

Teachers' and Parents' perceptions on desired and practised school mission:

Alignments and Misalignments

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Abstract

School leadership models emphasise the importance of leadership devoting time to the creation of a shared school mission, as a strategy for school effectiveness. This paper focuses on teachers' and parents' perceptions of the desired and practised school mission, considering the following dimensions: i) scientific and technological; ii) civic; iii) social and emotional; iv) vocational; v) physical. 3284 teachers and 3258 parents participated. All dimensions were highly valued as part of the desired school mission, mostly civic and social and emotional. However, the averages were lower in all dimensions of the practised school mission. Implications for school leadership are discussed.

Keywords: *school mission; teachers and parents' perspectives; desired school mission; practised school mission; school leadership*

Introduction

We live in a knowledge society where the role of education is changing. From a formal learning model in the 20th century, we are quickly evolving to a world of informal learning in the 21st century. The information technology revolution continues to change the nature of jobs in a way never witnessed before. Schools and universities were the main vehicles for preparation for future jobs in the 20th century, but this happened in a world where professions were stable and expected to last. With the advent of the internet and the IT revolution, several new jobs were created, and several students ended up in jobs that did not exist when they were studying (e.g., App developer) (WEF, 2020a). Despite these pressures to change and improve, schools still have difficulties transitioning to the digital world (OECD, 2023). In the OECD countries, digital education strategies vary significantly in their depth and concreteness and often lack implementation, governance and funding mechanisms. For instance, Portugal has prepared a Digital Transition Action Plan, largely implemented through professional training, but some difficulties persist related to access to and quality of Internet connection, devices' quality availability and IT schools' conditions (OECD, 2023). Csapó and Molnár (2017), mentioned that all these developments “have re-launched the debate on the mission of schooling, more specifically, on the types of skills schools are expected to develop in their students in order to prepare them for an unknown future” (p. 1). Within this context, the school mission is also changing. To make the organisational changes needed in the school setting, it is essential to clearly understand what is expected from schools today, considering the perceptions of different members of the school community.

School Mission

Current school leadership models emphasise the importance of a school leader devoting time to the creation of a shared school mission, as this contributes to shared commitment amongst the school professionals and other members of the school (Hallinger, 2003;

Leithwood, 2013), which in turn is related to school improvement and organisational effectiveness (Murphy & Torre, 2015). Instructional leadership includes one dimension that focuses the school leader on defining the school mission - being able to define goals for the school and communicating these goals to the school community (Hallinger, 2003). Likewise, the transformational leadership model (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000) comprises one main category: “setting directions”. This includes the presence of behaviours by the school leader that contributes to building the school's vision and mission and constructing specific goals and priorities for the school. A clear vision is one of the core aspects of school strategy, and setting the school mission is one of the key activities of strategic school leaders (Carvalho et al., 2022). Strategic leadership is about creating a vision, setting the direction of the school over the medium- to longer term and translating it into action (Davies & Davies, 2010; Eacott, 2011) through all actors’ participation and involvement.

Creating a shared school mission understanding is essential to align all the school stakeholders with a given direction (Sun & Leithwood, 2015). This unification provides a solid ground for leaders, teachers, non-teaching staff, parents, and others to work alongside and pursue a set of objectives (Gurley et al., 2014). As Lunenburg (2010) underlines, school leadership must promote community-wide discussions to help construct a shared perspective of the mission and a global commitment to lead the school on the path to reach that. Sun and Leithwood (2015) synthesised these ideas into the following sentence: “An organisational mission exists when the personal visions of a critical mass of people cohere into a common sense of purpose within a community” (p. 502).

A given school mission is often formalised into the Mission Statement of that school. However, this seems to happen because it is an obliged document for schools to have (Schafft & Biddle, 2013). The mission statement – or vision statement – is a document typically available to the whole school community that portrays the objectives and aspirations that the

school should work towards (Allen et al., 2018). It is argued that a school mission is mostly a way of thinking through the school strategy. This means that a specific school mission should guide leaders' actions, and other stakeholders, for school improvement as it provides a direction (Carvalho et al., 2022; Davies & Davies, 2010; Eacott, 2010, 2011). Nevertheless, there seems to be a lack of congruence between the mission *desired* and what is practised within the schools, often seeing that school mission statements are too general and lack the practice reality of the school (Chapel, 2015). Even school leaders seem to not take full advantage of mission statements as tools to support the creation of a whole-school shared understanding of its objectives (Ransom & Vlachopoulos, 2021).

Creating a unified perspective of a response to *Why does the school exist?* or *What can and should a school do?* is challenging because different school agents may have different perspectives, and it evolves. Allen and colleagues (2018) highlight the notion that the definition of what is a "high-quality education" can vary enormously from teachers to parents or students. It can mean good academic results on an exam; for others, it can mean ensuring students' well-being and happiness. It is vital to systematically analyse a school's priorities at a given time, as these are affected by cultural and societal changes (as mentioned at the beginning of this paper) (Allen et al., 2018).

Most literature studies analysed different schools' mission statements through content analysis. Stemler and Bebell (1999) were among the first to apply content analysis to 267 educational institutions in the USA, ranging from elementary to postsecondary (elementary, middle, secondary, and postsecondary). 10 major themes emerged (e.g., cognitive/academic; social; citizenship/vocational). Their study revealed that it is important to analyse the school mission throughout the schooling years, as differences were found mostly between K-12 and college years - the first more emotionally focused and the latter more academically focused. Moreover, although ten major themes emerged, schools seem to highlight an average of

four/five themes *per* mission statement, and four themes appeared systematically through all the mission statements (even though with different levels of importance): cognitive development, emotional development, and fostering effective citizenship/vocational preparation. In 2011, Stemler, Bebell and Sonnabend published an article that portrayed another content analysis of 421 mission statements of USA secondary schools. In this more recent study, the authors refined the rubric initially created by Stemler and Bebell (1999), being this the rubric that inspired the current study. The rubric is split into educational outputs (what the schools aim to develop in the pupils) and includes: *Foster cognitive development; Foster social development; Foster emotional development; Foster civic development; Foster physical development; Foster vocational preparation; Integrate into the local community; Integrate into the global community; Integrate into spiritual community*. And educational inputs (what the school itself focuses on developing to contribute to the educational outputs), which include: *Provide a safe and nurturing environment; Provide challenging environment*. Stemler and colleagues' (2011) coding rubric is available in the Appendix of their paper for more details. The main conclusions of their study were: most of the schools had mission statements emphasising two and five major themes, the most common shared by over 50% of the sample the *civic* development, *emotional* development, and *cognitive* development; there was found a high variance of themes through the mission statements, meaning that schools do adapt their mission not just according to policy and state requirements, but as well to their community and specific needs/goals. Nevertheless, the fact that *civic, emotional, and cognitive* development emerged as the three main themes led to consider that school mission in the USA might be standardised, and also these three themes equal the purpose of schooling represented by non-school stakeholders such as parents and government leaders (Stemler & Bebell, 2013). Another important study is the one by Bebell and colleagues (2020), where mission statements from the same schools collected in 2001 and then in 2019 were compared. One similarity was that

emotional, cognitive, and civic development remained the most frequently appearing themes. On the other hand, a difference was a significant increase in the frequency of the themes related to career preparation and challenging environment, much concerning the societal changes mentioned at the beginning of this paper.

Other authors have used Stemler and Babell's rubric to quantitatively classify school mission statements within their countries. An example is Chapple's work (2015) which used the rubric to compare 150 school mission statements from primary schools in Japan and New Zealand using content analysis. Chapple focused Stemler and Bebell's rubric on student outcome variables only, simplifying it into six major dimensions: "*cognitive/academic (covering the skills required for educational development), social (covering interpersonal and other "people" skills), emotional, civic (the factors relating to issues, roles and responsibilities in society), vocational (future employment-focused skills) and physical well-being*" (p.142). Conclusions pointed to differences in the value of different themes: Japan's school mission statements showed similar importance given to emotional and academic development areas, whereas New Zealand's mission statements reflected a bigger value attributed to emotional development; in Japan, physical development is more relevant than in New Zealand; and finally, New Zealand's schools seem to privilege social attributes, while the cognitive/academic theme is the one that is more prominent in Japan's school mission statements.

Allen and colleagues (2018) used a sample of 308 Australian secondary school mission statements and performed an emergent coding analysis with quantitative strategies, following Stemler and Bebell's methodology (1999). Although their coding led to slightly different themes, one conclusion to highlight is that *academic achievement* was the most valued theme, and within this, academic success and performance were the two most common subthemes.

Portuguese current Educational Frameworks

Schools are embedded in a legal framework that defines the national orientations for educational policies. Such frameworks must be considered before analysing issues regarding the school mission because the legal frameworks may shape the way stakeholders regard schools (mainly internal stakeholders like teachers and principals).

In 2017, Portugal published an educational framework of what young people are expected to achieve by the age 18. *Students' Profile at the End of Compulsory Schooling* (Perfil dos Alunos à Saída da Escolaridade Obrigatória, 2017) establishes Essential Learnings for each discipline at all levels of compulsory schooling and embraces the idea of transversality, calling upon each curriculum area to develop all competency areas defined in the Students' Profile (OECD, 2020). It presents a holistic and inclusive view of students' learning that should extend from learning and cognitive abilities to social and citizenship skills. For instance, the document advocates the need for skills such as critical reasoning, aesthetics and artistic sensitivity, interpersonal competencies, social and personal responsibility, or social and citizenship skills in addition to traditional cognitive skills. Also relevant to the scope of this study is the *National Strategy for Citizenship Education*, launched in 2017 to improve the societal values and competencies that contribute to active and informed citizenship to foster the attainment of a more secure, fair, sustainable and inclusive society (OECD, 2020). Jointly, these documents should be used as guides for schoolwork and, by the same token, inform schools' mission. From these documents (and others such legislation related to curriculum), schools and teachers have the autonomy to define the school mission and strategy considering its needs. Such schools' autonomy is relevant when discussing the expected, desired and practised school mission.

However, it must be said that regarding curriculum, the Portuguese education system is still centralized. Firstly, the Ministry of Education establishes a national curriculum and, secondly, although the curriculum autonomy is claimed, when teachers have it, some don't make use of

it (Oliveira & Ferreira, 2023). Within the possible autonomy available to schools, Torres (2011) explored the strategic mission of the public schools in Portugal, pointing out that there seems to be a certain continuum between two profiles of a school's strategic mission: one more focused on creating excellence and merit, and on the other end of the continuum schools with a more democratic vision, focused on the creating social and learning equity through the school. This author points out that a higher focus on the results *vs* a higher focus on creating diverse and equal learning opportunities has implications on the way each school will use the margin of autonomy they have to implement their mission into action, particularly through the school leadership actions (Torres, 2011).

The present study

This paper aims to shed light on the perspectives of both teachers and parents regarding the current school mission in Portugal. It is a novel study since most of the school mission studies in the literature focus on school mission statements. In this study, we aimed to understand teachers' and parents' perspectives, two key members of the school community, as to what they believe the school mission should be (what school mission dimensions are the most valued) – *the perceived desired school mission* - and as well what the practised school mission is (what school mission dimensions are more practised and paid attention to in everyday life) - *the perceived practised school mission*.

Method

Questionnaires

We developed two surveys to collect the perceptions of teachers and parents (one for each type of participant) about the *practised* and *desired* school mission. The questionnaires were based on Stemler and colleagues' coding rubric (2011), but adapted to our context, taking into consideration the current *Students' Profile at the End of Compulsory Schooling* and the

National Strategy for Citizenship Education, among other Portuguese educational legislation (e.g., inclusive education). These frameworks explicit the knowledge, capacities, attitudes, and skills expected to be developed in all students during school years and should serve as a guide for schools, particularly school leaders, to develop their own school mission and practices. We defined, then, five main dimensions, only considering educational inputs: i) school as a vehicle to promote students' *scientific and technological* knowledge (ScientTech); ii) school as a space for students' *civic* education (Civic); iii) school as a space for students' *social and emotional* development (SocioEmotional); iv) school as a space for student's *vocational* development (Vocational); v) school as a space for student's *physical* development (Physical). In comparison to Stemler and colleagues (2011) rubric, we opted for *scientific and technology* as opposed to *cognitive* because this is the term used in our country to represent the content of this dimension; in the previously mentioned frameworks, social and emotional development are considered one dimension; spiritual was not considered because public schools in Portugal do not incorporate these dimensions – only private schools can; and the content of the *local and global* integration in Stemler and colleagues' rubric is part of inclusion and diversity school efforts, considered in the frameworks as part of *civic* education curricula and *social and emotional* development – this decision is also in line with the simplified version of the rubric by Chapel (2015); finally, Stemler and colleagues research over time showed that most schools valued between four and five themes (dimensions) of the school mission, which also supported our efforts to reduce to five major expected dimensions when developing the questionnaire.

The perceived *desired* school mission ('how would you like it to be?') was measured through five items, answered on a Likert five-point scale, ranging from totally disagree to totally agree, starting with the word "school should be..." and then one item per dimension. Table 1 shows the final set of items, after principal component analysis, used to gather teachers'

and parents' (or guardians') perceptions of the *practised* school mission ('how is it?'). Sociodemographic questions were also included in the questionnaires.

[insert Table 1]

A preliminary version of the questionnaires was sent to a selected number of teachers and parents to collect comments to improve the questionnaires. A principal component analysis (PCA) methodology used in the teachers' sample allowed us to join various items to form specific sub-dimensions within the main dimensions that we anticipated and appeared in the analysis. Reliability analysis was performed on similar items, and some questions were removed from further analysis due to low reliability. **Error! Reference source not found. 1** provides details on the dimensions and the items that emerged in each one and were used for all analyses in this paper. The teachers' questionnaire was used to define the dimensions (through PCA). These dimensions and sub-dimensions of the organisation were then applied to both questionnaires similarly. Table 1 includes, for each sub-dimension, the Cronbach alphas that emerged from the teachers' questionnaire and the factor loadings from the factor analysis (teachers). As for each dimension, it is included in brackets the Cronbach alphas for teachers' and parents' questionnaires, in this order.

As will be mentioned ahead, we can say that the sample of teachers is representative of the Portuguese population. As for the sample of parents, the same is not true, since our sample represents the perceptions of highly educated parents. For this reason and comparability purposes, we have decided to use the PCA results from teacher sample to define the structure of the questionnaire. Likewise, the Cronbach alpha is rather low for the 'scientific and technological' dimension in the teachers' questionnaire. The reason for maintaining a low, and unacceptable value according to some authors (e.g., Pestana et al., 2008) regards comparability

between both questionnaires. The first scale was the one less reliable in both the teacher's and parents' questionnaires and we tried as much as possible to maintain the same questions in both despite lower reliability. So, this is a case where the price of comparability between questionnaires was paid by lower reliability (fortunately this just happened in one of the dimensions and that is why we proceeded this way).

Procedures

The questionnaires were administered in a pre-pandemic period from 8 July 2019 to 30 September 2019 through Google Forms. Teachers and parents across the country were contacted through email, using the extensive mailing lists our partners (e.g., parents' associations) had available. We followed the recommendations from the Ethics Committee for Technology, Social Sciences and Humanities (CETCH) from Universidade Católica Portuguesa. All teachers and parents participated voluntarily, with no incentives, and gave informed consent to participate in the study, following the Declaration of Helsinki. Participants were informed about the research aims, and confidentiality and anonymity were assured.

Sample

3284 teachers participated in the study. The distribution of teachers by cycles of studies is as follows: 22,5% - 1st cycle (6 to 9 years old), 15,3% - 2nd cycle (10 to 11 years old), 54,1% - 3rd cycle and secondary (12 to 15 years old + 16 to 18 years old). Note that in the population of Portuguese teachers, 58% teach to the third cycle and secondary education. 86% of the sampled teachers are female, and around 90,3% teach in public schools (note that 90% of Portuguese schools are public). Geographically teachers are distributed similarly as the Portuguese population of teachers: 24.5% in the metropolitan area of Lisbon, 33.3% in the north region and 23.3% in the centre region.

3258 parents participated in the study. Most of the respondents to our sample are mothers (85%). Parents were asked to choose one of their kids about whom the questionnaire was going to be filled: 44.43% of the children were enrolled in the 1st cycle, 20.15% in the 2nd cycle, and 33.53% in the 3rd cycle and secondary (20.6% and 12.93%, respectively). 86.3% public and 13,7% private. Regarding parents' level of studies, we can say that the parents that participated in our study are more educated than the Portuguese population - 63% of parents have a bachelor's degree or higher. Regarding geographical distribution, 38% are in the metropolitan area of Lisbon, 29.9% belong to the north region and 19.5% to the central region. The remaining are spread to Alentejo, Algarve and the islands of Azores and Madeira.

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Data Analysis

Data were analysed with IBM SPSS Statistics 28. Various statistical techniques were employed, from descriptive analysis to inferential statistics. In most cases, T-tests and ANOVA tests were used to assess the statistical significance of differences between two or more sample means, respectively. Most of the time, the results of the parametric tests were confirmed by non-parametric tests, particularly Mann-Whitney and Kruskal-Wallis tests.

Results and Discussion

RQ1: What school mission dimensions are more valued by teachers and parents (desired school mission)?

Table 2 shows the averages relative to the importance of each of the perceived desired school mission dimensions in the teachers' and parents' samples. In bold, we show the two dimensions

with a higher average. Teachers and parents generally perceive the importance of all dimensions since all average values are above four. Stemler and Bebell, back in 1999, found that the mission statements analysed noted an appreciation for all dimensions as part of the school mission. Our result points to the same conclusion: all five dimensions we asked teachers and parents if they should be part of the school mission were perceived as being part of what the school mission should be, and what schools should aim to be and develop in their students. Also, in agreement with previous literature, nevertheless being all part of the school mission, the order of importance attributed to each dimension differs for teachers and the same happens for parents. Within each sample, the averages are statistically different between the five dimensions (ANOVA test): teachers value most the *civic* and *social and emotional* dimensions; parents value mostly the school as a vehicle for students' *scientific and technological* development (in line with Allen et al., 2018 results on the mission statements they analysed). Both teachers and parents rank the *physical* dimension of the school's mission as the lowest. Already here, we can see points of alignment (physical as the least valued by both and both teachers and parents value all dimensions greatly), but as well points of misalignment having parents value more the cognitive/academic mission of schools. Altogether, teachers' and parents' perspectives on the *desired* school mission are aligned with the three more salient dimensions found in previous studies: the *civic*, the *emotional* and the *cognitive/academic* (Stemler & Bebell, 2013; Bebell et al., 2020, Chapel, 2015). These results are in line with literature on parents' satisfaction with schooling, which shows that parents value academic performance, but they also value the development of non-cognitive skills and suggest that schools can increase the satisfaction of parents with school by supporting them in the emotional development of their children, as well as providing regular feedback on the academic performance (Jerrim et al., 2023).

[insert Table 2]

The difference in the perceived *desired* school mission between the teachers' and parents' samples was statistically significant in all dimensions, except for the *vocational* dimension (see the last column of Table 2). In the parents' sample, the *vocational* development dimension appears as the second most valued, which resonates with Bebell and colleagues' (2020) study where career preparation increased relevance over the years for schools' mission. In all the cases where the difference is statistically significant, teachers tend to value each of the dimensions of the perceived desired school mission higher than the parents, apart from the *scientific and technological* dimension, which parents value more than teachers. This suggests that parents regard the school as having a primary mission of cognitive and academic development. On the contrary, teachers regard this dimension of the school as important, but others are more valued, particularly students' citizenship and civic development and *social and emotional* development. This is an interesting result of another *misalignment* between teachers and parents in line with the differences in perspective that often exist of what is a "high-quality education" between members of the school community (Allen et al., 2018), reinforcing the challenge for school leaders to develop a shared school mission within the school community.

Stemler and Bebell (1999) called attention to variances in the school mission depending on the school years, as primary years seemed to be more emotionally focused and secondary years more academically focused. We did this analysis on the parents' questionnaire (the only questionnaire where we had information regarding the students' cycle of study). The results (Figure 1) show statistically significant differences in perceptions of the *vocational* dimension between cycles of studies (the p-value from ANOVA test is 0.008). The differences can be considered significant for the *scientific and technological* dimension at a 10% significance level (p-value from ANOVA test is 0.077). As for the remaining dimensions, the importance is uniform per cycle of studies, as the hypothesis of equal means across the cycle of studies is

not rejected. This is an interesting finding revealing that parents do not perceive the school mission and the importance of each of its dimensions as varying per cycle of studies (or by the age of the student) except on the vocational role of school missions that assumes its maximum importance in the 3rd cycle and secondary. At the end of the 3rd cycle in Portugal, students choose a narrower area of study for secondary school (e.g., languages, arts), which can have implications for their career path, which possibly justifies the importance *vocational* dimension assumes after this cycle for parents. There is also some evidence that parents tend to value more the role of schools in transmitting *scientific & technological* knowledge in later cycles of studies and schools themselves (Allen et al., 2018).

[insert Figure 1]

In Portugal, the discussion around public and private education is relevant since every year in school rankings, private schools occupy the first ranking places. Public schools are funded by the government, and they often serve a diverse student population as they are accessible to all students in the community. Private schools are independently owned and operated by individuals, organizations, or religious institutions. They rely on tuition fees paid by students and other private sources of funding. They can choose their students based on specific criteria defined by the school. We considered the type of school (see Table 3) and analysed the valuation of the various *desired* school mission dimensions by teachers and parents.

[insert Table 3]

Regarding teachers' *desired* perceived valuations of the school mission dimensions, the t-tests reveal statistically significant differences at the 5% level only for the *social and emotional*, and *vocational* dimensions - teachers from private schools tend to value more these two dimensions of the school mission. Interestingly there are no differences in *desired* perceived valuations between private and public school teachers for the *scientific and technological* dimension of the school mission. Regarding parents, we found statistically different valuations

per type of school for the *civic*, *social* and *emotional*, and *physical* dimensions of the school's mission, being parents from private schools the ones that have the higher valuation. Like teachers, *scientific and technological* dimension does not have a significant difference in valuation by parents of children in the public or private schools – another *alignment* between teachers and parents. These results show that teachers are very aligned in their perspectives of what they would like schools to be, whether public or private.

RQ2: What school mission dimensions are perceived by teachers and parents as more practised in everyday life? Do they share perspectives?

In this second research question, we were interested in how teachers and parents perceive school practices and what this can mean about the *practised* school mission, going beyond the *desired* school mission. The averages of the dimensions, or sub-dimensions when they exist, are shown in Table 4 (in bold we show the highest valuations in each sample).

[insert Table 4]

Teachers have, in general, a more positive perception when compared to parents, that different school mission dimensions are being put in place in schools. Teachers strongly agree that schools develop valuable actions related to the *physical* dimension, with the *civic* subdimension of respect for the other, and in the *scientific & technological* knowledge dimension concerning the strategies sub-dimension. Different changes in Portuguese education policies and system may justify these perceptions: physical education is part of the curricula, and efforts have been made, particularly at the primary level, for students to have more time for physical activity per week (e.g., Activities for Curricular Enhancement); as mentioned in the introduction section *National Strategy for Citizenship Education* has brought important content on civic development in schools, including a discipline in the curricula called Citizenship and Development; and the inclusive education legislation from 2018 (Decree-Law

No. 54/2018) along with Autonomy and Curricular Flexibility law (Decree-Law No. 55/2018) have enhanced innovative pedagogical practices in the schools that are adequate for the diversity of learning processes by students. Although with less valuation, parents also perceive the *physical* and *civic* respect for the other dimensions to be amongst the most *practised* dimensions in schools – another *alignment* between teachers and parents. Parents also see *social and emotional* as the second dimension with the highest average. However, it must be noticed that parents perceive all of these dimensions as being practised in school in a satisfactory way (average above 3.5). On the contrary, the dimension with the second lowest value for parents is the *vocational* dimension, where they tend to consider that the practices of the school are behind the importance of this mission's dimension (which parents rated as the second most important in the *desired* school mission – see RQ1).

Regarding the variation in the perception of the *practised* school mission according to the cycle of the students, once again, we did this analysis only in the parents' sample. In Figure 2, it is clear that when the cycle of studies increases, the perception of practices at schools regarding exam focus and support outside the school increases. This is in line with Allen and collaborators' (2018) analysis of mission statements of secondary schools having high academic and academic results focus. The perception of parents regarding learning practices at schools loses importance from the first cycle to the secondary. ANOVA tests reveal that all the differences per cycle of studies in each of the four sub-dimensions within the *scientific and technological* dimension are statistically significant (note that ANOVA tests the hypothesis that the means are the same for each cycle, meaning that a rejection of the hypothesis does not mean that all the means differ since some may be similar as can be seen graphically).

[insert Figure 2]

Figure 3 reproduces the analysis for the remaining sub-dimensions. Again, the ANOVA tests reveal that the differences are all statistically significant except for the sub-dimension of

citizenship where parents perceive similar school practices across the various cycles of studies. Figure 3 shows that parents tend to perceive less *vocational* practices at schools as the cycle of studies of their child increases, except in secondary where the decreasing trend suffers an inflexion. A decreasing trend also happens for the *social and emotional* dimension and the *civic* sub-dimension respect for the other practices (despite a small inflexion on this trend in secondary education) – in line with studies that show a decrease in the emotional and civic dimensions from primary to secondary.

[insert Figure 3 and Table 5]

Considering the type of school Table 5 shows the average values obtained for the two samples in each dimension and sub-dimension. One of the main results is that parents seem to perceive more the differences between public and private schools than teachers (as concluded from more statistically significant differences in the parents' sample, just like in the RQ1). For teachers, no differences were found in perceived *scientific and technological* practices between private and public schools. Regarding the remaining dimensions of the perceived *practised* school mission, significant differences can be found between the perceptions of public and private school teachers, namely *social and emotional*, *civic* sub-dimension respect for the other, *physical*, and citizenship. In the first case, teachers perceive practices at private schools as being more prevalent, whereas the opposite happens for physical practices and citizenship practices where teachers from the private school have a lower perception than the ones from the public schools. Regarding the parents' perspective, Table 5 shows that the observed differences are all statistically different between school types, except in what concerns the Exam focus, where parents do not seem to distinguish between practices in private and public schools. Parents perceive fewer actions in public schools regarding learning focus and strategies for learning and more actions regarding practices that seek extra support outside the school. For the remaining dimensions, all differences in public versus private between parents'

perceptions are statistically significant. Parents of children attending public schools perceive less the existence of practices in all the remaining dimensions. Note that the magnitude of the differences between public and private schools is around 0.6 for the physical, the *socio-emotional* and the respect for others dimensions. This shows great differences in perceptions between parents who have children in public and private schools.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to shed light on the perspectives of teachers and parents regarding the school mission. A questionnaire was applied to a large sample of teachers and parents in Portugal to ascertain their perceptions regarding what they believe the school *desired* and *practised* school mission.

The comparison between parents and teachers that we have discussed in this study should be seen with caution as our study has the representation of parents and teachers' samples according to the level of the school is different, and the representativeness of parents' sample is not ensured, as well as because the dimensions of the questionnaire were only analysed in the teachers' sample. Future studies should consider matching parents and teachers nested in schools, to understand if there are alignments/misalignments within the same school, which we did not do in this study.

On the other hand, this study is novel in the current literature, and we believe it brings important insights. We focused not on analysing mission statements from Portuguese schools but on understanding perceptions. When asked about *desired* school mission, all dimensions are relevant and should be part of school practices from the perspective of teachers and parents. Parents see schools very much linked to their traditional role of transmitting *scientific and technological* knowledge and value the *vocational* mission of schools much more than teachers. In communicating with parents, schools should be aware of the importance they attribute to the

vocational dimension and invest in the necessary means to practise that mission effectively. This investment emerges from this study as a necessity as parents perceive *vocational* practices at schools with one of the lowest values. Parents also showed lower perceptions of school mission practices in all dimensions than teachers (perhaps due to less information they have on these practices), so again it is important to have effective communication about these practices with parents from a strategic leadership point of view as that can contribute to alignment for a common purpose and higher engagement. Interestingly, there are very large differences in perceptions between parents that have children in private and in public schools, with parents perceiving better value for private schools in all dimensions analysed except the *scientific and technological* dimension. This has clear implications for school leaders in the way they communicate with parents about the practices at their school. In addition, school leaders learn from our results that the emphasis on exams and student evaluation is a common practice across both private and public schools (indistinctively), so differentiation should not arise from this sub-dimension of the school's mission, but from others (note that this emphasis is debatable in many ways, but that discussion is out of the scope of this paper).

Altogether, the perceptions of teachers and parents in this study are consistent with previous literature on school mission through analysis of mission statements. This reinforces the idea that school leaders should use strategic leadership skills, alongside transformational and instructional practices, resourcing to a mission statement as a tool to lead discussions within the school community about the specific goals and direction for that school – the specific mission of that school (Carvalho et al., 2022; Lunenburg, 2010; Sun & Leithwood, 2015). Our results reinforce the relevance of taking time to think about all the dimensions that a school needs to focus on (in this case, five), all the human resources and organisational initiatives that contribute to those dimensions (the *practised* school mission) and analysing these dimensions over time considering the fast changes in society.

It is known that effective organizations are defined by having an operational vision and mission, most especially when schools are going through transition moments – which is happening right now as we have established at the beginning of the Introduction section. It is also known that principals are at the centre of the creation and definition of the mission of the school, being a critical factor in distinguishing great successful leaders and least effective ones (Murphy & Torre, 2015). Moreover, a principal need to be able to change and adapt the mission of the school according to the context at a given moment, and therefore, a principal need to be up to date with the current policies, the current challenges in education and human development, but as well with the perceptions of the school community, in order to evolve the mission of the school, and the consequential practices of the school in alignment with the needs of the context and its people. In a recent study, Monbourquette (2017) found that more than half of the principals interviewed “did not have nor follow a personal vision for education or lead their school community in the development and implementation of a vision that would guide the learning process” (p. 19). So, this is a critical issue to be addressed in research, policy, practice, and initial/ongoing training of educational leaders.

We suggest that mission statements can be a tool used to support this creation and assessment (Ransom & Vlachopoulos, 2021). Moreover, the developed questionnaires can serve school leaders in collecting their school community perspective about the desired school mission and the perceived practised school mission, possibly even adapting the questionnaire to each school. Our results show the importance of bringing together different perceptions and trying to get a consensus when defining the school mission for the school community – not taking into consideration only teachers’ perspectives (Gurley et al., 2014). Particularly, parents' perspectives should be collected due to the importance of *prosumership* for parental satisfaction with school. Prosumership refers “to the view of the client provider relation not only as a source and/or a result of the client’s experience of the service, but as a constitutive

component of the service's construction and delivery. According to this perspective, the client is not the mere user of the service, but both its producer and its consumer – its prosumer” (Mossi et al., 2019). When applied to school contexts, this concept implies that parents, like their children, customers of schools, and their satisfaction need not only to be understood in terms of their appraisal of their and their children's experiences in the school but as well how considered as co-constructors of the school, focusing in the study as co-constructors of the school mission and its current and future practices. Mossi and colleagues (2019) have proposed a tool that can also be of use to school principals, the QUALUS, which aims to collect parental satisfaction with the school and includes the dimension of co-construction perceptions.

Aligned with a paper by Tintoré (2016), our study connects with the “management by missions” concept, suggested by Tintoré (2016) as a good management model to be introduced in the educational leadership field. This system of management aims to match the mission of each person from a given organization, with the mission of the organization, requiring from the leaders a combination of distributed, transformational and servant leadership. Tintoré (2016) proposes the use of case method to train future and current school leaders in doing so, mentioning that through the presentation of other school missions, trainers can reflect “beyond management by missions. They engage in the study of topics such as: the type of leadership that exists in an institution; what reasons and motivations prevail among its members; what type of communication is generated; how decisions are made; what impact this all has on the professional and personal satisfaction of the organization's members (...).” (p. 115).

This study has policy implications. Although each school should create its own school mission, the Ministry of Education and other international organisations such as the OECD must work alongside in providing guidelines for school leaders on this topic. As we have mentioned, society is changing continuously, and this change has implications for educational

systems. We suggest the importance of including working entities from the most recent areas of work (e.g., IT) in the dialogue about the school mission of today, promoting a connection between the worlds of school and work. Students should also be listened to in the desired and practised school. With different stakeholders involved, policymakers can provide broad guidelines on school mission essentials that can then be incorporated with the support of school leadership in each school. Moreover, it seems that school policy can be more aligned with the perceptions of desired school mission, but not practised school mission, seeming that school policy can sometimes be “leading the vision” that school leaders should focus on. Nevertheless, it is important to allow space for schools to develop their own mission considering their context and its needs.

The analysis of school priorities is affected by culture and changes in society (Allen et al., 2018), hence the importance of systematic data gathering. COVID-19 pandemic might have affected the order in which all stakeholders value each dimension. For instance, parents seem to give more importance after the pandemic to the *social and emotional* dimension, contrasting with all other dimensions (Ribeiro et al., 2021). It is important to note that some social and cultural variables were considered in the studies mentioned in our introduction section, such as the time (Bebell et al., 2020, comparing the school mission in two different years), and countries with different cultures (Chapple, 2015, comparing Japan and Neo-Zeland). The response to the question “*What can and should a school do?*” varies depending on cultural and social aspects, such as if it is a rural or urban school, in more disadvantaged areas, what is expected of the school is probably different to what is expected of a school in a higher economically developed area. The focus can also change from culture to culture (Chapple, 2015), as well as the time (e.g., it is possible that COVID-19 pandemic has affected the perceptions of what schools should do), the parents’ lifestyle (e.g., time spent with children), among other factors, all of these can influence the perception of the desired school mission by teachers and parents. Likewise, the practised school mission can vary depending on contextual factors that can hinder or increase

what is possible to be practised. In contexts where there is a higher disadvantage it is possible that teachers themselves perceive that the school needs to do more, for instance, be the main context for the development of social and emotional dimensions. Future research should focus more deeply on the analysis of cultural and social factors that interfere with the perception of the school's mission.

Although our analysis did not focus on the school leadership, it seems fundamental to us to provide this information to the school leaders' audience, so they can reflect on the alignments and misalignments between the desired and the practised, and between the perceptions of these two very important stakeholders of school (teachers and parents). Leaders should have a deep understanding of their contexts, know the perceptions of different school agents, identify dissonations, and with that define a strategy to build consensus, bring people together, and increase school-family partnerships. The research should inform the practice and being a leader means knowing the context deeper, something that this study aims to support.

To conclude, in Portugal, the school principal must develop an intervention project to apply to the role of the principal in a given school. This project includes his/her strategic mission for the school: what path does he/she propose to reach what he/she believes the school should be? In other words, the project reflects the desired mission of the candidate to be the school principal. This strategy follows a centralised perspective of the 'power' in schools, with a unipersonal type of leadership. Nevertheless, this study highlights the importance of considering different stakeholders' perspectives about what the school mission should be and what it is, inciting candidates to school principalship in Portugal, to gather this information when defining their strategic mission. This can be a way for school principals to create the specific mission of their school context more democratically, counterbalancing the elevated centralization demand of the Portuguese school governance system (Torres, 2011).

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List of tables (on individual pages)

Table 1: *Dimensions that emerged from the analysis of the questionnaires*

School Mission Dimensions (Alpha_T Alpha_P)	Sub-dimensions that emerged (factor loading of each item in the construct – Teachers' sample)
<p align="center">Scientific and Technologic</p> <p align="center">(0.534 0.608)</p>	<p>Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) = 0.842</p> <p>Exam Focus (alpha Cronbach for this set of items of 0.63) There is a strong preparation of the students for the subjects where there is a national exam. (0.799) There is a devaluation of the subjects that are not submitted to national exam. (0.602) Grades in national exams are considered very important. (0.828)</p> <p>Learning Focus (alpha Cronbach for this set of items 0.65) There is more concern with motivation for learning than with results/grades. (0.542) There are mechanisms to combat student failure. (0.626) Test grades and other elements are used to understand the strengths and weaknesses of students and to improve their performance. (0.699)</p> <p>Strategies (alpha Cronbach for this set of items 0.82) Diversification of teaching strategies and methodologies is seen as essential for students' motivation and good results. (0.670) Different assessment instruments are used to classify students in the most correct and fair way. (0.753) Practical teaching and solving varied daily problems is promoted. (0.771) Students' creativity is valued. (0.766)</p> <p>Support outside the school (alpha Cronbach for this set of items 0.59) An underachieving student is usually considered a lost cause. (0.574) Most students use out-of-school tutoring. (0.714) When the student's achievement is poor, parents are recommended to seek tutoring. (0.808)</p>
<p align="center">Social and Emotional</p> <p align="center">(0.935 0.96)</p>	<p>Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) = 0.947</p> <p>Only one dimension (alfa 0.935) There are activities which allow the social development of the students. (0.761) Students feel good at the school. (0.699) Great attention is paid to the relationship between students and their problems. (0.771) There are activities to develop autonomous thinking and scientific curiosity in students. (0.772) The ethical and moral development of students is promoted. (0.842) It is sought that all students reach their maximum developmental potential. (0.831) The enjoyment and pleasure of learning are enhanced. (0.849) Respect for all and among all is promoted. (0.833) There is a safe environment that promotes learning. (0.798) Professionals are focused on the healthy growth of students. (0.790)</p>
<p align="center">Civic</p> <p align="center">(0.826 0.867)</p>	<p>Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) = 0.916</p> <p>Citizenship (alpha Cronbach for this set of items of 0.68) There are mechanisms that promote the participation of students in school decisions (e.g., Student Associations, Student Assemblies, Delegates, etc.) (0.771) Citizenship is developed in a transversal way through the whole school (e.g., in all subjects, in the educational community activities). (0.701) There are remediation actions in case of non-compliance with the internal regulations. (0.662)</p> <p>Respect for the other (alpha Cronbach for this set of items of 0.773) Students from other cultures/ethnicities are included, both inside and outside the classroom. (0.491) There are no signs of discriminatory behaviours. (-0.63) There is appropriate action in case of bullying or in case of conflicts between students and teachers. (0.518) School staff treat all individuals appropriately. (0.605) The importance of being participative citizens is addressed with the students. (0.551) Opportunities for students to feel part of their local community are promoted. (0.532) An awareness of the global world and multicultural diversity is fostered in students. (0.559) There is a good environment of coexistence. (0.721) Teachers and students respect each other. (0.735)</p>

<p>Physical (0.732 0.760)</p>	<p>Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) = 0.728</p> <p>Only one dimension (alpha Cronbach for this set of items of 0.732) Physical activity is valued. (0.790) There are sensitisation actions on physical activity and healthy eating. (0.777) Menus in the canteen are made under nutritional guidance. (0.603) There is an opportunity for students to participate in inter-school sports competitions. (0.693) In addition to physical education, the school has other sports offers. (0.664)</p>
<p>Vocational (0.833 0.875)</p>	<p>Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) = 0.836</p> <p>Only one dimension (alpha Cronbach for this set of items of 0.833) There is concern in identifying and exploring the students' interests and competences. (0.841) The approach to content considers the interests and competences of each student. (0.832) It is sought to develop in students skills which are relevant to the labour market (soft skills/transversal skills). (0.828) The different school options available in Portuguese education are valued. (0.804) Activities are carried out for students to get to know the school they will attend in the following years (e.g., visiting primary schools, secondary schools, vocational schools, or universities). (0.597)</p>

Table 2: Averages for the different dimensions of the school missions, and T-tests between samples

	Teachers			Parents			<i>P-value</i> (T-test)
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	
(1) ScientTech	3371	4.52	.628	3241	4.59	.596	0.000
(2) Civic	3372	4.59	.628	3246	4.48	.696	0.000
(3) SocioEmotional	3371	4.54	.631	3248	4.46	.690	0.000
(4) Vocational	3362	4.52	.593	3241	4.53	.608	0.250
(5) Physical	3366	4.33	.710	3242	4.24	.781	0.000
<i>p-value</i> (ANOVA)		0.000			0.000		

Table 3: Averages for the different dimensions of the school missions per school type, and T-tests within samples

	Teachers			Parents		
	SchoolType		pvalue	SchoolType		pvalue
	Public	Private		Public	Private	
The school should be a vehicle of transmission of scientific and technological knowledge	4.522	4.495	0.466	4.584	4.631	0.130
The school should be a vehicle of civic development of students	4.588	4.624	0.334	4.473	4.588	0.001**
The school should be a vehicle of emotional and social development of students	4.529	4.626	0.009**	4.447	4.553	0.003**
The school should be a vehicle of vocational development of students	4.508	4.579	0.040**	4.529	4.572	0.177
The school should be a vehicle of physical development of students	4.315	4.396	0.052*	4.226	4.349	0.002**

** Significant differences for 5% significance; * Significant differences for 10% significance

Table 4: Averages of each dimension/sub-dimension for the teachers and parents samples

	Teachers		Parents		P value*
	N	M	N	M	
Scientific&Technologic_ExamFocus	3322	3.8869	3106	3.3743	0.000
Scientific&Technologic_LearningFocus	3333	3.6836	3063	3.2444	0.000
Scientific&Technologic_Strategies	3310	4.0643	3062	3.1303	0.000
Scientific&Technologic_Support_outside	3256	2.2863	2874	2.8725	0.000
SocioEmotional	3164	4.0370	2892	3.5543	0.000
Civic_Citizenship	3212	3.6697	2844	3.2091	0.000
Civic_Respect_for_other	3180	4.0411	2844	3.5852	0.000
Physical	3177	4.1001	2904	3.5449	0.000
Vocational	3147	3.7636	2789	3.0500	0.000

*t test performed for the differences between teachers and parents

Table 5: Averages for the different sub-dimensions of the school missions per type of school, and T-tests within samples

	Teachers			Parents		
	SchoolType		p-value	SchoolType		p-value
	Public	Private		Public	Private	
ST_ExamFocus	3.89	3.92	0.461	3.38	3.37	0.792
ST_LearningFocus	3.68	3.71	0.424	3.20	3.52	0.000**
ST_Strategies	4.06	4.07	0.903	3.08	3.41	0.000**
ST_Supportoutside	2.29	2.28	0.862	2.93	2.54	0.000**
Civic_citizenship	3.66	3.55	0.020**	3.17	3.44	0.000**
Civic_Respectforother	4.03	4.15	0.001**	3.52	3.97	0.000**
SocioEmotional	4.03	4.17	0.000**	3.47	4.05	0.000**
Physical	4.13	3.93	0.000**	3.47	4.00	0.000**
Vocational	3.77	3.72	0.280	2.99	3.39	0.000**

** Significant differences for 5% significance; * Significant differences for 10% significance

List of Figure caption:

Figure 1: Valuation by parents of each of the school mission dimensions per cycle of studies

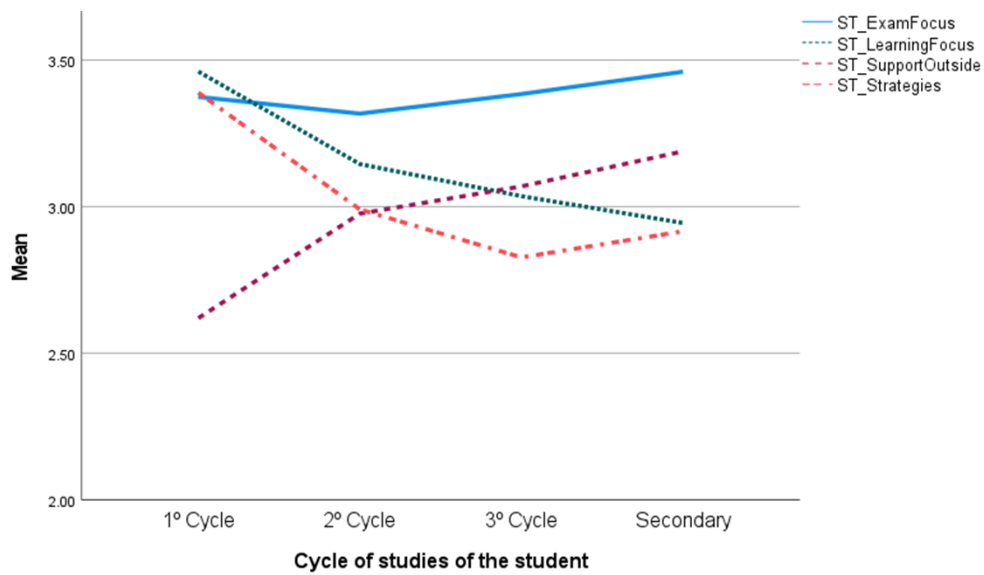
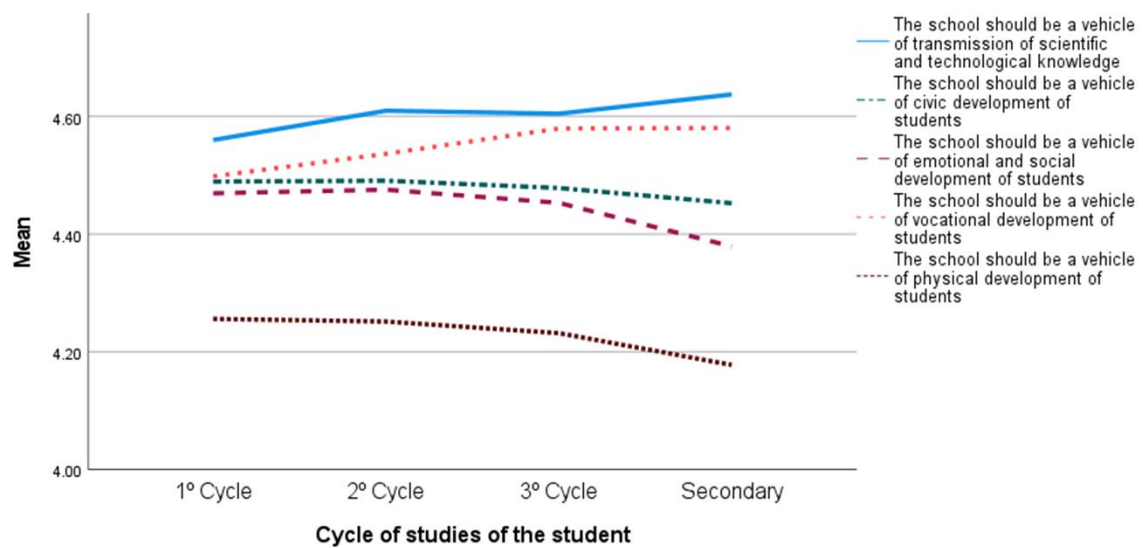


Figure 2: Valuation by parents of Scientific technologic dimension per cycle of studies



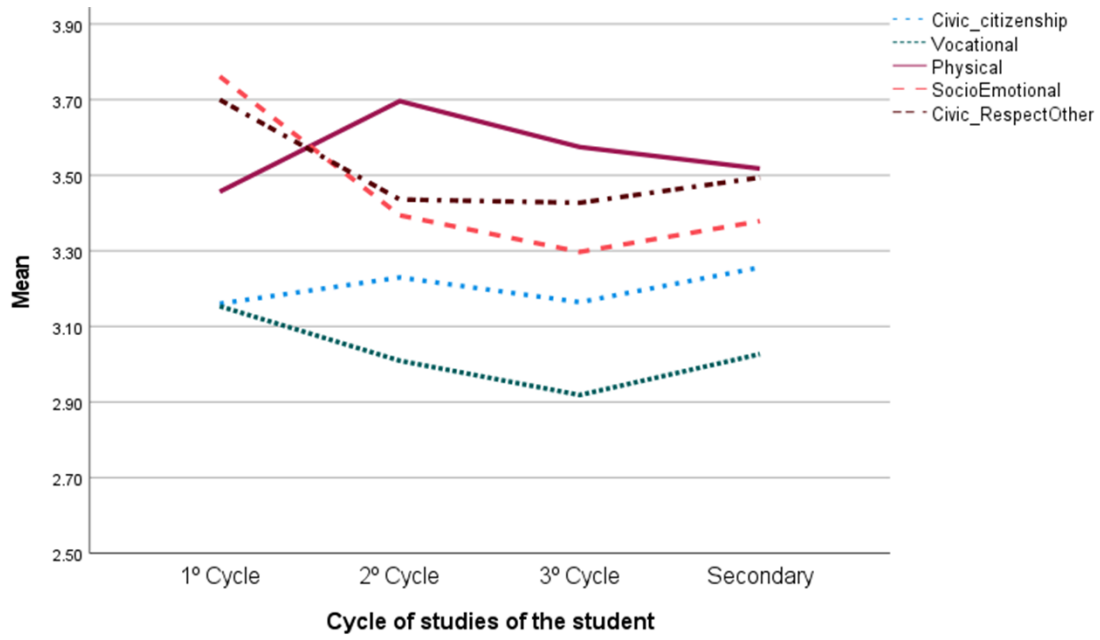


Figure 3: Valuation by parents of the remaining dimension per cycle of studies