Knowledge of experience and mother tongue teaching: reports of teachers in initial training

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Abstract
The objective of the article is to apprehend knowledge, representations and assumptions about mother tongue teaching, learning the alphabetic writing system in biographical reports of Pedagogy students enrolled in the Portuguese Language Teaching discipline. The methodology used was supported by Biographical Research in Education: Based on (auto)biographical reports, which we understand as a self-enactment, we seek to locate clues that point to knowledge about learning and teach mother tongue so that, based on this knowledge, we could expand and/or problematize them. The material analyzed here consists of 30 reports collected in 2021.1. We conclude that students, in general, bring quite traditional notions about language teaching, still understanding that teaching language is teaching normative grammar, and learning to write is almost always seen as a mechanical act, even though there is the perception that the way whose learning took place was not pleasant.

Keywords: Experience knowledge. Teaching knowledge. Teacher training. Written language teaching.

Saberes de experiência e ensino de língua materna: relatos de docentes em formação inicial

Resumo
O objetivo do artigo é apreender saberes, representações e pressupostos sobre ensino de língua materna, aprendizagem do sistema de escrita alfabética em relatos biográficos de estudantes de Pedagogia matriculados na disciplina de Ensino de Língua Portuguesa. A metodologia utilizada foi amparada na Pesquisa Biográfica em Educação: A partir dos relatos (auto)biográficos, que compreendemos como uma encenação de si, buscamos localizar pistas que apontam para saberes sobre aprender e ensinar língua materna para que, partindo destes saberes, pudéssemos ampliá-los e/ou problematizá-los. O material aqui analisado é constituído de 30 relatos coletados em 2021.1. Concluímos que os estudantes, de modo geral, trazem noções bastante tradicionais sobre ensino de língua, ainda compreendendo que ensinar língua é ensinar gramática normativa, e aprender a escrever é quase sempre tido como um ato mecânico, ainda que haja a percepção de que a maneira cuja aprendizagem se deu não foi prazerosa.

1 Introduction

The objective of this paper is to understand the knowledge, representations and assumptions about the teaching of Portuguese as a mother tongue, and about the learning of the alphabetic writing system in biographical accounts of Pedagogy students enrolled in the subject Teaching of Portuguese Language. As specific objectives, we sought to identify in the reported memories situations that illustrate the teaching of Portuguese they received; to understand their conception of language and of mother tongue teaching; and to understand how prior knowledge of experience influences the expectations they have about the teaching of Portuguese.

To do so, in this text, we make use of a framework that points out the importance of (self)reflection of/in the teaching practice (SILVA, 2018) for the construction of political-methodological proposals in teacher training (PIMENTA, 2010; VEIGA, 2002) that take into account the complexity of training teachers in the current context that we are going through, which has as characteristics the disbelief in democratic institutions and science, hence the need to think the teaching practice itself and an incarnate knowledge, full of life (FREIRE, 2020).

From a teaching experience, we will reflect on the teaching of mother tongue and the possibility of training that allows teachers in training to pay attention to the knowledge in reconstruction as vital knowledge for social transformation in which identities are not erased and/or diminished with the denial of the language one knows before entering school (FERRAREZI JR, 2018; SOARES, 2019).
We believe that this text can contribute to the perception of how the knowledge of the school experience echoes in the perspective of what should be object of teaching in the initial training of teachers, as well as in the importance of thinking of teaching methodologies that, uniting research and training, bring the discussions to the terrain of the lived, without giving up pointing to other possible worlds, so as not to create fatalisms in our action on/in the world (FREIRE, 2020).

Thus, we will follow the following rhetorical movements: in the methodology section, we describe the organization of the subject "Teaching Portuguese Language", articulating it to the conceptions we defend of language and its teaching, presenting the activity that generated the biographical accounts whose focus was the learning of the written language; then, we will present a brief discussion about the biographical accounts and their formative potential; In the next section, we bring scenes of training and memories in order to problematize the language teaching received, the knowledge of experience that undergraduate students of Pedagogy have and the expectations that such knowledge created in relation to the subject under discussion; finally, we draw some conclusions from the data and recommendations for thinking about the practices of teaching mother tongue.

I looked up the rationale and put it in section 3

2 Methodology

In this section, we chose to describe both the methodological strategies we used for our teaching practice from which this research report was born, and the methodological procedures used to reflect/research our practice and teaching knowledge. In this way, here are elements about the subject and teaching situations researched, and about (auto)biographical research in education, the methodological approach we used.

The subject Ensino de Língua Portuguesa (PC0337) is located in the sixth semester of the Pedagogy course at the Universidade Federal do Ceará. In its menu, we find the following elements for discussion in the hours assigned to it:
Types of production, functions and activities of the different languages in the process of human communication, literacy and literacy. Stages of acquisition and development of oral and written language. Types of reading and its objectives. Activities for the development of speaking and reading. Contents and methods of teaching the Portuguese language in the initial series/cycles of elementary school. The teaching of grammar and spelling in elementary school. The written production in elementary school: analysis of the grammar and spelling teaching situation in the initial grades of elementary school, its relationship with the evaluation and the oral and written production of the child and activities for its development. Reflection on the role of the teacher for the development of the child's language (UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DO CEARÁ, 2008, p. 28).

When we started our activities with the subject, it was divided into three units (unit I - Orality, unit II - Reading, and unit III - Writing), contemplated in theoretical and practical proposals that discussed the main strategies for teaching mother tongue in the early years of elementary education, and covering pedagogical implications when we opt for a teaching orientation of mother tongue that privileges the "interactional and discursive dimension of language" (ANTUNES, 2003, p.22).

However, as an introduction to the subsequent discussions, we decided to historicize the way the object of knowledge mother tongue was curricularized and transformed into teaching content, the changes that happened since it became a school subject, using Magda Soares's text, which presents the main changes in the teaching of mother tongue in our country (SOARES, 2004).

Thus, in order to rescue the knowledge of experience of the future teachers (some of whom were already working in the classroom), we chose, as a teaching strategy after the presentation of the syllabus and pedagogical agreements, a class based on the socialization of their memories of learning the written language, relating them to the learning of their name: where did the name each one received come from? What is the story behind this name? How did each one learn to write it? How, from this learning, did you learn to write?

Following the assumptions of (auto)biographical research in education, we understand that the opportunities to narrate one's own life, to figure oneself in a narrative (DELORY-MOMBERGER, 2014), - to build a staging of one's path (OLINDA, 2016), to relate some biographical episode -, has a formative dimension that makes the subject take
ownership of its history and the knowledge that emerges from such a report, since "the formative path covers different ways of being and living, multiple ways of understanding schooling and knowledge. The formation includes, above all, the experiences consolidated by the students, what affects them in relation to becoming a teacher" (SANTOS, LIMA, 2017, p.411-412).

It was about looking for clues, *flashes*, fragments of the literacy process so that we could anchor the subsequent discussions in the lived experiences, in what affected the historical bodies biographed (OLINDA, 2016). (Auto) biographical research in education has a formative dimension precisely because it enables:

To the one who narrates, investigate his life path -giving it meaning - become aware of the learning developed and of the references acquired over time, using them to his advantage, which will lead him, in turn, to the perception that he is a producer of knowledge and author of his history (SANTOS, LIMA, 2017, p. 417).

When we see in scene social devices affecting our biographical paths, it seems to become more evident that the difference between theory and practice is false, that we are embedded in theories of which we are not always aware, that many times, we come to school as teachers, and we are guided in our teaching practice by theories that formed us: what can we do with what was made of us? Our memories form us, shape us (SOUZA; ARAÚJO; BRANDENBURG, 2022).

After the socialization of the texts that were written, we asked permission from the students who gave us their reports to analyze them in order to publish the results in the form of an article that would contribute to understanding how the knowledge of experience affects the way teachers organize their teaching activity (SANTOS, LIMA, 2017).

Thus, teaching is coadunate with reflection through research based on the narratives created by the teachers in training (many of them already working in classrooms, as previously mentioned), so that we could realize the operationality of what we discussed in the classroom at the university, and the deep-rooted beliefs that cross and sometimes hinder other possibilities of teaching mother tongue (ANTUNES, 2018). Thus, we bet on:

A training that is not transmissive as far as the methods, techniques, and accumulation of knowledge are concerned. A human formation, dialogical, participative, that sees the educator as the subject of his/her formation, and not as
an object; that values the constant reflection of his/her knowledge/doing, of his/her pedagogical practice, in a problematizing manner, contextualized and based on the dialectic movement of action-reflection-action. This training enables the educator to develop a critical stance towards the reality of their time, to capture their real needs and difficulties, in the search for the transformation of their practices (SOARES, 2019, p. 154).

It is also important to highlight that some of the analyses made in this text were made in class during the collective discussion about the perception of which beliefs and concepts were present in the accounts narrated there, paying attention to the fact that these would guide our discussions in the discipline throughout the semester. We also emphasize that we used fictitious names in all the excerpts of the reports in order to preserve the identity of the people who gave us their written texts used as data in this article.

From the thirty (30) written texts, we will highlight below scenes from the literacy process of Pedagogy students/future teachers/teachers in activity, trying to figure concepts of written language, mother tongue teaching, and methodologies used in the learning of written language, as well as expectations involving the teaching/learning of the mother tongue from the training received.

3. Results and Discussion

Training teachers is a complex task. In the current context, taken by neoliberal policies that indoctrinate a fatalistic attitude, of discrediting the democratic institutions, that destroy the fragile bonds of human solidarity and naturalize competitive relationships in which the other is drawn in a monstrous format and placed in the role of an enemy that must be eliminated so that the "I" reaches the finish line, to go against this logic sounds like something dreamy, out of reality (FREIRE, 2020). Besides the current context, the multiple dimensions that intersect in the teaching practice itself (technical, human, political, ethical, aesthetic, etc.) make teacher training a complex, delicate task that demands immense responsibility (FRANCO, PIMENTA, 2016).

Ilma Veiga (2002) exposes the transformations of the contemporary world and the strong tendency to subordinate political interests to financial market interests, as a result
of globalization and neoliberal policies that fatalistically naturalize this model of social relations, transformed into competitive relations in which the technocratic bias reduces knowledge and social knowledge to measurable skills from descriptors created by funded agencies and / or guided by interests in this social market mold.

In this model, to train teachers would be to train teaching technologists: a technical professional who reproduces the knowledge of others, who does, but does not understand the fundamentals of his doing, who is restricted to the "school micro-universe, forgetting all relationship with the wider social reality" (op.cit. p. 72-73). Such a professional, reduced to a technologist, does not perceive himself as a social agent, does not realize that his work directly influences his life, that he malnourishes by alienating his students, because he is reduced to the technical dimension, leaving aside other dimensions that constitute him.

To train teachers as social agents, a proposal defended by professor Ilma Veiga, is, therefore, to engage them in their profession, understanding them as transformers of their work. However, how to train people who understand themselves professionally as social agents responsible for the progress of their educational practice? One of the answers we have been giving in our process of teacher educator is to use (auto)biographical accounts in order to connect what is being discussed/reflected to the experiences of undergraduates, so that they realize the various devices, conditionings, but also possibilities of resistance that cross our biographical paths, understanding them in the "interface between the individual and the social and that I call the process of biography" (DELOURY-MOMBERGER, 2011, p.49). Starting from one's own history, from the reading of the world, to problematize it and understand that what we study is not separate from us, but goes through us.

It was in this sense that we organized the subject "Teaching of Portuguese Language" starting from the memories of Pedagogy students, so that what was discussed in the teaching practice subject was experienced as something that affected us in our schooling process, and that can affect the lives of children who arrive at school with a register of mother tongue different from the one that the school holds as "standard" (SOARES, 2019), so that these future teachers could understand the need to engage in a
mother tongue teaching that produces speaking, writing, creative, and productive students, opposing the pedagogy of silencing that has been traditionally performed in language classrooms (FERRAREZI JR, 2018).

Thus, the first element that we highlight from the reports read, as well as from the socialization of the reports in the second meeting of the subject is the expectation regarding what would be the "content" of the subject Portuguese Language Teaching:

I had always learned that to speak Portuguese was to speak it correctly. The care with how one speaks and writes was at home, with my mother, who was a teacher, and at school: when I found out that I would be taking this subject, I was happy, because I love grammar and would finally have a subject that I love and that I am good at. All names in the reports are fictitious

Like Mônica, at least four other students state in their reports that their expectations for the subject are to study grammar, because to study language is to study grammar, and more than that, it is to study normative grammar, since every Portuguese speaker has knowledge of grammar, since "when one is able to speak a language one is then able to use, appropriately, the rules (phonological, morphological, syntactic and semantic) of that language [...] in the production of interpretable and relevant texts" (ANTUNES, 2003 p.85).

Thus, the knowledge that is presented in this expectation is the one that has been built in the history of mother tongue teaching, whose representation reduces teaching mother tongue to the teaching of normative grammar, with writing as a reference. According to Soares (2004), these learning demands are gradually changing as the social demands in Brazil change, but the tradition of language study centered on the language system, an inheritance from Latin studies, continues).

Therefore, knowledge is being passed on and it reaches us in the classroom in 2021, the time of the collection of these reports, gaining bodies and affecting them in our encounters, being important to confront this knowledge, in order to reflect on a mother tongue teaching that does not focus only on the teaching of written language, but that takes into account orality and its importance, that takes into account grammar in use, that systematically teaches reflective grammar, that teaches and expands students' discursive competence (TRAVAGLIA, 2018), that insists on the socio-interactive dimension of
language and on the formation of citizens aware of its uses, negotiations, and constructions of meaning (ANTUNES, 2018; TRAVAGLIA, 2018).

Moreover, it is important that we dispel the great misconception that there is only one way to write and/or speak "good Portuguese", since linguistic variation occurs in both oral and written registers (BENTES, 2018), and if we want to teach the real uses of the language, we cannot avoid studying this phenomenon, making the mistake of excluding various social groups that have linguistic variants different from the socially prestigious variant (BAGNO, 2007; ANTUNES, 2018; TRAVAGLIA, 2018; BENTES, 2018).

Another interesting element that stands out when we read the biographical accounts are the conceptions of language figured there: Vanessa says that "writing well is expressing the thought, so writing well is thinking well". For Pedro, "we don't communicate in the same way everywhere, only school demanded this from me and that made me angry and I hated Portuguese".

Among revolts and confluences, we find the same conceptions of language that Cavalcanti, Silva and Suassuna (2014) found in their research with four Portuguese teachers from the state education network of Pernambuco, conceptions that were built in different socio-political moments, according to Geraldi (2020), and that defined language sometimes as an expression of thought, sometimes as an instrument of communication, sometimes as a form of interaction.

This last conception, despite being present in Brazilian educational legislation since the National Curricular Parameters (BRASIL, 1998), and being the position defended in the most recent document, the Common National Curricular Base (BRASIL, 2018), appears only twice in the thirty reports read. One of the most striking reflections appears in Miguel's account, according to which talking about language is talking about power, inequality, exclusion:

I think it is mainly a deep and sincere reflection on our economic, political, cultural, and social reality that is missing in schools. Critical thinking needs to materialize and take over not only the consciousness of the masses, but also push them to fight for a new way of living in society (MIGUEL, 6th semester).
It is important to reinforce that this graduate was already working in a private school, and his politicized speech also came from a revolt, always present in his account, about the course that national politics had been taking with the extreme right in the presidency of the republic, producing a discourse of separation between politics and education, and accusing teachers of being indoctrinators.

Thus, besides this and other reports that bring this currently defended conception of language, the majority, as said before, still understands language as "speaking well", "expressing well": although there is revolt over how the school teaches mother tongue, there is still little knowledge or almost no knowledge about the "interactional and discursive conception of language" (ANTUNES, 2003, p.22).

Besides the conception of language and expectations about the teaching of mother tongue, what do the reports show us about the initial learning of written language? What strategies, methodologies are figured in the accounts, in the scenes, in the figuration of the self? What experiences emerge from there can help or hinder a mother tongue teaching that takes into account language as a form of interaction, which varies according to social uses?

There are few memories about my literacy process, I remember more about some strategies used by the teachers, one of them is in the blue notebook, our name was written in sticky letters, right below in dotted lines, then we should repeat it until the end of the page. On the next page it was cursive writing, the same process. Another resource was the letters of the alphabet related to some figure, for example A accompanied by an image of a bee, its dotted line, then the next ones always related as if that letter only belonged to one element. Dictations were also constantly used (Marianna, 6th semester)

Marianna's account almost totally sums up the strategies figured in the thirty accounts read: "calligraphy notebooks", "repetitive exercises to learn the ABCs", "to have impeccable handwriting", according to Caroline, were the purposes and methodologies that stood out, pointing to a repetitive, decontextualized teaching, not at all reflective about the alphabetic writing system, about its social uses, about genres, real ways of using language.

Rayane also points out that she learned from "calligraphy cards, dotted lines, a lot of copying...in short, very traditional" despite keeping "the feeling of discovering the
alphabetic writing system, of being able to read the words everywhere, of understanding what the letters meant, it was very cool”.

These reports point to the confrontation between the mechanical way in which writing is presented to children at school, and the adventure they experience outside the institution in the discovery of the written language: we can say that, despite the “traditional”, “repetitive” way this teaching has been taking place, even so, the taste for discovery, the adventure of ”understanding what the letters meant” make it so that the mechanical teaching does not take away the taste, the delight of realizing oneself in the literate world, of realizing that one is learning, that it is cool to be part of a community that knows what the letters mean (SOARES, 2020).

Moreover, it seems important to emphasize that not everything that today is “accused” of being traditional needs to be thrown away: Morais (2018) draws our attention to the possibility of using some of these resources, such as work with handwriting or dictation, as long as it is done in a meaningful way, not in a mechanical way as it has been used.

Thus, for example, in a class on mammals, we can make a dictated list of animals that children already know; we can make labels/subtitles for pictures displayed in the classroom, so that the language is exercised and its social use is perceived, including the need for its writing in the form that is socially recognized, not just a mechanical exercise, whose only purpose will be the correction by the teacher (ANTUNES, 2018; MORAIS, 2012).

However, what we see in the written reports is that the exercise of writing words, from the dictation strategy, is a mechanical gesture of evaluating (in the sense of testing) all the time whether or not they knew how to write that word, unlike proposing to write a list, a genre that we constantly use in our daily lives (shopping list, guest list, activity list, etc.)

Finally, some reports bring us lapses of hope: Isadora remembers that "Aunt Rosineide took us to the reading room every day, we read, we did theater with the stories, puppets, it was a lot of fun. Natiane also highlights that "there was a lot of storytelling and reading, and we learned the names of our classmates. I remember making birthday cards,
holiday cards to exchange with classmates. We also wrote notes. There we exercised the real language, right?

In these accounts, we can see a teaching that takes into account writing in real-life situations, with interlocutors, with the real intention of interacting and in which “the student is the subject of the learning that takes place, that is, it is he who performs, in interaction with the object of learning, the structuring activity that results in knowledge” (ANTUNES, 2003, p. 43, italics by the author).

No more decontextualized, mechanical, "traditional" activities, as one of the narrators said, but "real language" exercises that give the possibility of having fun while learning, interacting with classmates, experiencing in the classroom what we do in social spaces: we interact linguistically with others.

Thus, although we mostly have conceptions of language teaching as the teaching of grammatical norms, we find in the reports some lapses of a mother tongue teaching policy that produce hope in the sense that they have formed people who have incorporated the idea that language is much more than a prescriptive set of rules, and that its teaching is a monotonous and repetitive exercise of repetition to exhaustion.

5 Final considerations

This text aimed to apprehend knowledge, representations and assumptions about teaching Portuguese as a mother tongue, learning the alphabetic writing system in biographical accounts of Pedagogy students enrolled in the subject “Teaching of Portuguese Language”. To do so, we analyzed thirty (auto)biographical reports produced by undergraduate students of the course of Pedagogy enrolled in the subject “Teaching of Portuguese Language of the University in the semester of 2021.1, some of them already teaching in the private educational system.

As results, we could see that mother tongue teaching is still expected to be synonymous with teaching normative grammar, a historical mark inherited from Latin studies. We could also notice that the different conceptions of language found in other
researches still circulate in the classrooms and are part of the knowledge of experience of Pedagogy students, some of whom are already working as teachers. Finally, it is evident that, despite the advances in legislation and research in the area, we still find mostly mechanical and decontextualized teaching that does not take into account the real uses of language in social spaces.

It is also evident the formative power of (auto)biographical reports both as teaching and learning strategies, since collectively we can realize that the theories studied form/shape us and increase or decrease our power to act, transforming or reproducing the status quo, and also as a research/reflection strategy on teaching practice, producing unique data that allow us to perceive the social devices producing singularities socialized and colonized by the hegemonic way of conceiving and producing the world we live in.

We need to intensify teacher training policies that effect a conception of language in its interactional and discursive dimension, that can expand "the students' communicative-interactional competencies" (ANTUNES, 2003, p. 34), training that takes into account the knowledge of experience so that it is valued, but also problematized, expanded, confronted, as well as collectively fight for better working conditions for teachers, contrary to the movement of precariousness, which ensures spaces and times for reflection in order to think the teaching of language that produces subjects who interact and know the responsibility that this presupposes, that the language is not an instrument that is repeated, but a way of being with others. We still have breath and strength for this struggle?

References


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