

Teachers' lounge as a place of memory: narratives of retired teachers in the interior of Bahia

ARTICLE

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Abstract: This study conceives the teachers' lounge as a place for the (re)construction of retired teachers' memory. The analyses were based on a theoretical mapping of scientific data regarding the theme and on the collection of testimonies grounded in the discussions of Halbwachs (1990), Ricoeur (2007), Benjamin (1987), De Benedictis (2020), Nora (1993), and Bondía (2002). The phenomenological-hermeneutic method enabled visibility to testimonies, valuing their contributions and impressions of the memories constructed in the teachers' room, their knowledge and experiences. Semi-structured interviews and a 'memory workshop' were also conducted. Through the analyses, we can perceive the relevance of the retired teacher's perspective on their memories constructed in the teachers' room, the work done with students, the joys, but also the difficulties experienced both in the exercise of the profession and in the path of retirement, of forgetfulness. The (re)constructed memories became a trace of the experiences of retired teachers in the aracatuense society.

Keywords: Experience. Social Memory. Knowledge. Teachers' Lounge.

Sala de professores como lugar de memória: narrativas de docentes aposentados no interior da Bahia

Resumo: Este trabalho concebe a sala de professores como um lugar para a (re)construção de memória de docentes aposentados. As análises basearam-se no mapeamento teórico de dados científicos acerca da temática e na coleta de testemunhos fundamentados nas discussões de Halbwachs (1990), Ricoeur (2007), Benjamin (1987), De Benedictis (2020), Nora (1993) e Bondía (2002). O método fenomenológico-hermenêutico possibilitou visibilidade aos testemunhos, valorizando suas contribuições e impressões das memórias construídas na sala de professores, seus saberes e experiências. Foram realizadas também entrevistas semiestruturadas e uma "oficina de memória". Por meio das análises, podemos perceber a relevância do olhar do docente aposentado sobre suas memórias construídas na sala de professores, do trabalho realizado com os alunos, dos deleites, mas também das dificuldades vivenciadas tanto no exercício da profissão como no percurso da aposentadoria, do esquecimento. As memórias (re)construídas se constituíram como rastro da vivência dos professores aposentados na sociedade aracatuense.

Palavras-chave: Experiência. Memória Social. Saberes. Sala de Professores.

1 Introduction

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The present text aims to understand the teachers' lounge as a place of memory for retired teachers in Aracatu, Bahia. The temporal scope of the research covered the period from 1982 to 2013. This time frame refers to the final stage of basic education that was implemented at the Centro Educacional de Aracatu (CEA), welcoming young people to complete their basic education, especially those who did not have the financial means to move to nearby towns. This reality was a right granted by the legal framework of education through the *Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação Nacional - LDB* (Guidelines and Bases for National Education Law) No. 5.962, of August 11, 1971 (Brasil, 1971).

The production of this work is part of the discussions developed in the master's dissertation of the Graduate Program in Education at the Universidade Estadual do Sudoeste da Bahia (UESB), entitled "*A sala de professores como lugar de memórias: narrativas de docentes aposentados em Aracatu-BA*". Since the research approached the teachers' lounge as a place of memory, it may be inferred that the lounge can be re-signified as a place of encounters, sharing, recollections, and conflicts. Therefore, we conceive it as a place of construction and reconstruction of memories—memories of retired teachers.

The objective presented guided the path of this study and enabled the recording of individual and collective memories, built and rebuilt in the teachers' lounge by educators who, in sharing their memories, contributed and continue to contribute to the construction of the social memory of the school and of Aracatu society itself.

Our object of study fostered reflections and discussions regarding the memories constructed by retired educators within the relationships established in the teachers' lounge. The chosen temporal scope, from 1982 to 2013, marked the pedagogical trajectory of the educators who collaborated in this study, and it may be inferred that these retired teachers experienced significant moments for Aracatu society, contributing to the education of young people whose formative journeys were influenced by the presence of these educators, as well as by the professional choices revealed in various learning situations.

2 The methodological paths of the research

We present a qualitative research approach from the perspective of Minayo (2007), grounded in Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic phenomenology of memory (2007). For this purpose, the collaborators were retired teachers who took part in the implementation of secondary education in the city of Aracatu, Bahia, a process that began in the 1980s, more specifically in 1982. The four teachers who participated in the research left classroom teaching between 2008 and 2013.

These teachers live in the city of Aracatu and perform other functions, taking part in different social groups and, thus, constructing new memories in another time and space. Approached via the WhatsApp social network between October 5 and November 7, 2022, they were invited to participate in the research after being informed of the theme and objective of our study. In the first face-to-face meeting, each teacher chose a pseudonym according to the feeling experienced during our initial conversation, thus being named: *Recordar* (To Remember), *Saudade* (Longing), *Arrependida* (Regretful), and *Superação* (Overcoming).

Recordar, in addition to having taught for more than two decades, offering classes in Mathematics and methodologies in the same field, also served as the school's principal, to which he refers with great respect. For him, recalling these experiences means reliving remarkable moments, as he enjoyed being a teacher so much that, even today, he continues to design contextualized Mathematics activities for elementary school teachers.

Saudade taught for almost 30 years, working with Portuguese Language as well as its methodologies. She recalled positive experiences of empathy and solidarity among colleagues in the teachers' lounge but also spoke of the adversities and challenges inherent to the teaching profession, especially regarding "teacher training." According to *Saudade's* account, she left the classroom prematurely due to health issues.

Arrependida, from the field of languages, taught Didactics and Statistics at a time when a university degree was not yet required. About her teaching practice, she reported: "*I read a lot and tried to stay up to date, being assiduous in following the television news.*"

However, in 2023, while working as a proctor in the *Exame Nacional do Ensino Médio* (ENEM), this experience led her to rethink her pseudonym “Regretful,” since she realized, in the face of the challenges encountered, that she had already fully accomplished her role as a teacher.

Superação, as her pseudonym indicates, recalls with emotion her temporary departure from the school, since it was due to a three-year treatment for breast cancer. Upon returning to the classroom to complete her teaching career, she faced several challenges because of prejudice related to the disease. She reports that, despite this, she found support in some colleagues who helped her overcome the feeling of exclusion.

These collaborators were approached individually (via WhatsApp or in person) on two occasions and also took part in a third collective meeting, attended by *Saudade* and *Arrependida*, who were welcomed by two former students of the first Teacher Training class and by a fellow teacher from that time who still works at the school.

It is worth noting that the adoption of narratives/testimonies was based on the work developed by De Benedictis (2016, p. 118), who points to testimony as an effective technique in reconstructing individual and collective memories, considering that: “[...] testimony fulfills the function of recognizing the memories evoked, of establishing a connection between present life and past experiences, of exchanging experiences.” Testimony is considered a “bridge” between the present and past experiences, linking the recollections evoked to what is intended to be observed in this time. The shared memories were taken as significant elements for the analysis of the results.

Therefore, we discuss the memories of interpersonal relationships in the pedagogical practice of retired teachers, as well as the experiences that marked their life trajectories, crossing beyond the school walls and returning to them in a constant movement of knowledge construction, through semi-structured interviews and the analysis of bibliographic references on the subject.

In line with De Benedictis (2016), regarding the value of testimony, the study carried out by Vieira (2022) confirms the effectiveness of this technique in studies on memory reconstruction, affirming that:

In this sense, testimonies emerge as an alternative for **valuing the experiences and life stories of individuals or groups** often ignored in their social context, giving voice to ordinary people, whose testimonies contribute to our understanding of the richness of social memory [our emphasis] (Vieira, 2022, p. 93).

The valorization of testimonies aimed to denounce the silence that often promotes the forgetting of individuals who are active agents in the process of social construction. In this way, the art of listening becomes necessary so that testimonies may effectively serve as a means of affirming the presence of these retired teachers in the collective memory of Aracatu, going beyond the walls of the school and reaching other social groups in the various roles played by these educators.

Through the testimonies, we sought to understand who these participants are—individuals who chose to contribute to the human formation of students who are part of their collective memories. In this context, we investigated the role of the teachers' lounge, as well as the significance of the experiences that this space made possible through the interpersonal relationships developed in the shared practice of teaching during the period now recalled.

With professor *Superação*, there was a surprise, as we had initially understood her silence as a refusal to collaborate with our research. My return visit was motivated by the intention to understand and record her resistance toward our study. However, what we heard were deep sighs as she recalled her memories as a retired teacher. When asked about remembering, she said:

"To remember is to bring back things and events, people. How those students dedicated themselves to learning, to becoming teachers! A time when solidarity was a reality here! A time of challenges too, as we were just starting secondary education [...]; I think remembering is to rethink what we did and how we did it, but today we think differently" (Interview with *Superação*, 2023).

Studies were carried out with theorists who engaged in reflections that support the concepts mentioned, from a perspective capable of encompassing the categories discussed. In this sense, authors such as Halbwachs (1990), Ricoeur (2007), Bondía

(2002), Nora (1993), De Benedictis (2016), among others, provided the theoretical foundation for this investigation.

In this scenario, we analyzed the teachers' lounge as a place of encounters, construction, and reconstruction of memories, through individual semi-structured interviews. The dialogue, which often began timidly, became a conversation filled with affectionate recollections and the recording of experiences lived in the teachers' lounge. For the research on the teaching trajectory, we developed the *Cartographic Narrative* as a methodology for the construction and reconstruction of teachers' individual and social memory.

Through the *Cartographic Narrative*, we sought to reconstruct the memory of retired teachers through their testimonies, fostering an understanding of the transformations arising from experiences that transcend the school walls. For this reason, testimonies constitute part of the methodological path, insofar as they enable the recollection of experiences that highlight the value of social relations as the foundation of human and professional formation.

Testimony is a narration, a trace of an experience, an indication of an event, grounded in the context of the facts. "Testimony is a social phenomenon" (De Benedictis, 2016, p. 118). De Benedictis also emphasizes the value of the narrative born from the subject of experience, often marked by a presence rendered invisible by official history. Therefore, giving voice to these retired teachers was one of the most noble tasks, considering the feelings that inhabit each narrative.

3 Findings and discussions of the study

It is in this concrete reality that the locus of this research resides: the teachers' lounge. A social place, according to De Benedictis (2016), as a space of belonging and identity construction. The author dialogues with Ricoeur (2007), emphasizing the lived space in which individuals live, work, and struggle. It is the social sphere where interactions between members of each group occur. In this sense, this place—the teachers' lounge—

is a place of experiences, knowledge, and the construction and reconstruction of memories.

To value this interaction, intentionally directed toward the formation of subjects, means to understand the importance of memory as a producer of knowledge. We visited several websites, conducting a Google search for “teachers’ lounge” between October and November 2022, and found a variety of descriptions regarding this environment, which is theoretically intended to host teachers in their daily work within the structural dynamics of the current educational system. Thus, it was observed that, among the many qualifications and meanings, the teachers’ lounge presents itself as a space for the teacher’s rest. A space of exchange with colleagues, of sharing, with the purpose of finding, in the collectivity of the teaching staff, solutions to the daily challenges of the classroom. The teachers’ lounge is, therefore, an environment for the interconnection of knowledge and experiences from different areas of expertise.

The meaningful exchanges resulting from the relationships established in this environment—both geographic and symbolic—are reflected in the testimony of a teacher whose experience highlights communion and dialogue as a collective practice. It is also a place that “hosts” a specific time to share frustrations, challenges, and successful experiences. As Halbwachs (1990) argues, memory is always anchored in space and time, since it is social relations that promote both individual and collective experiences. In an exploratory field study carried out in 2022, a retired teacher recalled

“Ah, if that table could talk [...]! It is the most important table in the school. How much was said there! I truly miss our conversations and the little coffee that had a special taste. The formal or informal meetings, grading, doing research, telling stories, listening to the colleague who arrived exhausted from the classroom [...]”
(Interview with *Arrependida*, 2022).

The retired teacher highlights the value of the relationships that permeate this lounge, emphasizing the importance of being at the table in the teachers’ lounge—an essential moment during conversations, dialogues, and activities in the construction of memories that marked the personal and collective life of that school community, especially for the teachers. The much-anticipated coffee break, enjoyed while reflecting on

pedagogical issues, as well as the chats that evoked the remembrance of exchanges of knowledge and experiences, are all recalled. For each teacher, a specific meaning is attributed to this lounge: a place of encounters—encounters with others and with oneself.

In view of the above, we elaborated a summary table of the participants' responses in order to highlight the perspectives teachers hold regarding the lounge, their interpretations that reflect expectations, and the discussions that deserve attention and visibility.

Box 1 – What is the Teachers' Lounge for?

EXPECTATIONS	REALITY
A very cozy place for rest [...] you know that comfortable place doctors have? Well, teachers need that too [...].	A meeting place to discuss so many things [...] students, classes, projects, but also to talk about our life outside of school.
Well-organized, with comfortable sofas to recharge energy.	A place to talk about our students' learning, to think of different activities, a place to learn and teach [...] so many beautiful things we have already done there [...].
An airy space, decorated with lightness and simplicity, because too much information wears out those who are already tired.	There we talk about the curriculum, students' situations, parents, colleagues, our family, dreams [...] it is a place for conversation.
A welcoming, clean, and pleasant place.	A place to meet colleagues to talk about work, but also to talk about the readings we do—books, films, series, the Bible, the reading of life.
A place for rest [...] I think teachers deserve it.	A space for conversation about our students' learning, exchanging pedagogical activities, projects, planning, grading tests [...].
A place where teachers could find tranquility.	The teachers' lounge contains within it an infinity of universes because each teacher is a world. There are the exact sciences, the pragmatic ones [...] those who give good advice, those who look with solidarity, but also those who envy, those who just want to talk and are unwilling to listen [...] it is a plural place.

Source: Field research (2022). Prepared by: MARQUES, I.S.N., 2023.

The box above highlights teachers' perceptions of the teachers' lounge and points to an understanding of this space as both an environment of interconnected social relations and a place of memories for educators. They conceive it as a personal space, intended for

rest, conversation, sharing, meetings, planning, grading, and casual talks, thus configuring it as a plural space.

The reports and testimonies collected use recollections as a means of reconstructing memories, formed through lived experiences, sharing, solidarity, learning, experiences, and expectations developed within the teachers' lounge. We understand that a passage narrated by one teacher reflects this reality regarding the experience of being in this space: "[...] *it is a plural place.*"

From this place of memory, we aimed to reconstruct those memories built through the exercise of human formation and professional growth. The relationships established with peers in the teachers' lounge produced memories that can be evoked as experiences. As Bondía (2002) explains:

Experience, the possibility that something may happen to us or touch us, requires a gesture of interruption, a gesture that is almost impossible in contemporary times: it requires stopping to think, stopping to look, stopping to listen, thinking more slowly, looking more slowly, and listening more slowly; stopping to feel, feeling more slowly, lingering over details, suspending opinion, suspending judgment, suspending will, suspending the automatism of action, cultivating attention and delicacy, opening eyes and ears, talking about what happens to us, learning slowness, listening to others, cultivating the art of encounter, keeping silence, having patience, and giving oneself time and space (Bondía, 2002, p. 19).

Thus, researching these relationships from the year 1982, when secondary education began in Aracatu, led us to the need to contextualize the prevailing educational reality for the final stage of Basic Education. It is important here to reflect on the role of the school as a social institution. Regarding the school's function, Nóvoa (2022) states:

The school is not exhausted at the individual level and constitutes a central institution for social life; finally, because the school cannot be seen merely as a private good, dragged into a consumerist logic, it must also be considered a public good and a common good (Nóvoa, 2022, p. 14).

Understanding the school as a common good, we believe it plays an important role in social dynamics, as it is responsible for promoting opportunities for the construction of knowledge accumulated throughout human history. Thus, the school is a space for all and

by all. Being part of society, it is also shaped by social groups, which, in their interpersonal relations, construct both individual and collective memories.

In other words, the school is, par excellence, a place of knowledge; however, there is not just one knowledge. It offers school knowledge integrated with the diverse knowledge that individual memory shares in meaningful and ongoing exchanges between different subjects, who, precisely because of their diversity, come together to form a rich cultural mosaic.

According to Nora (1993, p. 7), “places of memory exist because there are no longer means of memory,” meaning that spontaneous memory has been replaced by archives and records. What survives are places, linked to events and occurrences. “Places of memory” exist precisely because there is no longer a living memory, but rather a need to preserve traces, remnants of collective social recollections. It is in this context that studies on social memory are developed to value the memories of diverse social groups, including those of the teachers’ lounge for retired educators.

Places of memory persist in social subjects’ recollections because there is a need to protect them. The teachers’ lounge, therefore, represents a geographic space also imbued with meaning, according to each person’s lived experience, as memories are constructed and reconstructed anchored in a social space. According to Nora (1993, p. 9), “[...] memory is rooted in the concrete, in space, in gesture, in image, in object.” Thus, the meaning attributed to each object in the lounge is marked by the individual experiences of those who pass through, creating significance in both individual and collective experiences.

As memory is a multimodal field, various areas of study use it as a reference to explore different forms of cultural production in their social and historical aspects, presenting varied conceptions, since the need to understand and make sense of existence is constant in human formation and subjectivation processes.

We understand that the memory constructed by these educators in their relationships is permeated with emotions and represents knowledge that goes beyond the school curriculum, as it also carries understandings that transcend formal education. The willingness to listen to them enabled the reconstruction of significant memories produced

throughout their teaching careers and their collaboration in the formation of young people within and for the Aracatu community.

4 Final considerations

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This study enabled the recollection and reconstruction of memories of retired teachers in Aracatu-BA, formed within the teachers' lounge, during a temporal frame encompassing the implementation of Secondary Education in 1982 up to the conclusion of the careers of the pioneering educators involved in this initiative, now retired.

Conceiving the teachers' lounge as a place of memory not only facilitated the expansion of scientific studies and the collection of participants' narratives and testimonies, but also allowed for the construction of pillars supporting our goal of contributing to the academic community. This contribution lies in making visible the experiences, knowledge, and daily practices of teachers—their voices, encounters, and exchanges—thereby ensuring the scientific value of our work.

In this context, it was also observed that retired teachers continue to engage in other activities; nevertheless, they retain numerous memories of their teaching years, shaped by significant and meaningful experiences.

The study prompted reflections on issues regarding the social role of teachers and retired teachers, particularly in terms of valuing the memories constructed in the teachers' lounge. It encouraged consideration of whether or not the community acknowledges the retired teacher and the recognition of the work carried out throughout their teaching careers.

Although we confirm the multimodality of memory, we also recognize the existing gap in studies concerning the teachers' lounge as a place of memory, since the interactions taking place there provide opportunities for responsible action and engagement in social transformation.

The reconstruction of memories produced by retired teachers in the teachers' lounge confirms the objectives related to the dynamics of interpersonal relationships,

highlighting the plurality of knowledge that permeates this place of memories. Moreover, it underscores the diversity of these teachers beyond the school walls, indicating that the individual is a social being.

The theoretical framework selected was essential for establishing dialogues with participants and supporting the process of (re)construction, allowing us to achieve the study's first specific objective: to analyze the teachers' lounge as a space for encounters, and for the construction and reconstruction of memories.

Listening to retired teachers—through their words or their silence, which also communicates—the desire to be remembered and valued by society reveals the fulfillment of our task to give voice and visibility to these transformative agents. Often, they are prevented from expressing themselves because they are no longer considered workers and, by the system, are classified as “inactive,” as if they no longer “serve.”

The development of this study, which focused on memory, specifically within the teachers' lounge among retired educators, allowed us to rethink the function of the school and the social role of teachers. The experiences of this time left marks on us, reflecting the pursuit of knowledge of lived memory, as one participant narrates: “I think to recall is to think again about what we did and how we did it, but today we think differently.”

We observed, in the forward steps and necessary setbacks along this journey rich in experiences, that memory production occurs within the social group, more specifically in the relationships established there. Participants' testimonies made it clear that the teachers' lounge is a place of memory. As teacher *Saudade* expressed upon smelling the alcohol on the exam papers: “[...] *it feels like I am smelling the exams.*”

We also noted the necessity of this interaction and, above all, the knowledge derived from the exchanges that became necessary, as they generated new insights while facilitating the evocation of memories “archived” in memory. In conducting this research, we understood that memory is both individual and collective, encompassing the subject in their subjectivity while acknowledging the experiences within social groups to which they belong. Moreover, living, feeling, and experiencing the school is equivalent to living the school community.

Thus, recollection is an opportunity to revisit this space and time, since meaningful memories become evident through this process of individual and collective reconstruction. This process does not occur as a mere “retrieval,” for memory cannot be fully retrieved; rather, recollection allows a return to the deeper “repositories” of preserved memory.

In this way, the collaborating participants (retired teachers) are not the “same” visitors of that space, just as the space and time have changed; life imposes movement, and within this dynamic, memory remains alive in its reconstruction.

The memories constructed by these educators in the teachers’ lounge throughout this period—from the beginning of their teaching careers to retirement—were shared with us through a reconstruction process, as memory is alive and embedded in the dynamics of society. For the participants of this study, recollection evokes pride, nostalgia, and gratitude, but also sadness and disappointment. As one participant stated: “[...] *no one here communicates anything to the retired teacher; it’s as if we do not even exist.*”

The study highlighted the existing gap between retired teachers and society, particularly between retired teachers and the school once they conclude their teaching careers. In a society focused on productivity, they appear no longer to “serve” the utilitarian system. The retired teacher becomes “inactive.” The community does not perceive the retired teacher as an active agent. This underscores the need for further studies on the reality of teachers’ experiences in this new phase of life—retirement.

In this regard, beyond public policy, it is important that the educational institution in which these teachers served maintain a “memorial record” of its retired teachers as a form of recognition and appreciation of their work, with the aim of contributing to the formation of individuals capable of transformative action.

The institution could also, within its academic calendar, invite retired teachers to give talks about their experiences, knowledge, and practices as a means of dialogue with students’ knowledge. Such activities could facilitate the inclusion of retirees in the educational process, while also highlighting their professional contributions, fostering students’ respect for the school’s human memory, and encouraging students to recognize themselves as participants and producers of memories within the educational process.

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