

## Burnout and professional identity: teaching between pedagogical meaning and the logic of capital

### ARTICLE

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### Abstract

This study examines the process of functional readaptation of teacher Alessandra Alves Ferreira, highlighting mental illness among educators as an expression of the contradictions between the pedagogical meaning of teaching and the logic of capital. Grounded in the New Cultural History and in biographical-hermeneutic Oral History, the research reconstructs the educator's trajectory, marked by a diagnosis of burnout syndrome and by the precarization of teaching work. The findings indicate that teachers' psychological suffering cannot be reduced to individual fragility, but must be understood in light of alienation and the commodification of education, which weaken the emancipatory dimension of pedagogical practice. The narratives also reveal practices of resistance, self-care, and solidarity among colleagues as strategies for persistence and identity reconstruction. The study further points out limitations in Ceapro's actions and reaffirms the need for public policies that recognize mental health as an essential condition for educational work.

**Keywords:** Women's biography. Mental illness. Burnout. Teacher identity. Logic of capital.

### Burnout e identidade profissional: a docência entre o sentido pedagógico e a lógica do capital

### Resumo

O estudo analisa o processo de readaptação funcional da professora Alessandra Alves Ferreira, da Educação Infantil do Município de Fortaleza, destacando o adoecimento mental docente como expressão das contradições entre o sentido pedagógico da docência e a lógica do capital. Fundamentado na Nova História Cultural e na História Oral de caráter biográfico-hermenêutico, o trabalho reconstitui a trajetória da educadora, marcada pelo diagnóstico de síndrome de burnout e pela precarização do trabalho docente. Evidencia-se que o sofrimento psíquico das professoras não pode ser reduzido à fragilidade individual, mas deve ser compreendido à luz da alienação e da mercantilização da educação, que enfraquecem a dimensão emancipadora da prática pedagógica. As narrativas revelam também práticas de resistência, cuidado de si e solidariedade entre colegas como estratégias de permanência e reconstrução identitária. O estudo aponta ainda limitações nas ações da Ceapro e reafirma a necessidade de

políticas públicas que reconheçam a saúde mental como condição essencial ao trabalho educativo.

**Palavras-chave:** Biografia de mulheres. Adoecimento mental. Burnout. Identidade docente. Lógica do capital.

## 1 Introduction

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Teacher mental illness constitutes an expression of the structural contradictions of capitalist society, which transforms teaching into a commodity and reduces professional identity to a productivist function. As Marx (2011) emphasizes, under capitalism, human labor is converted into exchange value, and the worker becomes alienated from their own activity, from the product, and from themselves. This logic reaches the public school, where teaching work is subjected to targets, indicators, and measurable results, distorting its formative and emancipatory character. Antunes (2004) adds that the intensification and precarization of work are concrete manifestations of this subordination of life to capital, which imposes accelerated and dehumanizing rhythms. In the same direction, Dejours (1994) understands psychological suffering as a product of work organization, when the desire to perform a meaningful activity comes into conflict with conditions that prevent its realization. *Burnout* syndrome, in this context, does not appear merely as an individual clinical phenomenon, but as a historical and social outcome of work intensification and the precarization of objective conditions in the public school.

Thus, understanding the process of functional readaptation of teacher Alessandra Ferreira requires situating her trajectory between two contradictory poles: the pedagogical meaning of teaching, oriented toward human and emancipatory formation, and the logic of capital, which empties teaching work of its critical and emancipatory character, subordinating it to quantifiable results and mercantile rationality (Marx, 2011; Mészáros, 2008; Antunes, 2004).

The study is situated within the field of the history of women's education, specifically that of women educators from Ceará, and is dedicated to understanding the mental illness of a Basic Education teacher in the municipality of Fortaleza, specifically

Alessandra Alves Ferreira. This theme has gained increasing relevance in recent decades due to the rise in leaves of absence caused by psychological disorders and the consolidation of functional readaptation as a strategy for remaining in teaching work.

To this end, we biograph the teacher Alessandra Alves Ferreira, hereinafter Alessandra Ferreira, daughter of Maria de Fátima Alves Ferreira, a seamstress, and José Alberto Ferreira, a boiler operator, born in 1973 in Fortaleza. She has 23 years of experience in teaching in regular classrooms of the Municipal Government of Fortaleza. She holds a degree in Pedagogy from Universidade Vale do Acaraú (UVA) and a specialization as a Psychopedagogue from Universidade Estadual do Ceará (UECE).

In 2022, the professional began the process of medical leave, registered under ICD-11 QD 85, and had her duties readapted at the Jornalista Demócrito Dummar Early Childhood Education Center (2024), where she had previously worked as a teacher of Infantil IV.

When analyzing the biography of Alessandra Ferreira, we observe the elements that initiate her mental illness and culminate in the process of teachers' readaptation: a routine dimension that is little visible within the classroom context, permeated by stigmas, identity displacements, and a sense of professional failure. These elements reveal the tensions between the demands of the prevailing educational model and the limits of mental health in the exercise of teaching.

From this perspective, the importance of listening to narratives about the process of teaching readaptation, articulated with mental illness, is highlighted as a pathway to understanding the multiple dimensions of suffering that are often rendered invisible in statistics and official discourses. Thus, by giving visibility to singular experiences, such accounts make it possible to understand educational work not only as a professional practice, but also as a space for the production of subjectivities, for confronting the contradictions inherent to the school context, and for constructing possible forms of resistance (Fialho, 2024).

We conceptualize mental illness as a historical and social phenomenon, resulting from the contradictions between work demands and the concrete conditions of their

realization. According to Dejours (1994), psychological suffering emerges when there is a mismatch between the desire to perform work with meaning and quality and the impossibility of doing so due to labor organization. In the case of teaching, this is translated into symptoms such as anxiety, depression, chronic stress, and *burnout* syndrome, linked to work intensification, loss of pedagogical autonomy, and the devaluation of the profession (Souza; Leite, 2011).

In this field, we refer to the conception of work understood as a fundamental ontological category of human existence, which constitutes the basis of sociability and of the historical process of humanization of the subject. Oriented toward transforming not only the object but also the human being through nature, in order to develop creative and social capacities, therefore “to work is not exclusively to transform an object into something else, into another object, but to become involved at the same time in a fundamental praxis in which the worker is also transformed by their work” (Tardif; Lessard, 2007, p. 28).

It is through work and social relations that the human condition as a social being is consolidated. This relationship, however, is not dissociated from proximity to nature, but rather redefines the relationship with it. Throughout history and through transformations in modes of production, relations between human beings and work acquire distinct contours.

With the appropriation of labor power by other human beings, the production of material goods goes beyond the satisfaction of essential needs. Surplus labor time comes to be converted into exchange value, and living labor is subjected to the logic of the commodity. As Marx (2011) points out, the value of the product does not reside in its intrinsic utility, but in the quantum of socially necessary labor for its production, which introduces commodity fetishism, a relationship between people disguised as a relationship between things.

School education, especially within the scope of basic education, is embedded in the social and economic dynamics of contemporary society. In this movement, there is a growing commodification of knowledge, driven by hegemonic groups that hold power and influence prevailing pedagogical conceptions. Such influences are reflected directly in teacher education, guiding practices and values aligned with market interests. According

to Mészáros (2008), education under capitalism tends to serve the reproduction of the logic of capital, transforming knowledge into a commodity and the teacher into a functional agent of this machinery. In the same direction, teaching subjectivity is captured by this productivist and bureaucratic logic, which contributes to mental illness (Antunes, 2004).

The biographical study, in narrative form, asks what challenges are faced by the tenured teacher of the Municipal Network of Fortaleza, Alessandra Alves Ferreira, that were reflected in her mental illness and in the constitution of her teaching identity during the process of functional readaptation. This research focuses on the period between 1998 and 2024, which corresponds to Alessandra's work in the Municipal Network of Fortaleza, from her entry as a teacher to the process of functional readaptation.

The choice of this biographee is justified by representing an emblematic case of the contradictions experienced by early childhood education teachers, as it brings together elements that articulate a long professional trajectory, a diagnosis of *burnout* syndrome, and identity displacement resulting from the precarization of work. In addition, her willingness to narrate her own history, recognizing illness as part of a historical and collective process, made it possible to understand, from a singular experience, the subjective and structural dimensions of teaching suffering, aligning with the biographical hermeneutic perspective adopted in this study (Fialho, 2024).

To dimension this significance, it is proposed to examine the process of functional readaptation of teacher Alessandra Alves Ferreira, considering teacher mental illness resulting from the precarization of working conditions, as well as the role of the Cell for Attention and Promotion of the Health of Education Professionals in this context. As specific objectives, we propose to describe the challenges experienced by teacher Alessandra Alves in the process of professional readaptation in teaching and to identify the actions implemented by the Cell for Attention and Promotion of the Health of Education Professionals (Ceapro) in the face of teacher mental illness and the precarization of teaching work.

## 2 Methodology

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This study adopts a qualitative methodology, theoretically grounded in the New Cultural History, which emerged from the third generation of the *École des Annales* (1968 to 1989), known as *Nouvelle Histoire* and defined by François Dosse as “history in crumbs.” Its main representatives include Jacques Le Goff, Pierre Nora, Philippe Ariès, and Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie. This phase broke with earlier conceptions by privileging the history of mentalities and social representations, highlighting the experiences, memories, and symbolizations of marginalized, silenced, or repressed groups (Costa; Santos, 2023).

In this context, the New Cultural History, strongly influenced by postmodern perspectives, came to recognize oral accounts as relevant sources for historical analysis. Through memory, understood as “[...] an essential element of what is commonly called identity, both individual and collective, whose pursuit is one of the fundamental activities of individuals and societies today, in fever and anguish” (Le Goff, 1984, p. 46), it becomes possible to access subjective and collective dimensions of the past. It is within this perspective that the biography of teacher Alessandra Alves is situated, whose trajectory was analyzed using the methodology of Oral History, by approaching “[...] oral narratives used as central elements in the research [...]” (Fialho; Cunha; Vasconcelos, 2024, p. 4), which takes on a broader dimension through a study from a biographical hermeneutic perspective (Dosse, 2020).

The production of research data occurred through the analysis of a biographical interview, cross referenced with documentary sources concerning the personal and professional trajectory of the biographee. These sources included school documents related to functional readaptation, medical certificates and leave reports issued by the municipal medical board, as well as teacher education materials such as certificates, lesson plans, and records of pedagogical practices, in addition to an institutional interview with the Teacher Health Support Cell, which discusses processes of collective illness and institutional forms of support. The cross analysis of these sources with the oral account made it possible to achieve a broader and more contextualized understanding of the

experience of illness and teaching readaptation, as recommended by Fialho (2024), who emphasizes that Oral History is strengthened through the dialogue among memory, documents, and social context.

Regarding ethical aspects, it is noted that the interview with the biographee was conducted in an open space of her preference on August 13, 2025, lasting 53 minutes and 35 seconds. The content was transcribed, organized into text, and subsequently validated by the participant. It is emphasized that Alessandra signed the Informed Consent Form, in which the possible risks and discomforts of participation were detailed, as well as the measures adopted to minimize them. The participant also expressly authorized the disclosure of her identity in this study.

### 3 Teaching between emancipation and alienation: pedagogical meaning and the logic of capital

Teacher Alessandra Alves completed her teacher education in the *Curso Normal* (1992 to 1996), offered by the Centro Específico de Formação e Aperfeiçoamento do Magistério (CEFAM), in a full-time format at the Instituto de Educação do Ceará, located in the municipality of Fortaleza, completing up to the fourth pedagogical year of this track, which “[...] was discontinued when its quantitative reach was still limited, and there was also no policy for making use of the teachers trained by the centers within public school networks” (Saviani, 2009, p. 147).

For long periods, the *Curso Normal* constituted the main pathway for training women teachers for primary schools, advocated by the Normal Schools through a specific form of preparation. With Opinion No. 349/72 (Brazil-MEC-CFE, 1972), approved on April 6, 1972, the specific teaching credential was reorganized into a modality; thus, the former *Curso Normal* gave way to a 2nd-level track (Saviani, 2009).

Alessandra Ferreira (2025) mentions that, at CEFAM, full-time dedication was required, since the students remained in the school space throughout the day, in a full-time schedule. It is also noted that, up to the third year of the program, students received a

scholarship, a resource intended to make their continued attendance feasible and to ensure conditions for the continuity of the formative process.

Teaching, historically influenced by feminization, has been associated both with the devaluation of the profession and with the expansion of possibilities for women's insertion into the labor market. Under this interpretation, teaching became a space for the construction of teaching work and cultural practices. According to Stascxak, Mouta, Costa (2023), from the perspective of women's education in Ceará, linked to the history of its incoherent and conflictual multiplicities, the diversity of various cultural practices in society is understood, primarily with regard to the educational field.

According to the biographee's account, in the period when she began her teaching career (1998), as a temporary teacher at Escola Estadual Joaquim Aguiar, located in the municipality of Maracanaú, Ceará, she began working with Learning Cycles. At that time, the fourth pedagogical year enabled teaching up to the fifth grade (currently the 4th year of elementary school). From this perspective, we understand that "a teacher's professional path is usually composed of various experiences, especially when one does not yet have stability" (Oliveira; Pereira; Fialho, 2023, p. 809).

With the reformulation of the 1996 LDB, there was a reconfiguration of responsibilities between the state and municipalities:

The LDB of 1996 began to require that every teacher had to have higher education. But at that time, in 1998, I obtained a contract as a temporary teacher in the state system. It was also determined that the state would be responsible for secondary education and the municipality for basic education [...], but because I was in transition, I was able to teach the cycles. Learning Cycles, which was a proposal in which there was no grade retention (Ferreira, 2025).

Learning Cycles<sup>1</sup> were implemented starting in the 1990s as an alternative to annual grade repetition. The proposal aimed to ensure continuous progression, but it was

<sup>1</sup> Learning Cycles were implemented following Law No. 9,394/1996 as an alternative to annual grade repetition, organizing schooling into longer instructional periods; in practice, they were criticized for masking indicators of school failure (Brasil, 1996).

widely criticized by teachers, as emphasized by Alessandra Ferreira (2025), for being perceived as a way of concealing structural school failure through a “makeup” of educational indicators.

She earned a degree in Pedagogy in 2002 from UVA, through a special program<sup>2</sup>. After being approved in the civil service examination for a tenured teaching position with the Municipal Government of Fortaleza (PMF), she was appointed to work initially in Early Childhood Education and Elementary Education schools, working specifically in the area of Early Childhood Education.

Shortly after assuming her duties with the PMF, she was called by the *Crede* of Maracanaú to work with the “[...] *Tempo de Avançar* of elementary education (TAM)<sup>3</sup> and the *Tempo de Avançar* of secondary education (TAF)<sup>4</sup>. It was a way to accelerate and correct, and the indicators increased. It was a ‘makeup’ [...] of secondary education” (Ferreira, 2025).

At the beginning of her teaching career, the biographee worked concurrently in both municipal systems and revealed a professional trajectory influenced by initial enthusiasm and a strong identification with teaching, especially in work with Early Childhood Education and Youth and Adult Education (EJA). Alessandra Ferreira (2025) describes teaching as a choice shaped by affection and commitment to the act of teaching. As she states, “I enjoyed being with children, teaching, and being in the classroom. That fulfilled me, it was what I wanted to do” (Ferreira, 2025). This perception highlights the dimension of meaning in work, which is fundamental to the constitution of teaching identity (Facci, 2004), but which, over time, was strained by conditions of precarization.

Her educational trajectory, from CEFAM to *lato sensu* continuing education, signaled a process of professional construction permeated by public policies of both

<sup>2</sup> A modality aimed at meeting the demand for the training of teachers already working in basic education, especially those who did not yet hold a full teaching degree, composed of intensive and modular courses designed to meet the minimum training requirement established by Law No. 9,394/1996.

<sup>3</sup> It is an acceleration program created to address age grade mismatch, allowing the completion of school stages within a reduced timeframe.

<sup>4</sup> It is a similar initiative applied to secondary education, focused on rapid completion, but frequently criticized as a strategy for cosmetically inflating educational indicators.

incentive and restriction, reflecting the contradictions of the Brazilian educational system. In this context, she values her working conditions, in which one teaches “[...] for the money [...] but with love. And everything you do will flow” (Ferreira, 2025).

Teaching work, from the historical-critical perspective, should be understood as an intellectual activity and a social practice that mediates the appropriation of knowledge historically produced by humanity (Saviani, 2008). In this pedagogical sense, to teach means contributing to human emancipation, enabling omnilateral formation and the development of criticality. This understanding ties teaching to a formative project that transcends the technical dimension and affirms itself as an ethical, political, and social practice.

However, under the logic of capital, this same work is transformed into a commodity, emptied of its emancipatory character, and subordinated to productivist rationality. As Marx (2011) explains, human labor is reduced to exchange value, establishing commodity fetishism: social relations appear as relations between things. In the school, this process is manifested through the quantification of results, curricular standardization, and the intensification of tasks, which become sources of alienation and illness (Oliveira, 2004; Antunes, 2004). Thus, teacher *burnout* expresses the contradiction between pedagogical meaning and the logic of capital, materializing in the loss of meaning, exhaustion, and the teacher’s depersonalization (Maslach; Leiter, 2017).

In this arena, teaching work has been progressively subordinated to the logic of productivity and marked by the precarization of labor conditions, which contributes to the emptying of its formative and emancipatory meaning. This process directly impacts teacher education, promoting practices and values increasingly aligned with market interests, to the detriment of a critical and transformative education. The teacher’s subjectivity, in turn, is captured by an instrumental rationality that reduces them to a functional piece within a bureaucratic and competitive machinery, thereby fostering mental illness and compromising professional and personal integrity.

The precarization of teaching work constitutes the structuring axis of the reported experience, manifesting itself in learning acceleration programs, cycle-based organization,

overloaded classes, excessive noise in the classroom, and interpersonal relationships marked by stress and verbal violence, shaping an adverse work environment. In this context, the first signs of *burnout* syndrome emerge through physical somatization, emotional exhaustion, and a loss of meaning in work.

The commodification of knowledge intensifies the precarization and devaluation of teaching work, in contrast to teacher Alessandra's account, who, when she began her activities in the pedagogical field, emphasized the ideal of "[...] forming a critical, participatory citizen who builds their own history. That was the motto. Developing criticality, working on competencies" (Ferreira, 2025). This perspective consolidated the ideal of a democratic public school, moving in the opposite direction from the hegemonic thinking and practices that sustain the interests of the ruling class.

Under this interpretation, teaching work is viewed from a Marxist perspective as a social practice and intellectual activity that mediates the appropriation of knowledge historically produced by humanity. However, for Mészáros (2008), under capital, education is instrumentalized as a means of social reproduction, and the teacher's work is emptied of its emancipatory character.

Alessandra Ferreira was appointed to take up her position after passing the civil service examination of the Municipal Government of Maracanaú (2005) and began to deepen her teacher education, investing in the field of Psychopedagogy at Universidade Estadual do Ceará (UECE) in 2006. After years of professional practice,

Fatigue started to set in. It was very hard. [...] But it was exactly when I reached twenty that I began... The battery started to run down. The patience was no longer there. Even though you have the discernment you need. [...] When you get home from work, your problems [...] come, all at once. You have to know how to manage it. I always knew how to manage that very well (Ferreira, 2025).

The problem worsened with the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>5</sup> while she was teaching Infantil IV. Due to the level of noise in the classroom in the PMF system and the strain of teaching under those conditions, the first manifestations of illness emerged in her body, in the form of pains that were interpreted as rheumatological problems. In her words: “I started to feel real pain. I thought it was arthritis, arthrosis. And I went to see a general practitioner. I didn’t look for a psychologist” (Ferreira, 2025).

This process reveals the somatization of psychological suffering, a frequent phenomenon among teachers, who often seek medical care before recognizing that their distress is work-related (Dejours, 1994).

Subsequently, teacher Alessandra Ferreira, based on clinical examinations, found that her pain had a psychological origin and, given the need for treatment, sought psychiatric care. The specialist initially placed her on leave for twenty days, initiating a process of psychological and psychiatric follow-up, at which point the teacher acknowledged: “[...] it was difficult to accept that the profession I had chosen was harming me” (Ferreira, 2025). In this sense, we corroborate Saviani (2008), who argues that teaching is a work of human mediation, whose emptying leads to a feeling of powerlessness. Here, the core of the contradiction experienced by teachers becomes evident: teaching, historically linked to the pedagogical purpose of forming critical and emancipated citizens, is converted into a source of wear and alienation. This displacement is a direct expression of the logic of capital, which turns the teacher into a cog in a system oriented toward indicators, targets, and control, obscuring the formative dimension of education (Mészáros, 2008).

The medical recognition was decisive for Alessandra’s suffering to be named. As she recalls: “The psychiatrist put me on leave for twenty days, with a diagnosis of *burnout*” (Ferreira, 2025). Accordingly, we stress that *burnout* is a work-specific phenomenon,

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<sup>5</sup> It is an infectious disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus, declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization in 2020, which led to the suspension of in-person classes and intensified teachers’ workload due to the emergency adaptation to remote teaching (WHO, 2004).

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classified in the ICD-11 (WHO, 2021) as an occupational phenomenon (QD85) and that it cannot be reduced to personal fragility. According to Maslach and Leiter (2017), it is characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced professional accomplishment.

Alessandra Ferreira (2025) describes that the illness is not an individual collapse, but the consequence of a historical process of teacher devaluation, in which the choice of a life project (teaching) comes into conflict with professional identity in the face of illness. In this arena, Vygotsky (2009) indicates that subjectivity is constituted in social relations; therefore, the feeling of being “overtaken” is not individual, but a reflection of changes in the educational system. Thus, the affirmation of professional identity functions as a mechanism of resistance against the alienation of work.

The dimensions described in the account highlight the precarization of teaching work and the centrality of the subjective dimension in teacher Alessandra Ferreira's illness, by exposing counterpoints between feelings of insufficiency, the perception of being overtaken, and the difficulty of admitting that the chosen profession, once a source of identity and pride, had become a cause of suffering.

Fatigue, impatience, and physical pain constitute signs of *burnout*, aggravated by noise, inadequate acoustics, and coexistence with stressed colleagues who shouted at students. According to Maslach and Leiter (2017), *burnout* is situated within a framework of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a sense of low accomplishment.

From this perspective, the precariousness of objective working conditions (inadequate infrastructure, excessive noise, conflictual interpersonal relations) acts as a trigger for somatization and psychological suffering. As Facci (2004) points out, the teacher internalizes this wear as a personal failure when, in fact, it reflects the social conditions of work.

The functional readaptation of teacher Alessandra Ferreira, which took place in 2024, represented, on the one hand, stigma and a sense of disqualification in relation to her colleagues and, on the other, relief and the possibility of remaining within the school

environment, performing duties related to management support, project management, and document organization.

In this process, the teacher expresses feelings of insufficiency and of being outdated, but also reaffirms pride in her trajectory and respect for herself, highlighting herself as “[...] victorious for still being in the school” (Ferreira, 2025). This ambivalence reveals a teaching subjectivity marked by the contradiction between exhaustion and self-recognition as a professional.

Teacher Alessandra Ferreira reaffirmed that she has not ceased to be a teacher, but criticized the educational system for offering only punctual and superficial actions to promote health. In this sense, she emphasized the urgency of structuring public policies focused on teacher health, aiming to re-signify her pedagogical work outside the classroom through the welcoming stance of the institution in which she works and through listening to colleagues, carried out via life narratives (Ferreira, 2025).

#### **4 Actions of the cell for attention and promotion of health of the municipal secretariat of Fortaleza in the face of teacher mental illness and the precarization of work**

The analysis of Alessandra Ferreira’s trajectory also reveals the absence of institutional support in coping with her illness. At no point in her narrative does the teacher mention having sought Ceapro. This unit was created by the Municipality of Fortaleza to provide physical and mental health care for teachers and is located at Rua Dona Leopoldina, 907, Centro. The cell “[...] presents four areas of action, through which it operationalizes several actions and projects; learn more by clicking on each area: mental health, vocal health, movement health, and nutritional health” (Aprof, 2025).

In line with the objective of this study, we focus on the mental health area. Thus, it is observed that the teacher, while fully immersed in a process of illness, did not identify Ceapro as a space for welcoming and support. This indicates that dissemination and outreach have not yet effectively reached the subjects for whom they are intended, as she reports: “[...] I didn’t know about it until you told me” (Ferreira, 2025). We understand that

the lack of recourse to the cell does not stem from refusal, but from a lack of knowledge about the existence and functioning of the agency. This scenario reinforces the gap as a structural problem in the dissemination of the services offered and highlights the urgency of expanding Ceapro's reach as a public policy for supporting teachers in relation to mental illness.

The interview conducted with the Ceapro team indicates that “the agency provides services in psychology, nutrition, speech therapy, relational psychomotricity, in addition to activities aimed at promoting well-being, such as water aerobics and functional training” (Freitas, 2025). The central objective is to offer support and prevention, without replacing medical care, but rather providing a space for listening and care. However, as emphasized by the team itself, “there are limits to outreach” (Freitas, 2025), since access depends on teachers' registration through online forms and on the engagement of school administrators in disseminating the initiative.

The case of Alessandra Ferreira, who did not access these services, concretely illustrates this gap between the proposal of care and effective teacher adherence. Beyond the problem of dissemination, it is also necessary to consider the existence of a culture of non-care among teachers. From this perspective, resistance to seeking support reflects not only a lack of information, but also the historical difficulty of the profession in recognizing itself as a subject deserving of care, given that teaching is marked by sacrifice and self-denial.

Alessandra's absence as a user of this service shows that, even when actions aimed at teacher well-being exist, their effectiveness depends on objective conditions of dissemination, access, and social legitimacy. Thus, the teacher's account, in dialogue with data from the institutional interview, points to the need to overcome cultural and structural barriers so that teachers may understand Ceapro as a legitimate space for welcoming and listening.

The subjective constitution of teacher Alessandra in the face of illness, as indicated by Vigotski (2001), can be understood through the relationship between sense and meaning. For the author, meaning corresponds to the social and stable aspect of the word,

whereas sense refers to the singular and dynamic dimension it acquires for the subject in a concrete situation. As he states, “the sense of a word is always a dynamic, variable, and complex formation, which has several zones of stability and instability. Meaning, by contrast, is only one of the most stable zones of sense” (Vigotski, 2001, p. 465). In this way, teachers’ mental health is directly related to the sense attributed to work and to the possibility for teachers to recognize themselves as subjects of care.

When we return to the narrative of Alessandra Ferreira’s early trajectory, it can be observed that while teaching held a socially valued meaning, linked to teaching and caring, the personal feelings that emerged over the course of her career were crossed by exhaustion, suffering, and, later, the need for readaptation. This dialectic between the meaning of the profession and the senses attributed to practice reveals how the precarization of teaching work impacts subjectivity, reconfiguring professional identity and possible modes of resistance.

Capitalism, as it consolidates itself as a hegemonic system, redefines the very nature of work by transforming it into a commodity. Marx (2011) explains that, under capitalism, human labor is reduced to a commodity, subordinating use value to exchange value. This process generates the “commodity fetishism” in which social relations appear as relations between things. In the educational field, this is manifested through the standardization and quantification of teaching, transforming teaching into a mere productive cog, as observed by Antunes (2004). This process contributes to the emptying of pedagogical meaning and to the psychological suffering of teachers.

The man who has no free time at his disposal, whose life, apart from purely physical interruptions such as sleep, meals, *etc.*, is entirely absorbed by his work for the capitalist, is less than a beast of burden. He is a mere machine, physically shattered and intellectually brutalized, producing wealth for others (Antunes, 2004, p. 110).

Given this interpretation, understanding teaching work and its impacts on mental health requires a critical reading of the objective and subjective conditions imposed by capitalist sociability. Teachers’ psychological suffering is not reducible to an individual

issue; it is rooted in the structural contradictions of the world of work, demanding analyses that articulate subjectivity, history, and social determination.

It is important to emphasize that work is an ontological activity essential to the process of humanization (Marx, 2011), but that, under the logic of capital, it is perverted into a source of alienation and suffering (Alves, 2007). In teaching, this contradiction is expressed in the intensification of tasks, the loss of autonomy, and the emptying of pedagogical meaning, as well as in the questioning of professional identity in the face of this context.

Dejours's (1994) contributions are central to understanding the relationship between work organization and mental suffering, as he shows that suffering does not stem only from individual factors, but from the way work is structured and managed. In the context of readaptation, it is common to perceive a disconnection and the invisibilization of teachers' knowledge in relation to pedagogical practice.

In this sense, Historical-Critical Pedagogy (Saviani, 2008) offers resources for thinking about omnilateral formation and the overcoming of forms of alienation present in the capitalist school. Teaching, understood as a social practice that mediates the appropriation of historically constructed knowledge, needs to be reclaimed in its critical, emancipatory, and transformative dimension.

Facci's (2004) contributions are also fundamental for understanding the constitution of teaching subjectivity in dialogue with the material conditions of educational practice. Mental health, from this perspective, cannot be conceived in isolation from the social totality; it must be analyzed in light of the historical, political, and economic determinations that shape school work.

Finally, the life narrative of the readapted teacher Alessandra Ferreira, as an expression of historicity and subjectivity in motion, becomes a methodological tool for understanding the senses attributed to illness and to the experience of work. By listening to the voices of women, specifically teachers, who are affected by this dynamic, the aim is not only to map adverse conditions, but also to recognize the forms of resistance and identity reconstruction that emerge even in contexts of precarization.

Teachers' work, historically devalued and feminized, has been traversed by increasing demands for productivity, bureaucratization, and control, especially in public school systems. According to Saviani (2008), teaching, from a historical-critical perspective, must be understood as an intellectual activity that requires objective and subjective conditions to be realized as an emancipatory practice. However, the current scenario imposes structural obstacles that intensify suffering.

In her narrative, teacher Alessandra Ferreira highlighted self-care as an act of resistance: remaining in the school, caring for one's own mental health, and defending solidarity among teachers are dimensions that reveal subjective and collective strategies for confronting precarization. When the biographee states, "Don't let go. No one lets go of anyone's hand. Don't let go of yours" (Ferreira, 2025), the collective dimension of resistance comes into view. Solidarity among teachers emerges as a way of confronting alienation, recovering the pedagogical meaning of teaching amid the impositions of capital. From this perspective, subjective and collective resistance represents a counter-hegemonic movement, albeit limited, in the face of the emptying of school work. If, on the one hand, *burnout* is experienced individually, on the other, the way out that is pointed to is collective and grounded in solidarity in the face of a system managed by results-driven practices that at times neglect teachers' subjectivities.

To address these challenges, the Municipal Secretariat of Education (SME), through Ordinary Law No. 11,082/2021, which includes the "Lilac October" campaign in the Official Calendar of the Municipality of Fortaleza, aims to promote mental health and the appreciation of teachers in the Municipality of Fortaleza, with the objective of strengthening emotional health within the school community. The program includes welcoming activities, listening spaces, and collective support, aiming to implement a culture of mental health prevention and cycles of socioemotional care, with the participation of students, families, and education professionals (Sousa, 2024, p. 86).

Alessandra Ferreira, currently assigned to the same institution, CEI Jornalista Demócrito Dummar, is readapted and performs management support duties while she awaits her retirement.

## 5 Final considerations

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This study aimed to understand how mental illness and the process of functional readaptation impact the professional identity of Basic Education teachers, taking as reference the trajectory of teacher Alessandra Alves Ferreira from the Municipal Network of Fortaleza. Grounded in the New Cultural History and anchored in Oral History with a biographical-hermeneutic character, the methodological path involved analyzing the biographical interview, cross-referenced with functional documents, institutional interviews, and the teacher's pedagogical materials. This approach made it possible to understand, from a singular experience, the social and subjective determinations of teacher illness and the meanings attributed to readaptation as a way of remaining in educational work.

Teacher Alessandra Alves's narratives show that teacher mental illness cannot be understood only as an isolated individual experience, but as an expression of a collective and historical process, traversed by the precarization of working conditions. Her trajectory reveals the transition from an early professional stage marked by enthusiasm and a sense of purpose in teaching to an experience permeated by emotional exhaustion, somatization of physical symptoms, and, finally, a diagnosis of *burnout* syndrome. This experience revealed not only the limits of remaining in teaching, but also the subjective and institutional challenges of her functional readaptation.

Alessandra's lack of awareness of the services offered by Ceapro reveals another contradiction: although there are initiatives of welcoming and prevention, their dissemination still does not effectively reach teachers in distress. This gap demonstrates the need to consolidate such experiences as broad, legitimized, and accessible public policies, so that teachers recognize these spaces not merely as complementary activities, but as places of care and listening, showing that readaptation, if not accompanied by care policies, may represent only the displacement of the problem.

In this sense, the analysis of the narratives brought by the biographee confirms the central objective of this research: to understand how mental illness and functional readaptation impact teachers' professional identity, producing feelings of insufficiency,

displacement, and loss of meaning. However, Alessandra Ferreira also points to practices of resistance and self-care, which become fundamental for subjective reconstruction and for the possibility of remaining in education.

Alessandra Ferreira's experience allows us to state that teacher *burnout* is not an isolated event, but the materialization of the struggle between the pedagogical meaning of teaching and the logic of capital. If, on the one hand, teaching represents a space for human and emancipatory formation, on the other, mercantile rationality prevails, capturing teaching as a technical, productivist, and bureaucratic function. The result is exhaustion, the loss of professional identity, and the need for functional readaptation, experienced by the teacher as displacement and stigma, but also as a possibility for re-signification.

Recognizing this contradiction means understanding that teachers' mental health can only be fully ensured through structuring public policies that confront the precarization and commodification of education. Alessandra's case shows that self-care and solidarity among teachers can function as practices of resistance, but that, beyond individual effort, it is essential to confront the logic of capital that perverts educational work. Only then will it be possible to restore to teaching its original pedagogical meaning, linked to human emancipation and to the construction of a more just society.

We conclude that by recognizing illness not as individual weakness, but as a result of the structural contradictions of education, this study contributes to affirming that practices of resistance, self-care, and institutional welcoming are possible paths to face the challenge of a precarized and illness-ridden teaching profession, opening horizons for public policies that ensure the centrality of mental health in the educational field.

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