

## The mimesis of continuing education: configuration and refiguration of the teaching narrative identity in reference groups

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### Abstract

The objective was to reflect on the influences of reference groups on teacher training and performance. Training research was carried out with teachers of basic education in the North of the country during a doctoral research (GABRIEL, 2008). The discussion focused on the mimesis of continuing education, a methodology originated from work based on a (auto)biographical approach, having theoretical references as: Pineau, Nóvoa, Josso, Passeggi, among others, and in the hermeneutics of Ricoeur. The autobiographical narrative and the report of successful experiences enabled the configuration and refiguration of the teacher's identity, by providing the recognition of educational practice in different spaces and time. The re-narrating of the self provided an opportunity to reaffirm/recognize the knowledge of teaching, the development of knowledge, the identification of intervening factors of the school system itself that limit or favor the achievement of pedagogical objectives and, above all, modulate the power to act on the experiences challenges of the professional group and school context by mastering the meaning of their educational practices.

### Keywords

continuing education; autobiographical narrative. recognition; teacher's identity.

### A mimese da formação continuada: configuração e refiguração da identidade narrativa docente em grupos-referência

### Resumo

Objetivou-se refletir sobre as influências dos grupos-referência na formação e atuação docente. Realizou-se a pesquisa-formação com professoras da educação básica no Norte do país durante uma pesquisa de doutorado (GABRIEL, 2008). A discussão centrou-se na mimese da formação continuada, metodologia originada do trabalho fundamentado na abordagem (auto)biográfica, com o referencial teórico: Pineau, Nóvoa, Josso, Passeggi, dentre outros, e na hermenêutica de Ricoeur. A narrativa autobiográfica e o relato de experiências bem-sucedidas possibilitaram a configuração e refiguração da identidade docente, ao propiciar o reconhecimento da prática educativa em diferentes espaços e tempos. A re-narração de si *oportunizou* reafirmar/reconhecer os saberes da docência, a elaboração de conhecimentos, a identificação dos fatores intervenientes do próprio sistema escolar que limitam ou favorecem o alcance dos objetivos pedagógicos e, sobretudo, modular o poder de agir diante das experiências desafiadoras do grupo profissional e contexto escolar pelo domínio de sentido de suas práticas educativas.

### Palavras-chave

formação continuada; narrativa autobiográfica; reconhecimento; identidade docente.

## La mimesis de la educación continua: configuración y refiguración de la identidad narrativa docente en grupos de referencia

### Resumen

Se objetivó reflexionar sobre las influencias de los grupos de referencia en la formación y el desempeño docente. Se hizo la investigación de formación con docentes de educación básica en el Norte del país durante una investigación de doctorado (GABRIEL, 2008). La discusión se centró en la mimesis de la educación continua, una metodología originada a partir del trabajo basado en el enfoque (auto)biográfico, teniendo como referentes teóricos: Pineau, Nóvoa, Josso, Passeggi, entre otros, y en la hermenéutica de Ricoeur. La narrativa autobiográfica y el relato de experiencias exitosas posibilitaron la configuración y refiguración de la identidad docente, al brindar el reconocimiento de la práctica educativa en diferentes espacios y tiempos. La re-narración del yo brindó una oportunidad para reafirmar/reconocer el conocimiento de la docencia, el desarrollo del conocimiento, la identificación de factores intervinientes del propio sistema educativo que limitan o favorecen el logro de los objetivos pedagógicos y, sobre todo, modular el poder de actuar frente a las experiencias desafiantes del grupo profesional y contexto escolar mediante el dominio del significado de sus prácticas educativas.

### Palabras clave

formación continua; narrativa autobiográfica; reconocimiento; identidad docente.

## 1 Introduction

In this article, I aim to reflect on the reference groups' influence on teacher training and performance. It's important to highlight that this article is part of the doctoral thesis in Education from 2008 (GABRIEL, 2008). I carried out research and training with basic education teachers in the North of the country. When questioning myself about these influences, I agree with Josso (2004, p. 115) when they state that it is "[...] indispensable to reconstitute the network of interior and exterior events that marked my existence as a thinking and reflective being [...]".

I understand by reference groups the groups to which we belong from an early age, such as the family, school, community, church, among others. These groups structure the way we conduct ourselves, our way of thinking and acting, and are references in our lives for the multiple situations we face in a social context. When we are faced with a problem, we activate one of those referents and we make decisions based on one of the referents of the groups we belong to. According to Ricoeur (1994, p. 120), "[...] every reference is a co-reference, a dialogic or dialogical reference [...]".

I will focus the discussion on the mimesis of continued education, a methodology originated in the course of qualitative research based on the (auto)biographical approach in renowned theoretical references, such as Pineau, Nóvoa, Josso, Passeggi, among others, and Ricoeur's hermeneutics. Thus, I found in the autobiographical narrative the appropriate theory and methodology to enable the configuration and refiguration of the teacher identity of the researched teachers.

Ricoeur (1997, p. 139), when constructing meaning around time and narrative, unveils to us “[...] that time becomes human time insofar as it's articulated narratively, and that narrative reaches its full meaning when it becomes a condition for temporal existence” Thus, when interpreting Aristotle's Poetics, he presents us with the theory of mediation between time and narrative, which he called mimesis I, mimesis II, and mimesis III:

[...] It's by building the relationship between the three mimetic modes that I constitute the mediation between time and narrative. It's this very mediation that passes through the three phases of mimesis. [...] To solve the problem of the relationship between time and narrative, I must establish the mediating role of the weaving of the plot between a stage of practical experience that precedes it and a stage that follows it. [...] I propose to un-simplify them from the act of textual configuration and to show the mediating role of this weaving time of the intrigue between the temporal aspects prefigured in the practical field and the refiguration of our temporal experience by this constructed time. *We follow, therefore, the destiny of a prefigured time in a reconfigured time through the mediation of a configured time.* (RICOEUR, 1997, p. 87, author's emphasis).

According to this author, in mimesis, I, imitation, or the representation of action, corresponds to the pre-understanding of what happens following the human action. In this way, the prefigured time is the unfolding of the narrative action, the evocative act of the narration itself. In mimesis II, it's the act of reading that accompanies the configuration of the narrative and updates its ability to be followed. To follow a story is to update it while reading it. The time configured in the narrative pertains to the process of reflection on itself, made possible by the action of re-narrating itself, which, therefore, allows the subject who narrates and re-narrates themselves to critically analyze their actions, their life trajectory. In mimesis III, the narrative has its full meaning when it's restored to the time of human action because, says the author, “[...] it is in the listener or reader that the path of mimesis ends” (RICOEUR, 1994, p. 110).

Here I want to explain my reading of the author's text to adapt it to the context of this work. Mimesis II marks the intersection between autobiographical narrative and the personal and professional self. Therefore, the intersection of the formation is structured by the narrative of the personal and professional self, in which the effective action exhibits its specific temporality with a revision of the self. For the author: “[...] The complete event is not only that someone takes the floor and addresses an interlocutor, it's also that they aspire to bring to language and share with others a new experience. It's this experience that, in turn, has the world as its horizon” (RICOEUR, 1994, p. 119-120).

Thus, reconfigured in mimesis III, time is the revision of oneself, the construction of a professional profile through the recognition of oneself and the other, in the identity constitution that allows to perceive a world as a horizon in a continuous movement of writing and rewriting of the self in reference groups, involving the personal, social, professional, and institutional dimension in the constitution of personal identity, which, when “[...] considered in its duration, can be defined as narrative identity [...]” (RICOEUR, 2006, p. 116).

Freire (2005, p. 118) also alerts us to the importance of self-reflection to act critically: “Men are because they are situated [...]”. This reflection on situationality is a way of thinking about the very condition of existing”. It was intending to reflect on the situationality of the teachers, concerning the formation and the teaching performance, to which Freire (2005) refers in the epigraph, that I chose to develop a research-education that is characterized, according to Josso (2004, p. 113), by the way the subjects are invited to participate, because “[...] each stage of the research is an experience to be designed so that whoever is involved in it can participate in a theoretical reflection on the training and the processes through which it makes itself known”.

In public schools, the educational practice has proved to be increasingly challenging for those who intend to understand it and who want to promote significant changes, and transform it. For more critical performance in this space, where the majority of students from the popular classes of our country study, it's of fundamental importance to broaden the understanding of the formation and performance of teachers in the school routine. So, it's necessary to listen to what teachers say about their educational practices and the reflections they produce on these practices.

## 2 Methodology

The letter from the International Association of Life Stories and Training (2005) advocates that one of the ethical and deontological principles for working with life stories is that the researcher experiences the formative experience of having written of themselves. It's also important that they master the theoretical-methodological principles and foundations of autobiographical narrative. For Josso (2020, p. 46), “[...] the instructors must work their own narrative and, thus, acquire a first level experience in rules to be respected [...]”.

The research was carried out in Roraima, whose population is 605.8 thousand inhabitants (IBGE, 2019). It's the Brazilian state with the largest indigenous population. It also has migrants from all over the country and more than 100,000 Venezuelans who have taken refuge since 2013 as a result of the economic, political, and social crisis in Venezuela.

Regarding the teachers, to differentiate the training phase – whether initial or continued education –, I made the following distinction: teachers (A.B., A.Q., E.) are those who already have finished their degree; student-teachers (A.L., E.R., J.) are those who are in the process of completing Higher Education, studying Pedagogy. The total number of subjects is six: three student-teachers and three teachers. The teachers' age varies between 29 and 47 years old. All of them corresponded to the criteria listed for the research-education: professional teaching practice and interest in continued education. It's worth mentioning that the teachers were invited due to my prior knowledge of their successful educational practices as reflective teachers (SCHÖN, 2000), who carry out the reflection processes and find continuing education strategies aimed at improving educational practice and teacher professionalization.

Nóvoa (1988) highlights the research axes that serve as a guide for the writing of the autobiographical narrative and the reports of teachers' successful experiences. In Ricoeur, I found the clarification that narrative is a re-construction, a revision of the events that were requested to be reported:

[...] Since we want to mark the difference between fiction and history, we always invoke the idea of certain correspondence between the narrative and what actually happened. At the same time, we are well aware that this re-construction

is a different construction from the course of events reported [...]. (RICOEUR, 1997, p. 255).

The biographical sources' construction took place in three stages in three years (2005, 2006, 2008). The first stage was the elaboration of autobiographical narratives and reports of successful experiences. In total, 11 meetings took place during three months (February, March, and April 2005). In the second stage, the teachers analyzed in writing and in a group the repercussion of the biographical work, three months after it was carried out (July 2005). The year 2006 was dedicated to reading and complementing the information in the research corpus. Finally, the third stage consisted of the individual analysis of the repercussion of the biographical work on the teachers' personal and professional lives. This last stage took place in July 2008.

It's worth mentioning that, at the last meeting, the teachers submitted the final version of the narratives and experience reports. They signed an authorization for the total or partial use of their autobiographical narratives and their experience reports, for presentation in congresses and/or publications. They also received certification issued by the Pro-Rector of Extension and Pro-Rector of Research and Graduate Studies for participating in research-training.

The formal learning process provided by the research allowed the teachers to model the experiences through what I called mimesis of continued education: prefiguration, configuration, and refiguration.

The mimesis of continued education is a formative and performative process for teachers both pursuing their initial degree and after grad school situations, intending to foster the revision of their self-knowledge (RICOEUR, 1997), personally and professionally through autobiographical narratives. This activity involves a personal, social, professional, and institutional shift as well as the alternation of training at the three levels mentioned by Pineau (1988, 2004): hetero-training, eco-training, and self-training. These processes jointly contribute to the awareness of the process of teacher identity constitution and its implication in educational activities.

In this sense, the mimesis of continued education has three phases:

1. In the prefiguration phase, the evocation of the biographical self is the first self-writing, which presents the pre-understanding, the unfolding of the self, and life story, which corresponds to the first version of narrative writing.

2. During the configuration phase, the autobiographical narrative takes on a more organized form. The re-narration of the self, through reports of successful experiences, allows mediation, the intersection between the fractured self (GIDDENS, 2002) and the self as becoming, by modeling the experience. In this phase, the successful experience makes it possible to balance the conflicts raised in the prefiguration phase by becoming aware of the creative and innovative potential that the examined life elicits when making the person realize that they have applied to themselves the results of a culture (RICOEUR, 1994), which are the values, principles, and knowledge of the reference groups in the situationality (FREIRE, 2005) and instantaneity (PINEAU, 2004) of the existential events throughout life (ALHEIT; DAUSIEN, 2006; PINEAU, 2004).

3. In the refiguration phase, the act of writing and re-writing of oneself or re-narration makes it possible to update and recognize their self. The refiguration phase reveals the teacher with their personal and professional self linked to an existential space-time, as they built their profiles. For Ricoeur (1994, p. 117-118), “[...] it's the act of reading that accompanies the configuration of the narrative and updates its ability to be followed [...]”. This phase includes the second version of the autobiographical narrative, the report of a successful experience, and the testimonies about the repercussion of the biographical work on personal and professional life. In this research, it was in the revising themselves that the teachers found the keys to entering a world as a horizon (RICOEUR, 1994).

I adopt Ricoeur's hermeneutics (1994, 1997, 2002a, 2002b, 2006) as a base theory to interpret the teacher training process and their professional performance. In the biographical work carried out with his autobiographical narratives and the accounts of successful experiences, it was of fundamental importance to be clear about the fact that:

[...] The task of hermeneutics [is] to reconstruct the set of operations by which a work rises from the opaque background of living, acting, and suffering, to be given, by an actor, to a reader who receives it and thus changes his or her activity. [...] Hermeneutics, on the other hand, is concerned with reconstructing the entire arc of operations through which practical experience is given to works, authors, and readers [...]. (RICOEUR, 1994, p. 86).

Aware of this author's warning that “[...] we cannot replace each other in our absolutely unique quality [...]” (RICOEUR, 2002b, p. 42), I extracted from the research corpus the thematic axes that guided understanding and interpretation of data. They are a) Reference group - The prefiguration and refiguration of the teacher's identity constitution; b) Reflective group - The configuration of teachers' continued education.

In the first thematic axis, the reference group, I analyzed the constitution of the teaching identity in the light of the reference groups that were/are part of the teachers' life history. Thus, I identified the different groups that influenced the constitution in the different spaces-times and dimensions of the teachers' professional training. Halbwachs (2006, p. 170) reminds us that collective memory takes place in a spatial context, and it's in this space that thought has to be established so that the memories categories can reappear:

[...] So, space is a reality that lasts: our impressions follow one another, nothing remains in our mind, and we wouldn't understand that it's possible to return to the past if it weren't preserved in the material environment that surrounds us [...].

This way, from the teachers' narratives and the attentive look at the material environment surrounding their past/present, I identified, through biographical mediation, the reference groups that influenced their teacher identity constitution since they started their schooling and childhood. These are the groups: family group, community group, religious group, school group, professional group, and academic group.

In the second thematic axis, the reflective group, the analysis consisted of the interpretation of the formative experience of continued education that the biographical work fostered. According to Passeggi (2006, p. 1-2), the reflexive group corresponds to “[...] a group of people who recognize their engagement in a common research-education project, through the practice of autobiographical narratives [...]”.

Working with teacher narratives today is an epistemological challenge for researchers and instructors. According to Ricoeur (2006, p. 123), “[...] the analytical problems characteristic of a rational approach to narrative texts are absolutely legitimate”. For the author, the problem is not to establish what is correct or not, but the self-understanding of the object examined.

In addition to Pineau (2004) and Ricoeur (2006), for the analysis and interpretation of narratives and experiences reports, Barbosa (2005) and Szymanski (2004) were also useful since they helped me to identify the thematic axes, categorization, and organization of individual files. The steps of the analysis were the following: 1. A systematic reading of the narratives and reports of experiences to identify the thematic axes; 2. Organization of individual files – these files contained the identification of the subjects; 3. Data triangulation – data triangulation arose from relating the fragments of narratives and experience reports. For Pineau (2004, p. 203), “[...] It's simply a matter of trying to conjugate in the first person singular and plural all conjugations with all moods and tenses. In this attempt, there are two main conditions: taking the word in the singular, but also triangulation [...]”.

### 3 Results and discussion

Although I present all the participants in a two-dimensional analysis (WELLER, 2007), I will focus the discussions on the reference groups, family group, and professional group that influenced the educational practice of two teachers (A.Q. and A.B.) and two student-teachers (J. and E.R.). The letters correspond to their pseudonym.

Teacher A.B. and student-teacher E.R. aren't from rural areas. All are married: one has no children, and five have two or three children. The teachers continued their education through formal learning processes in post-grad courses. Regarding their teaching time, they have between nine and 19 years of professional experience.

The teachers studied in public schools; student-teacher A. L. and teachers A. Q. and E. studied multigrade classrooms. They were all influenced by their families in their school experience and the schooling process. Religious influence was also present in their lives, giving them eternal values. All teachers participated in the community where they developed the spirit of comradeship.

Teachers A. Q. and E. have had experiences in education with people with disabilities (BRASIL, 2007), and among the student-teachers, J. was the only one who had a student with a mental disability included in her literacy class. The teachers and student-teachers had experience with Early Childhood Education. Regarding the

professional experience with Adult Education, teachers A. B. and E. and student-teacher E. R. had the opportunity to teach this group of students outside the regular school age group. The student-teachers worked in Elementary School from 1st to 4th grade and the teachers, in addition to early elementary school, also had taught 5th to 8th grades, High School, and worked with teacher training.

All of them claim to have faced challenging experiences in their professional trajectory. In face of these situations, they mobilized what they learned from the reference groups, but they needed to look for new alternatives; to look at the problem from the outside. Vygotsky (2005, p. 119) says the following to address the development of the child, here I adapt to the challenges faced by the researched teachers, “[...] the level of development of the [teacher] shouldn't be evaluated by what they learned during their instruction, but rather by the way they think about subjects about which they haven't been taught [...]”.

In this sense, challenging experiences are the experiences that mobilize my thinking and my actions on subjects about which I have not been taught anything. In this way, it's possible to state that these challenging experiences are close to Alheit and Dausien's (2006) understanding of informal learning processes, which don't have a clarified intention about the object but incidentally accompany everyday life. It's also possible to infer that the challenging experiences that the teachers had in their educational practices made them reflective teachers because the socio-educational context instigated and provoked them insistently and daily to seek answers to the problem/situations that surrounded them. Therefore, these challenging experiences are formative and form us into reflective teachers (ALARCÃO, 1996; SCHÖN, 2000), through the reflection processes that we undertake in the educational activity.

Now I present the discussions of the reference groups, family and professional group, that influenced the educational practice of two teachers (A.Q. and A.B.) and two student-teachers (J. and E.R.), as I mentioned earlier.

### ***3.1 Family group: intergenerational examples of how to be a literacy teacher***

The family group is composed of people who are relatives, either by blood or adoption. The interest of the parents lies in the desire to provide their children with

biological, psychological, social, and spiritual development for the exercise of citizenship. In the teachers' narratives, the most often discussed family members are the parents. The teachers highlight their parents' interest in the schooling process and the intergenerational influence on the transmission of school knowledge. Student-teacher J. emphasizes that her parents offered her, in the process of adult/child interaction, the first example of teaching when they took upon themselves the task of teaching her reading and writing through informal learning processes, which was a formative experience in her constitution of her teacher identity.

*[...] I have, since childhood, the first and most important reference of an educator, my mother, a utopian teacher, who is proud of what she considers one of the greatest achievements of her life: her thirty-two years in the classroom in the public school system. (J.).*

The biographical model of a utopian teacher serves as a reference for herself as a teacher. The manner of school learning in the family group is discussed by this student-teacher J. when she explains her parents' tasks division as literacy teachers:

*[...] nothing compares to the literacy moments provided by my parents. My mother told me beautiful stories that I would then interpret and taught me to write words even with sticks on the floor. And my father, a farmer who could barely read, taught me mental calculations based on the weight of the produce harvested, dreaming for his only daughter an education he didn't have [...].*

Significantly, her mother shared with her husband, who wasn't a teacher, the responsibility of teaching their daughter to read and write. Student-teacher J.'s mother read beautiful stories for her child to interpret and wrote with sticks on the floor to teach her how to read and write. Her father, a simple man with little education, used his creativity and employed the resources around him, using what he planted and harvested to teach his daughter mental calculations.

Continued education requires from the subject a state of theoretical-methodological and autobiographical surveillance, or self-referential (PINEAU, 1988), to unveil the object of educational practice. Alheit and Dausien (2006, p. 190) argue that: “[...] without biography, there is no learning; no learning, no biography [...]”.

### **3.2 Professional group: the teacher's first formal apprenticeship**

In this group, the teacher has the chance to experience the formal, non-formal, and informal learning processes of the continuously. The process of dialogue that takes place between pairs: reflection on the action; the epistemology of educational practice; interactions with students, interactions with practical knowledge, and interactions with the community; participation in scientific events, and the socialization of knowledge are formative and performative learning that will, at the same time, contribute to the teachers' professionalization and the identity constitution. Thus, learning of the profession arises through educational praxis, which needs to involve the relationship between theory and practice.

In the following excerpts from the teachers' narratives referring to the professional group, I realized that the choice of the teaching profession was due to the view that it guarantees decent work, as well as the occurrence of continued education and professional learning in a collective.

*[...] Teaching meant a more concrete possibility of getting a job, and my financial conditions left no room for doubt: I couldn't wait for higher education to then think about working [...]. (A. Q.).*

*[...] Directly influenced by my mother and indirectly by my older sister, as they were also teachers, I ended up studying to be a teacher. [...]. (E. R.).*

*[...] When I finished the 8th grade, I had no doubts about starting to study to be a teacher, as I thought that, being a teacher, I would always have a guaranteed job wherever I went and, thus, I could provide for myself while I went to grad school [...]. (A. B.).*

It was in the effort to connect and materialize thought and action that they began to study to be teachers and forged, in the space-time of their professional performance, the culture of reflection, to better understand the object of speculation, the educational practice, through of continuing education.

### **3.3 Reflection on action and conscious intervention**

Here, I take as a reference the narrative of teacher A. Q., who spoke about her apprehension when working with teenage students, the advice her peers gave to

establish teacher-student interaction, and, finally, her decision to charm the students. This attitude and professional posture in the face of the reported challenges showcase the influence of understanding the meaning of education forged within the family group. This influence was/is present in the base of the knowledge, structuring and organizing the teaching knowledge in favor of a quality education for her students. Thus, there is a commitment, respect, and responsibility in the development of pedagogical activities and the search for continuous training to improve her professional performance.

*In 1998, when I returned from vacation, I discovered that I was assigned to teach in high school. It was a big shock as I had never worked with teenagers. I received a lot of advice, like: you have to be tough on them; you need to show who is in charge [...]. I preferred to conquer them, and, in the end, it was a job that brought me many joys and learning. (A. Q.).*

Contreras (2002, p. 84), when analyzing professional competence, makes us realize that it is associated with understanding the context of implication in the practice, as well as the ability to intervene in this practice: “[...] professional competence must be analyzed in relation to the ability to understand the way in which these contexts condition and mediate their professional practice, as well as the ability to intervene in these areas”.

Teacher A. Q. demonstrated her professional competence by the values, principles, and dimensions pointed out by Contreras (2002) by providing her students with teaching guided by the search for alternatives to improve teaching and in the achievement of students to learn to teach with pleasure and joy.

In teacher A. B.'s narrative analyzed below, it's evident that the reproduction of traditional educational practices was the alternative she found in the face of the lack of knowledge of literacy processes. But her insurgency about this professional experience led her to create a learning environment that provided joy and pleasure in interactions with students.

*[...] Literacy was what I had the least means to learn in my professional practice. What did I do to teach those innocent children? I reproduced a lot of what the more experienced teachers taught me. Over time, I created my own way of teaching, to make the children and I enjoy the classes. (A. B.).*

These revelations by teacher A. B. point once again to her identification with the teaching profession, as she continued her training, creating her own way of teaching.

By recognizing it herself, she clarifies that the educational activities must be enjoyable for both students and teachers. According to Dominicé (1988, p. 61), “[...] training corresponds to a global process of generating autonomy, during which the form we give to our life resembles [...] identity”.

In this assertion, the author leads us to infer that training and identity are similar and concern the configuration of our own lives. Thus, the reports of teachers A. B. and A. Q. point to professional experiences that required conscious attention, especially concerning interactions with students and school knowledge. When narrating these experiences and reflecting on the alternatives of educational practice that guided decisions between one and the other, they had the chance to create themselves (JOSSO, 2004).

Another testimony of a successful educational practice is given by student-teacher E.R., who testifies to Josso's (2004) statement in that she allowed herself and the other (the student) to dive into the construction of knowledge and to create a significant project:

*[...] I never imagined that from a word that wasn't understood (great-grandmother) in the simple poetry 'Great-grandmother's portrait', by José Paulo Paes, a project could spontaneously arise so meaningful for the lives of students, their families, and others involved. With the project, I realized that children can do more than expected of them and perform beyond what is asked, as the results went beyond expectations [...].*

The professional culture permeates the acquisition of fundamental values, in which life, in its fullness, is the motivation for all the efforts and endeavors executed during the personal/professional trajectory of these teachers. Therefore, the educational practice of these teachers is in the dimension of intersubjective exchange, which Bruner (2001, p. 62) helps me to understand:

*[...] The understanding process is developed through discussion and collaboration, in which the child is encouraged to better express their views in order to build an understanding with others – ‘a meeting of minds’ – who may have other views.*

Tardif (2002, p. 180-182) also argues that knowing how to teach has a practical specificity and that it should be sought in what can be called “[...] the professional culture of teachers”. This culture has a triple foundation linked to the conditions of teaching practice: 1) the ability to discern contingent action situations based on

reference systems; 2) in the professional practice conceived as a process of professional learning, and 3) ethics of the sense of education as a responsibility towards the other.

Josso (2006, p. 376), when studying the cultural forms of biographical links, highlights that family ties are the most evoked in the reports analyzed by the author, demonstrating that: “[...] the strength of these family ties is expressed in the bonds of loyalty and fidelity that they engender and that are manifested not only in the preservation of more or less ritualized relationships but also in the convictions adopted [...]”.

In the teachers' narratives, the strength of family bonds, or the family group itself, is especially identified in the acquired convictions about education and the value of school knowledge and in the way in which they transposed these convictions into educational practice, even when opposite forces tended to prevail.

Ricoeur (2006, p. 260, emphasis added) says that recognition-identification, mastery of meaning, and mutual recognition enable the subject the power and to act in the passage from recognition-identification to mutual recognition.:

[...] I can call a path, namely, the passage from recognition-identification, in which the subject of thought effectively intends to master the sense, to mutual recognition, in which the subject places themselves in the guardianship of a relationship based on reciprocity, passing through recognition of the self in the variety of capacities that modulate their ability to act, their agency [...].

Therefore, when remembering and reflecting on the informal learning of teaching (commitment, responsibility, respect, affectivity, and ethics) of the reference group, the family group, the teachers found a world as a horizon, by acting creatively and innovatively in favor of the humanization, modulating their ability to act in the face of challenging experiences in the professional group and school context by mastering the meaning of their educational practices. According to Ricoeur (2002a, p. 31), “[...] the shortest path between me and myself is the word of the other, which makes me go through the open space of signs”.

## 5 Final considerations

In this research, I aimed to present the influences of reference groups on teacher training and performance. My choice to work with two groups of teachers – the student-teachers and the teachers – revealed that continued education is an indispensable process for the constitution of professional identity. The constitution of the teachers was due to the influence of the reference groups.

One of the relevant data of the research is that the understanding of the meaning of education was forged more specifically in the family group. The teachers revealed that family members, such as the father and mother, for example, fought for their children's education. Thus, I inferred that the fact that they didn't have a school education and that they had a hard time being illiterate was the engine that drove them to remain firm in the project for their children's lives and in the persistence to educate their kids.

The biographical work made it possible for the teachers participating in the research to look at their educational practice, questioning it and seeking explanations for the educational work they developed/develop with the students. This immersion allowed them to identify the mistakes, contradictions, and attitudes that brought them closer to or distanced them from their objectives and also helped to identify the intervening factors of the school system itself that limit or favor the achievement of these pedagogical objectives.

Since their academic training, the teachers have shown a strong inclination towards innovative practices and theories that focus on the historical-social subject and the construction of knowledge. This theoretical approach, therefore, provided a more questioning pedagogical action.

Faced with the difficulties, the teachers reflexively sought to reverse the schooling situation of students considered to be difficult, and in educational contexts and scenarios that limited meaningful learning. The insurgency in the face of such challenges, however, made possible a clinical attitude in solving the problems.

It's important to highlight that when following the teachers in their accounts of experiences that they considered successful, listening/reading their life stories, I

inferred that their pedagogical choices and continuing education aimed to minimize educational gaps experienced both in the personal and social fields.

Therefore, given the emergence of new educational paradigms, which seek to understand educational practices in the school environment, the biographical approach presents itself as an important contribution to teacher training, because it involves personal and professional dimensions.

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