effective practice in education. There is no more time to spend reproducing top-down reforms, that do not value the expertise of teachers, do

not consider families and students' voices, and do not acknowledge how important the context is in education. The cost has been not only the country's development but the future of our most vulnerable young people.

In terms of suggestions for further research, firstly, a focus can be given to experiences of collaboration in countries in development, since most cases analysed in this study are from developed countries, so other perspectives and insights can be found in that reality. Secondly, novel studies can explore the most equitable educational systems around the world to better understand their contexts, backgrounds, policies, and relationships with collaborative approaches. Lastly, I recommend a deeper reflection on specific conditions or barriers to implementing collaborative initiatives, such as family engagement, power balancing, resistance reduction, and common goal establishment, to comprehend how it is possible to create or overcome them.

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Appendix 1 - Systematic Literature Review GRID

S/N	Reference	Sample	Method	Findings	Tags
1	Madrid Miranda, R., & Chapman, C. (2021). Towards a network learning system: reflections on a university initial teacher education and school-based collaborative initiative in Chile. Professional Development in Education, 1-15.	University-school partnership to improve Initial Teacher Education in Chile.	"Semi-structured questionnaire at the beginning and the end of the Program. Semi-structured interviews and focus groups. Observational notes and records of meetings." (p.7)	"Insights on how the initiative becomes a space for building trust and relationships and disrupts boundaries between institutions, enhancing teacher professional learning." (p.1)	#collaboration #enquiry #initial teacher education #university-school partnership
2	Burns, D., Darling-Hammond, L., & Scott, C. (2019). Closing the Opportunity Gap: How Positive Outlier Districts in California Are Pursuing Equitable Access to Deeper Learning. Positive Outliers Series. Learning Policy Institute.	Seven "positive outlier" districts in California.	"Three-phase, mixed-methods study examining positive outlier districts in California in which African American, Latino/a, and White students are consistently achieving at higher-than-predicted rates on California's assessments." (p.6)	Focus on students' learning, relationships building, staff empowerment, teachers' and leaders' development and retention, collective efficacy, collaborative enquiry-based instruction, use of evidence to inform practice, support for students based on their needs.	#equity #gap #learning #outliers #collaboration
3	Meyer, F., Bendikson, L., & Le Fevre, D. M. (2020). Leading school improvement through goal setting: Evidence from New Zealand schools. Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 51(2), 365-383.	Elementary school and high schools in New Zealand.	"Case studies drew on principal and teacher interview data, workshop artifacts and discussion recordings, observations, school reports and school achievement data." (p.365)	"Challenge teachers' beliefs about current achievement to raise commitment; evaluate practices; distribute responsibility and leadership; develop capability and collective responsibility." (p.378)	#SchoolImprovement #goalsetting #principalleadership #leadership #monitoring #collectiveresponsibility

4	Niemi, H. (2021). Education Reforms for Equity and Quality: An Analysis from an Educational Ecosystem Perspective with Reference to Finnish Educational Transformations. Center for educational policy studies Journal, 11(2), 13-35.	Case study about the educational improvement process in Finland.	"The study is a literature-based analysis and review. It is based on policy level reports and reviews from international organisations, such as the OECD, World Bank, UNESCO, and the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS)." (p.17)	"Different actors and stakeholders work in collaboration. Active interactions within and between different subsystems. Need of diverse partners and governance in which trust is present." (p.13)	#educationecosystem #educationreforms #interconnectedness #communication #diversity
5	Armstrong, P. W., Brown, C., & Chapman, C. J. (2020). School-to-school collaboration in England: A configurative review of the empirical evidence. Review of Education, 9(1), 319-351.	"Drawing on 46 peer-reviewed empirical studies from 2000 onwards." (p.19)	Literature review through the Education Resource Information Centre (ERIC) and Scopus.	"Why schools enter collaborative arrangements and the conditions and factors that can facilitate and hinder it, as well as the possible benefits it can bring." (p.19)	#collaboration #competition #England #school
6	Eizadirad, A., Abudiab, S., & Baartman, B. (2022). The Community School Initiative in Toronto. The Radical Teacher, (124), 33-42.	The most under-resourced neighbourhoods in Toronto (CA).	Realisation of meetings, which were via Zoom. Survey and focus groups. Research blog.	"How to adapt and mobilize during the pandemic to mitigate opportunity and achievement gaps for Black, Indigenous, people of colour and families from lower socio-economic backgrounds." (p.34)	#community #school #pandemic
7	Watson, W., Esquivel-Swinson, A., & Montemayor, R. (2018). Collaborative impact and professional development: Effective student services for immigrant populations amid growing inequality. Community College	Community College District in the U.S.	Literature and data analysis.	"Building educational capacity strengthens institutional effectiveness, promotes economic mobility in marginalized communities, and prepares workforce for a globally	#collaboration #immigrant #inequality #student #california

	Journal of Research and Practice, 42(11), 778-782.			competitive Silicon Valley." (p.779)	
8	Ishimaru, A. M. (2018). Re-imagining turnaround: Families and communities leading educational justice. Journal of Educational Administration, 56(5), 546-561.	High school in the West of the U.S.	Qualitative case study.	"Minoritized families, community and formal leaders enhanced conventional schooling structures to transform institutional scripts of schools and focus on equity-change for all students." (p.546)	#Parents #EducationalAdministration #EducationalInstitutions #DecisionMaking #CommunityRelations #EquityTheory
9	Fletcher, E. C., Smith, C. A., & Hernandez-Gantes, V. M. (2021). IT Takes a Village: A Case Study of Internal and External Supports of an Urban High School Magnet Career Academy. The Urban Review, 53, 681-707.	A high school in a Southeastern region of the United States.	A qualitative case study design, with focus group, interview, and school/classroom observation.	"How schools can build a high-profile reputation with investment from key stakeholders within the district, as well as with the community, business/industry, and postsecondary partners." (p.699)	#CareerAcademy #CommunityEngagement #SchoolLeadership #SocialCapital
10	Formosinho, J., & Figueiredo, I. (2014). Promoting equity in an early year's context: the role of participatory educational teams. European Early Childhood Education Research Journal, 22(3), 397-411.	"The Childhood Association, supported by the Aga Khan Foundation, in Portugal." (p.397)	"Research conducted through structured observation using the adult's engagement scale, ethnographic type observation, field notes, and photos. Semi-structured interviews." (p.404)	How professional development about a participatory pedagogy can contribute for a better development on early childhood education.	#quality #earlychildhood #participatorypedagogies #educationalteams #cooperation #teambuilding

11	Perry, D. M., & Geller, J. (2021). Toward an integrated, systemic, and sustainable model of transformational family engagement: The case of the Kentucky statewide Family Engagement Center. Social Sciences, 10(10), 402.	Family Engagement in Kentucky.	A case study design, with interviews, observations, and survey data.	"KY Collaborative leverage partner's strengths to break through historical barriers that fail to acknowledge the critical role families play within and outside of schools. A commitment to strengthening families, building capacity, and supporting communities to achieve equity." (p.1)	#transformative #familyengagement #collectiveimpact #model
12	Arkhipenka, V., Dawson, S., Fitriyah, S., Goldrick, S., Howes, A., & Palacios, N. (2018). Practice and performance: changing perspectives of teachers through collaborative enquiry. Educational Research, 60(1), 97-112.	Teachers involved in a collaborative action in England.	"Engagement with teachers, supporting enquiry processes. The study design was ethnographic, with tools introduced to generate systematic data within the process." (p.97)	"Enquiry can work as a tool, offering teachers a way of tackling a problem. But, in addition, enquiry can change the way teachers see themselves, leading to a deepening of teacher professional identity." (p.97)	#collaborativeenquiry #equity #performativity #practice #teacherdevelopment
13	Kolleck, N., Rieck, A., & Yemini, M. (2019). Goals aligned: Predictors of common goal identification in educational cross-sectoral collaboration initiatives. Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 48(5), 916-934.	A German study case to address inequality in education.	"A mixed-methods design, including surveys, semi-structured interviews, and social network analysis, combined with logistic regression and qualitative content analysis." (p.916)	"Practical implications for networked leadership and school principals': the settings, skills and knowledge needed for managing cross-sectoral collaboration to the benefit of schools." (p.916)	#SocialNetworkAnalysis #CommonGoalIdentification #Cross-sectoralCollaboration #EducationalNetwork #Third sector
14	Kang, H., & González-Howard, M. (2022). Beginning school-university partnerships for transformative social change in science education: Narratives from the	Two school-university partnerships	Participatory design research.	"Recommendations for supporting education researchers who aspire to transform the learning of sciences at schools through a	#equity #participatorydesignresearch #schooluniversitypartnership

	field. Science Education, 106(5), 1178-1197.			collaborative and sustainable partnership." (p.1178)	
15	Gallagher, T. (2016). Shared education in Northern Ireland: School collaboration in divided societies. Oxford Review of Education, 42(3), 362-375.	Schools in Northern Ireland.	Systematic literature review.	"The paper outlines the genesis of the idea and the research which helped inform the shape of the shared education project." (p.362)	#NorthernIreland #SharedEducation #IntegratedEducation #Conflict #EducationalChange #Impact
16	Ishimaru, A. (2014). Rewriting the rules of engagement: Elaborating a model of district-community collaboration. Harvard Educational Review, 84(2), 188-216.	District leadership and a Latino parent group in the U.S.	Single-case ethnographic exploratory study.	"An emergent model of collaboration that engages parents as educational leaders, focuses on shared goals, builds capacity and relationships, and addresses educational change." (p.188)	#Engagement #Community #Partnership #Schools #Rules
17	Wilkinson, E. L., Lewthwaite, B. E., & McGinty, S. C. (2017). More than the power of two: sharing leadership for social justice in Australian schools with Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.	Collaboration focused on Indigenous Education in Queensland, Australia.	"A mixed method, participatory action research multi-site case study approach." (p.1)	"Insights into the significance of the IEW/CEC role and the distinctive educational leadership relationship practice between IEWs/CECs and principals." (p.1)	#SocialJustice #Australia #Schools #Aboriginal #SharingLeadership

18	Ishimaru, A. M. (2017). From family engagement to equitable collaboration. Educational Policy, 33(2), 350-385.	Cross-sector project in the United States.	"A nested, comparative qualitative case study of three initiatives." (p.357)	"Parent capacity-building, relationship-building, and systemic capacity-building. The dynamics of implementation in the cross-sector collaborative constrained change and limit family engagement in practice and policy." (p.350)	#FamilyEngagement #EducationalEquity #Cross-sectorCollaboration #ParentInvolvement #SchoolCommunityRelations
19	Nelson, G. (2022). Combating chronic absenteeism: multitiered systems of support at the elementary level. In Improvement Science as a Tool for School Enhancement: Solutions for Better Educational Outcomes. Stylus Publishing, LLC, 67-79.	Evergreen Elementary School (EES) in Portland, Oregon.	Report about an improvement project led by the author.	Equity-focused leadership needed to be the foundation of the work, with a team that is diverse and represented the population that serves. Seek improvement, test change ideas, and succeed-or fail-and learn from the efforts. Increase communication among partners.	#Abstenteeism #Multitiered Level #Elementary School
20	Gonzalez, L. (2022). Superintendents and School Boards Collaborate to Narrow Achievement Gaps: A Suburban New York Multisite Case Study. Journal for Leadership and Instruction, 21(2), 9-14.	A Suburban New York Multisite Case Study.	"This qualitative study involved four case studies and made use of interviews, observations, and document review." (p.9)	"The data revealed that the challenges to closing achievement gaps were increasingly diverse student needs, stakeholders' deficit-thinking about students, lack of family engagement, and financial obstacles." (p.9)	#Achievement #Gap #Collaboration #School #NewYork #District