

Initial and continuing training from the perspective of basic education teachers

ARTICLE

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Abstract

The study was based on a set of conceptions about the processes of initial and continuing training, from the point of view of basic education teachers. The aim of this work is to understand basic education teachers' conceptions of initial and continuing training. The qualitative research is based on the assumptions of Historical-Cultural Psychology, idealized by Vygotsky. The selection of teachers to take part in the research took into account their teaching experience in state and municipal public schools. The research allowed us to identify that teachers are subject to a prescriptive continuing education model, to the detriment of training that favors a space for dialogue and exchanges between their peers. Training that promotes reflections that reverberate in your daily actions with students.

Keywords: Teacher training. Initial and Continuing Formation. Basic education.

Formação Inicial e Contínua sob a Lente dos Professores do Ensino Básico

Resumo

O estudo se desenvolveu a partir de um conjunto de concepções sobre os processos de formação inicial e continuada, sob a ótica de docentes da Educação Básica. O objetivo desse trabalho é compreender as concepções de formação inicial e continuada dos professores da educação básica. A pesquisa de cunho qualitativo está assentada nos pressupostos da Psicologia Histórico-Cultural, idealizada por Vygotsky. A seleção dos professores para a participação na pesquisa considerou a experiência no magistério, em escolas da rede pública, estadual e municipal. A pesquisa nos permitiu identificar que os professores estão submetidos a um modelo de formação continuada prescritiva, em detrimento de uma formação que favoreça um espaço de diálogo e de trocas entre seus pares. Uma formação que seja promotora de reflexões que reverberem na sua ação cotidiana junto aos alunos.

Palavras-chave: Formação de Professores. Formação Inicial e Continuada. Educação Básica.

1 Introduction

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Despite the existence of a significant number of studies in the area, teacher training has long been a prominent topic of discussion, especially when it involves, at the heart of the educational debate, the understanding of teachers as subjects with a history, amalgamated with their experiences. For this reason, this article aims to highlight the phenomenon of teacher training from the point of view of teachers, expressed in their reports, in the light of the understanding that our individual experiences of how we became teachers and the reflection on how our trajectories help us to critically interpret the multiple facets of initial and continuing training.

The research, therefore, will be understood as the possibility of, through the analysis and critical interpretation of the data produced, perceiving and visualizing the teachers' understanding of their training process. In this line of thought, we highlight the words of Imbernón (2011), when he states that

The training process must equip teachers with the knowledge, skills and attitudes to develop reflective professionals or researchers. Along these lines, the fundamental axis of the teacher training curriculum is the development of the ability to reflect on one's own teaching practice, with the aim of learning to interpret, understand and reflect on social reality and teaching (IMBERNÓN, 2011, p.41-42).

We start from the understanding that the demands of the contemporary world marked by globalization, advances in the media and technology, among others, have led to a redesign of the concept of school, implying new ways of learning, teaching, feeling and acting, requiring a more careful look at the way teacher training processes are organized, both initial and continuing, demanding that these processes increasingly dialogue with the reality in which they are inserted. For this reason, "it is not enough to say that the teacher must teach from the student's experiences if the programs that plan their training do not also place them as subjects of their own history" (CUNHA, 1997, p.189).

Within this context, teaching practice has been widely discussed, "from the perspective of thinking, rethinking, questioning and investigating the knowledge produced by teachers, so that it can be identified, activated and socialized among the school institution's own teaching group" (OLIVEIRA, 2020, p. 76). Therrien (2005, p.292) ponders that "teaching work, situated in the changing and multiple contexts of contemporaneity, points to the necessary search for new curricular configurations, as well as new profiles of professionals prepared for this challenge". It is therefore necessary to create a space for discussion that is capable of evoking reflections on the place of teaching in such challenging times and which promotes an activity permeated with complexity.

We also highlight as an important factor in the writing of this work the opportunity to carry out research in the light of the reality experienced in everyday teaching practice, seeking to thematize this practice in order to provide moments of reflection with teachers. In this way, we agree with Fazenda (1989) when she states that:

Focusing on everyday school life therefore means studying the school in its singularity, without detaching it from its broader social determinants. The aim is to understand everyday life as a singular moment in the social movement, and this will require, from a theoretical point of view, the handling of major social categories such as class, culture, hegemony, etc. From a methodological point of view, this means complementing field observations with data from other social orders, such as the country's educational policy, the various organizations that exert some influence on the school, etc. (FAZENDA, 1989, p.42).

It is in this multifaceted scenario that the discussion on teacher training, often conditioned to demands from outside the school and presented in a decontextualized way from the experiences of students and teachers, is inserted. From this perspective, Imbernón (2009) warns us that:

It will be necessary to change the model of training through institutional plans in order to move more intensively towards a more inquisitive and project-based model, in which the teachers of a given context take the lead they deserve and are the ones who plan, implement and evaluate their own training. (IMBERNÓN, 2009, p.107)

For André (2016, p.36), "there is no magic possible here, there is no way to skip stages - we are a plastic organism, yes, a flexible one, but an organism that develops under certain conditions and in close relationship with socio-cultural contexts". It is important to highlight the studies by Farias (2006, p.69), in relation to understanding the "imponderable role of teachers in the process of change in education". The author emphasizes the need to:

Recognizing that the success of change lies beyond the individualized and selfless efforts of a few, particularly teachers, imposes a twofold task: on the one hand, overcoming the discourse of the teacher's hyper-responsibility for the quality of teaching, as well as the 'pedagogizing' approach to the school and the work of its professionals; on the other hand, attributing to the teacher the condition of subject, product and producer of the experiences lived in the context in which he finds himself, which delimits potentialities, circumstances and limitations (FARIAS, 2006, p. 70).

From this perspective, we understand that it is necessary to provide teachers with moments to reflect on and discuss their training and teaching practice and, more importantly, it is imperative to listen to them in order to face the challenges posed by this reality, which consists of ensuring the right of all teachers to be the authors of their professional development process.

These reflections have led us to question the way in which basic education teachers conceive of initial and continuing training. The aim of this article is therefore to understand basic education teachers' conceptions of initial and continuing training. We present the methodological procedures of the research below.

2 Methodology

The qualitative research is based on the assumptions of Historical-Cultural Psychology, idealized by Vygotsky, who understands man beyond biological determinations, conceiving him as an active subject who transforms reality, a process that takes place through the development of his actions (REY, 2002). This path enabled

us to understand the conceptions of initial and continuing training from the perspective of basic education teachers.

In order to understand the object of study, we used interviews, corroborating Bogdan and Biklen (1994, p.134), who point out that "interviews are used to collect descriptive data in the language of the subject themselves, allowing the researcher to intuitively develop an idea of how subjects interpret aspects of the world". This way, the interview proved to be an appropriate instrument, in the sense that it met the objective we were trying to achieve and allowed us to enter the subjective universe of the teachers. Thus, "through language, teachers can express significant areas of their personal experience, their world, their needs, their conflicts, their reflections and their emotions" (MARQUES; CARVALHO, 2015, p.34).

Teachers were selected to take part in the research on a personal basis, taking into account the criteria of having taught in public, state and municipal schools. In order to preserve the anonymity of the interviewees, the teachers will be referred to by their gender, i.e. teacher and teacher, considering also that "anonymity should cover not only the written material, but also the verbal reports of the information gathered during the observations" (BIKLEN; BOGDAN, 1994, p.77).

In view of this, the interview was carried out with the two basic education teachers: one teacher, aged 40, with 17 years' teaching experience, working in elementary school I, in the early years of a municipal public school in the interior of Ceará. The second teacher is 57 years old and has been teaching for 20 years, working in youth and adult education. Both have a degree in Languages, and the teacher also studied Pedagogy, a need that arose because of her work in the early years of primary education, specifically in the literacy cycle.

To this end, some questions were drawn up to guide the dialog with the teachers. The semi-structured interview combined closed questions for information related to their professional profile (stage of basic education where they work, length of time teaching, age and initial training) and open questions for aspects related to initial and continuing

training (conceptions of initial and continuing training; what initial and continuing training has represented and provided for their lives and a defining experience from their training trajectory). The decision to use open questions was designed to provide teachers with a space to listen, where they could express their views. The questions were asked by the researchers and the answers recorded by cell phone. It is important to note that in order to carry out the interviews, the teachers were asked to sign an informed consent form and to authorize the recording, ensuring their anonymity. The results and discussions that enabled us to achieve the study's objective are presented below.

3 Results and Discussion

The open questions in the interview allowed teachers to hear about their conceptions of initial and continuing training, as well as what these training processes represented and provided for their lives. In addition, they added to their accounts an experience from their training that was significant for their personal and professional lives.

In view of this, when talking about their conceptions of initial training, the teacher believes that it is "a process that aims to support teachers at the start of their career". The teacher, on the other hand, believes that "it's the first step for the person who wants to get a degree," he explains, "for the person who wants to teach, to have that experience". However, both consider that "academia doesn't provide enough maturity for you to face a classroom", because "we leave university, but we don't really have the training for classroom strategy". It is possible to see that the teachers' conception of initial training is anchored in the condition of having training that allows them to act as teachers, in other words, training that qualifies them for teaching. However, they report that their initial training did not prepare them for teaching, because the practical issues to be experienced in a classroom were not covered.

To this end, it is important that when teachers start teaching, they receive guidance from the school, from the pedagogical coordinator, from a more experienced colleague, for example, so that they can find the resources and support they need to

carry out their work. Corroborating André (2018, p.6), "teaching is a complex profession that requires constant learning and that, in order to face the issues and challenges of everyday practice, it is necessary to continue studying, to turn to more experienced colleagues, to seek support, to be willing to learn". Otherwise, there is a serious risk of this professional being overwhelmed by a feeling of frustration, which could lead to them giving up.

As such, we can see the presence of a rationalizing logic in the teachers' statements, which corroborates a reductionist understanding of the initial training process, since "professional activity is conceived as instrumental and is directed towards the rigorous application of specific techniques to be repeated" (SILVA, 2011, p.21). In this sense, we highlight the importance of initial training that contributes to teachers in their contexts of work, with theoretical support that sustains their practice, while at the same time enabling them to adopt a critical and reflective stance on their training process. It follows, therefore, that initial training promotes meaning when it enables teachers to build up the knowledge inherent in teaching.

With regard to the concept of continuing education, the teacher believes that it "plays a more solid role, as it takes place more systematically, more consistently", and furthermore, according to her, "it expands on theoretical issues, further deepening our teaching practice". For the teacher, "continuing training is the next step towards reaching your goal" and he emphasizes that "it is essential to always do it with other people, other teachers, and it is important to be accompanied in this continuing training". The reports point to an understanding of continuing training as an addition to initial training and a desire to access new knowledge that will support their "teaching", an understanding refuted by Franco (2019) when he warns that

Continuous training is not about making up for previous training deficiencies, continuous training is the need to integrate life and training; to articulate the teacher's person to the circumstances of their work and profession, in a critical and integrated way; creating conditions for formative experiences that allow self-knowledge; self-formation; the processes of identity and teacher professionalization (FRANCO, 2019, p 98).

From this perspective, it can be seen that continuing education programs have been configured in the shadow of a discourse based on efficiency and productivity, where a functional and utilitarian bias underlies them. "What's more, teachers are hardly listened to, and their speech is almost always drowned out by specialists who set out to find solutions to all the problems that teachers experience in the course of their work" (FALCÃO; FARIAS, 2017, p. 163). Thus, immersed in a context of demands for results, teachers are pressured to comply with a list of prescriptions, mainly focused on student performance in external assessments.

Despite this adverse context, according to the teachers, continuing education is seen as a possibility for improving teaching practices to meet the needs of students, highlighting the immediacy of the present, in line with the demands of contemporary education. In a way, they understand that the training process becomes a guide for their pedagogical work. Aligned with the discourse of a public policy focused on results, teaching practice is developed in the light of performance indicators that restrict teachers' actions in the classroom. We corroborate the view that teaching practice cannot be reduced to a list of prescriptions drawn up outside the school context, nor do we refute the institutional discourses on teaching quality, which have only accentuated the precariousness of teachers' work.

It is therefore necessary to question the continuing education programs that insist on plastering teachers' actions and which generally do not reflect the needs of the teaching profession. There is an expectation that the process of continuing training will have an impact on student performance results, constituting a possible intervention to improve these results. This tendency highlights a linear conception of the training process, as well as the fact that the responsibility for the results obtained by the students is attributed solely to the teachers, resulting in an overload of attributions, triggering significant emotional exhaustion, which can even lead to teachers becoming ill.

A relevant aspect identified in the teacher's speech, in relation to continuing training, was the understanding that "it's fundamental to always do it with other people, other teachers, and it's important that this continuing training is monitored". The possibility

of conceiving a training process linked to exchanges between peers, from a collective and collaborative perspective, gains relevance, especially in a context in which we increasingly see the promotion of individualism and isolation in teaching work. Accompanying teachers in their training process is still a gap in the school system. According to Placco and Souza (2015, p.84), "the group develops through collective effort around a task, through discoveries, through the relationships established and through facing its difficulties". The authors also add that "listening to and valuing each other's contributions facilitates the dissemination of ideas, the strengthening of bonds and the appropriation of individual memories and knowledge, which weave the group's history and identity, in a relay of leadership and responsibilities" (PLACCO; SOUZA, 2015, p.84/85). It is based on this understanding that continuing education makes sense and contributes to the practice of teaching, by sharing and socializing everyday situations, understanding the school as the central space for planning the training process.

The teachers also recounted a remarkable experience from their formative career. The teacher highlighted the last few years of training, working as a trainer for the literacy cycle, emphasizing that,

"Since 2014, I believe I've been living a very remarkable moment in my career with training, because at the same time as I'm receiving training to discuss with teachers about everyday school issues, I'm also working in the classroom and this is also a very cool thing, because we start to realize and also receive many questions that broaden our horizons, our vision of education in fact and executing this is really the best part".

The teacher highlighted his experience as a trainer at Fortaleza City Hall, as it was an opportunity to "understand what our trainees, our students, want and not what we want". At the same time as they narrate themselves as classroom teachers, they also declare themselves as trainers in continuing education programs. This is an experience that allows them to reflect on both situations, trainee and trainer, which is why "it is essential that everyone gives themselves opportunities to reflect on their thoughts, or, metaphorically speaking, to look in the mirror. Looking at your thoughts, reflecting on the act of knowing itself are movements similar to looking in the mirror" (PLACCO; SOUZA, 2015, p. 54). It may be a paradox, without a connotation of being contradictory, but in the

sense of being a challenging situation, as the authors reiterate, "looking in the mirror allows the subject to be surprised, to be surprised, to recognize themselves" (PLACCO; SOUZA, 2015, p.54). Thus, by playing the role of trainee and trainer, they re-signify the training process based on their own experiences, generating possibilities for possible changes and transformations.

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In relation to the report on the teaching experience that was most significant in their lives, the teacher highlighted her work with acceleration classes, noting her satisfaction. She says:

"As they managed to become literate within the process, they were being placed in their classrooms according to their age and it was a very memorable moment, because it was very nice to follow those young people who were out of their age group, to be able to move forward in that process and to be placed in a classroom where they really fit in, either because of their age, or their thoughts".

The teacher highlighted the time he worked as a learning advisor as a defining teaching experience, because it was at this time that he realized the importance of being attentive to the students' interests, stressing that, "it's no use the teacher having the best content, having the best lesson, if the student isn't thirsty for learning, hungry for knowledge". The experience reported by the teachers reveals the combination of various types of knowledge built up over the course of teaching. This is shown when the teacher, through her work and interventions, enables students outside the age range to be inserted "into a classroom where they actually fit in". The experience recounted by the teacher shows a concern to promote a dialog between the content and the students' interests, because "if the student doesn't have a thirst for learning, a hunger for knowledge", this learning is compromised. These are experiences that are closely associated with a teaching practice full of meaning for the students. Thus, as Nóvoa (2000) points out, teachers go through an identity process that involves building a way of being and being in the profession. In this way, the teachers who took part in this study demonstrated, from their accounts, authorship in running their classrooms, promoting a transformative pedagogical practice.

In addition, one of the findings of the research was in relation to the length of time the two teachers have been teaching: 17 and 20 years, which provided an opportunity to discuss the career stage these teachers are at, in the light of Huberman's studies on teachers' professional lives, systematized in what the author called the teachers' life cycle. Huberman (1995, p.38) states that "career development is therefore a process, not a series of events. For some, this process may seem linear, but for others there are oscillations, regressions, dead ends, slopes, discontinuities". In the case of the two teachers taking part in this study, we could infer from their accounts that they are both in the third phase, i.e. what Huberman called experimentation or diversification. Garcia (1999, p. 65) points out that "it is a phase that is not the same for all teachers", in other words, "for some teachers, their energies are mainly channeled into improving their teaching skills: they diversify teaching methods, experiment with new practices and often look outside the classroom for professional stimulation" (GARCIA, 1999, p.65). However, this is a phase that has three different types of characteristics, from the one described above to the moment when teachers show a feeling of uncertainty about continuing to teach.

4 Final considerations

The context of this study emerges from basic education teachers' understanding of the concept of initial and continuing training. Their statements revealed the challenges posed by the teaching profession, which arise from the moment they start teaching and expand in the midst of their daily training, starting with their work in the classroom. In addition, it was possible to perceive satisfaction with their training process, both in terms of initial training and continuing training, despite highlighting the gaps left in their initial training, which did not "prepare" them for teaching.

The perspective of bringing the life cycle of teachers into this study is in line with the objective of this research, because it alerts us to the importance of breaking with the homogenization of training models, based on the understanding that teachers and their

needs are different. For this reason, we believe that the locus for teacher training must be the school, because it is in the school that teachers have the chance to legitimize their experiences and establish, together with their peers, a dialogue full of meaning in relation to the students' learning process.

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In addition, the teachers' narratives alert us to the importance of a training process based on the demands identified in the school context, taking into account the knowledge produced by teachers in their daily work, as well as their interests and training needs.

The research also allowed us to identify that teachers are subjected to a prescriptive model of continuing training, to the detriment of training that favors a space for dialogue and exchange among their peers. Training that promotes reflections that reverberate in their daily actions with students.

In view of the above, it is necessary for the training bodies, the Ministry of Education, the State and Municipal Education Departments, as well as the schools, to develop continuing education actions in line with the demands presented by the teachers. We corroborate the idea that this training should be conceived with the teachers' context as its starting point and that its fundamental premise should be to strengthen teachers' autonomy.

The findings of this study revealed that the meanings produced by the two teachers about the training process they are undergoing, even with all the limitations identified in their statements, were important for their learning process about teaching. Even though some of them need to be re-signified, they were necessary in order to envision new perspectives for teacher training.

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