

Teachers support at the beginning of the career: a training proposal

Acompanhamento de professores em início de carreira: uma proposta formativa

Soporte al profesorado en inicio de la carrera: una propuesta de formación

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Abstract

The literature on the beginning of the teaching career in Brazil shows that there are few policies and teacher training programs that seek to alleviate the situations experienced by teachers in the school context. This article aims to analyze the contributions to the constitution of teachers participating in a training course offered to teachers at the beginning of their careers, linked to a Municipal Department of Education in the interior of the state of São Paulo (Brazil). It addresses the organization and composition of the work developed together with these teachers who, based on training sustained in dialogue, instituted a follow-up process that leveraged the teaching constitution. The first author of this work considered the training course as an object of study of a narrative research, that is, the lived experience itself. To compose this work, materials produced by professors in the period of insertion in the career were shared, derived from writing proposals instituted in the course. Considering the evidential paradigm, the writings highlight: - the urgency of monitoring for teachers at the beginning of their careers; - the difficulties experienced by teachers in the period of insertion in the career; - training paths for these teachers.

Keywords: Teachers at Beginning of the Career. Teacher Support. Teacher Training. School.

Resumo

A literatura acerca do início da carreira docente no Brasil mostra que são poucas as políticas e programas de formação docente que buscam amenizar as situações vividas pelos professores no contexto escolar. Este artigo objetiva analisar as contribuições para a constituição dos



docentes participantes de um curso de formação oferecido a professores em início de carreira, vinculados a uma Secretaria Municipal de Educação do interior do estado de São Paulo (Brasil). Aborda a organização e composição do trabalho desenvolvido junto com esses docentes que, a partir de uma formação sustentada no diálogo, instituiu um processo de acompanhamento que alavancou a constituição docente. A primeira autora deste trabalho considerou o curso de formação como objeto de estudo de uma pesquisa narrativa, ou seja, a própria experiência do vivido. Para compor este trabalho, foram compartilhados materiais produzidos pelos professores em período de inserção na carreira, derivados de propostas de escrita instituídas no curso. Considerando o paradigma indiciário, as escritas deixam em evidência: a urgência de acompanhamento para professores em início de carreira; as dificuldades vividas por professores em período de inserção na carreira; caminhos de formação para estes professores.

Palavras-chave: *Professores em início de carreira. Acompanhamento docente. Formação docente. Escola.*

Resumen

La literatura acerca del inicio de la carrera docente en Brasil muestra que son pocas las políticas y programas de formación docente que buscan amenizar las situaciones vividas por los profesores en el contexto escolar. Este artículo tiene como objetivo analizar las contribuciones para la constitución de los participantes de un curso de formación que ha sido ofrecido a profesores en inicio de la carrera vinculados a una Secretaria Municipal de Educación del interior del estado de São Paulo (Brasil). Aborda la organización y composición del trabajo desarrollado junto con esos docentes que, a partir de una formación sustentada en el diálogo, instituyó un proceso de apoyo que sustentó a la constitución docente. La primera autora de este trabajo consideró el curso de formación el objeto de estudio de una investigación narrativa, es decir, la propia experiencia vivida. Para componer este trabajo, fueron compartidos materiales producidos por los profesores en período de inserción en la carrera, derivados de las propuestas de escrita instituidas en el curso. Considerando el paradigma indiciario, las escritas ponen en relieve: la urgencia de soporte para profesores en inicio de la carrera; las dificultades vividas por los profesores en período de inserción en la carrera; caminos de formación para estos profesores.

Palabras Clave: *Profesores en Inicio de Carrera. Soporte docente. Formación Docente. Escuela.*

1 Introduction

This study focuses on teachers at the beginning of their careers. The issues addressed are enlightened by the authors' experiences as teachers' educators in the university outreach course "Beginning teachers: sharing dilemmas and knowledge". This course was offered in the context of a public university located in the interior of the state of São Paulo and the target audience was formed by teachers at the beginning of their careers, who had graduated in Education and were linked to the Municipal Education Secretariat in the same municipality.

The course was initially planned to be held in 2017 only, but it continued throughout 2018 and 2019 upon request by some of the participants. During those three years, the course was taught in the evening. However, from 2020 onwards, following an arrangement with the Municipal Education Secretariat, it could be offered during the working hours. The first meeting was held in the early March 2020, but due to the Covid-19 pandemic the meetings were suspended.

In 2017, eight teachers attended the course, in 2018, six professionals participated, and, in 2019, there were 12 participants. Out of the total number of participants, three attended the three years of the course.

The objectives of the course were: a) to optimize collective processes of reflection upon trajectories followed in the school context by the teachers beginning their teaching career; b) to promote spaces of development supported by dialogue and search for collective construction of strategies to overcome the daily stress and dilemmas experienced by those professionals; and c) to contribute to this process by providing elements that enable those in management to rethink the insertion of and support to teachers at the beginning of their careers in the municipal school system in partnership with the university.

Thus, our intention was to create a space of support, study, and problematization of beginning teachers' professional constitution, where they could share the school routine, contradictions, fears, and joys, and with that promote a context of collective development. In such context, those professionals would be able to dialogue and better understand their practice and their constitution as educators. We considered, as Geraldi (2010, p. 82), that "we are made teachers along some years of study of certain contents, which we acquire, we *embody*, and that reshape us, making us the person we did not use to be" (italicized by that author). However, that author states that the processes experienced in training courses only qualify us, but do not make us teachers.

Therefore, we also agreed with Geraldi (2010) when he pointed out the need to look at the constitution of the teacher that occurs in this movement of becoming teachers at the school, in their group, with their colleagues, students' parents, and students.

Throughout the three years, the course had the same proposal of holding monthly meetings in which we shared the situations experienced at the schools. Scientific and literary texts were read, and we also worked with images, short films, and documentaries (CHALUH, 2012a). During the meetings, the group decided to socialize teaching practices developed by

the teachers with their students and from them we promoted theoretical studies that provided elements to broaden the understanding of the concrete situations lived. We emphasized the legitimation of the writing practice as an educational dimension since it challenged the participants to systematize their reflections upon the issues raised in the discussions during the meetings, seeking to broaden their understanding of the situations.

For considering that this development course represented a significant experience for study and analysis, it became the research object in the thesis of the first author of this article, who is advised by the second author. The following material was used to elaborate this research: educator/researcher notebook; audio recording of the meetings; participants' individual production; collective material produced by the participating teachers and educators.

The data produced was interpreted based on the methodological principles of the evidencial paradigm proposed by Ginzburg (1989) to understand the relevance of development processes experienced by beginning teachers. Narrative research (LIMA; GERALDI; GERALDI, 2015) was the methodological perspective used, which focused on the singular, the local, the unpredictable, and the implied. It was organized from the subjects' particular experience, regarding the contextual and singular, supported by Bakhtin's ideas, exploring the concepts of exotopy, creative author, responsible act, and research as creation.

This article presents the writings of some of the participants in the first and last years, highlighting the development processes and the support provided to those professionals. We sought to clarify the contributions of the course to the constitution of the teachers who attended it.

2 Theme relevance: beginning teachers

At this point, it seems relevant to clarify the concept of insertion in the career. A teacher is considered at the beginning of his/her career when experiencing the "insertion phase as the mandatory period of transition between the teacher's initial education and his/her incorporation into the job market as a fully qualified professional" (VAILLANT; MARCELO, 2012, p. 123).

In a recent publication, Cruz; Farias and Hobold (2020, p. 3) systematized the concept of professional insertion: "The professional insertion concept refers exactly to the teachers' entrance in the professional life, the start of their career, (...) it is the crossing time

characterized by the transition from student to teacher (LIMA *et al.*, 2007), which implies intense learning (...)"

Marcelo Garcia (2011, p. 9), when referring to the beginning of one's career, agreed with other scholars in the field to explain that this is 'a period of intensive stress and learning in contexts that are usually unknown, during which the beginning teachers must acquire professional knowledge and keep a certain personal balance'".

Also, Romanowski and Martins (2013, p. 13) pointed out the difficulties faced by teachers at the beginning of their careers, in addition to the fact that, "[...] when facing the complexity of the pedagogical practice, they many times give up the professional activity, abandoning the teaching job in the first few weeks".

André (2012) explained that beginning teachers must cope with too many tasks, which demand a lot of learning, and for this reason, that author defended the implementation of programs (mainly public policies) of teaching initiation. The relevance of such programs regards both the support and development of these teachers, to help them mitigate the difficulties faced, seeking to overcome them collectively.

To investigate the existence of policies and programs in Brazil that supported beginning teachers, André (2012) surveyed the literature about teachers' education, analyzing texts presented in the Annual Meetings of the Associação Nacional de Pesquisas e Pós-Graduação em Educação – ANPEd (Education Research and Postgraduate course National Association), and in the Encontros Nacionais de Didática e Prática de Ensino – Endipe (Didactics and Teaching Practice National Meetings) from 1995 to 2004. According to André (2012), this study:

[...] revealed that, out of 6,978 texts, only 24 focused on beginning teachers (MARIANO, 2006, p. 12). Such finding was confirmed by Papi and Martins (2009), when those authors updated the mapping of texts presented at the Anped more recently (2005-2007), adding a survey of theses and dissertations presented in the period from 2000 to 2007. Those authors concluded that "the theme corresponds to 0.5% of the studies developed on the broader Education area" (PAPI, MARTINS, 2009, p. 256), which shows the scarce attention that the professional initiation has received from Brazilian researchers (ANDRÉ, 2012, p. 117).

A recent literature survey carried out by Brande (2021) reinforced this condition by pointing out that, out of 699 theses and dissertations analyzed, only 4 (four) addressed

beginning teacher's support proposals. Considering the low number of studies on supporting teachers at the beginning of their career, we reaffirm the importance of education proposals and support to these teachers.

3 About the concept of teacher's support

When developing this teachers' development proposal for those in their career insertion period, we devised a teachers' support process for the initial years of their professional activity, resulting in the combination of the knowledge they acquired in the undergraduate course, knowledge acquired from their experience, reflection upon the teaching practice, and awareness of the intentionality of their actions.

The teachers' development process experienced in their undergraduate course enabled the systematization of the concept of teachers' support during their insertion in the career. A study developed by Brande (2021), from that experience pointed out the need for a support process for teachers starting their career, which

[...] was defined in the practices built up to support teachers in their career insertion period and in the advancement of their teacher constitution process. Such practices comprised the attentive look and hearing of educators, who provided a choice of texts that provoked their questioning about education relations, the use of counterarguments to trigger dialogue to enable the analysis of teaching practices, and the elaboration of esthetic experiences that resulted in a favorable environment. This environment should provide professionals with a feeling of reliability, of being in a safe place, where we are cared for, where we understand each other, and where it is possible to say how we feel and what happens to us. Also, the proposition of documentaries, which provoked reflection upon the movement to 'see beyond oneself' and promoted interlocution, problem sharing, and the elaboration of knew knowledge – shared knowledge (BRANDE, 2021, p. 192).

This perspective of understanding the teachers' development and support during their insertion in the career requires the consideration that this process is a specific proposal for a distinct step, in both the initial education and the in-service training period.

The process of supporting teachers' insertion in the career must be characterized by a period of questioning, growth, innovation, and reflection as explained by Marcelo (2009):

The insertion process cannot only integrate beginning teachers to the current school culture. Because that would only complete the perfect socialization circle, that is, students that had observed their teachers teaching throughout their school life, go back to school to teach in the same way their old teacher had taught them. To break this vicious circle, the insertion period must be a period of questioning, growth, innovation, and reflection. To achieve that, the participation of individuals and institutions that can contribute with a more complete view of the school and the classroom reality is fundamental. (MARCELO, 2009, p. 21).

Taking into consideration the discussion above, we think that it is possible to say that the proposition of public policies aiming at the development of teachers in their professional insertion process cannot be characterized by proposals of courses that privilege information transmission or teaching action models. These public policies must be based on the proposition of development processes that enable teachers to engage in their own professional growth process and, thus, principles of collectivity, language/interlocution, and empowerment cannot be neglected (CHALUH, 2012b) since they represent the best way to achieve such objective.

4 The course contribution according to the participants

To achieve our objective of emphasizing the importance of the teachers' development and support during their period of professional insertion for the constitution of these professionals, we refer to the views of three teachers that took part in the development course, whose writings revealed signs of the implications of the support process for the teachers' constitution.

Over the years of the course, several written assignments were proposed. It seems relevant to emphasize that these propositions always resulted from the discussions and problems raised by the participants during the course. One of the assignments, carried out in 2017, was a letter to the municipal education secretary, to the school coordinator, or to a teacher working in the same school about the needs, challenges, and dilemmas faced by teachers in their professional insertion period and proposing a suggestion of 'improvement' or some help with the difficulties:

But if we were to talk about this a little more, I would talk about the need for: a) some support (but this support does not mean regulation and control) from a more experienced teacher; b) spaces of training directed to these beginning professionals and their needs and difficulties (inside the school and also in the system); c) a welcoming culture within schools (which can only be created from a collectivity culture) (excerpt of a letter written to the municipal education secretary by teacher Nanci¹).

I know that you must be asking yourself what I mean by these words. In fact, I am asking help not for myself only, but for all beginning teachers, and about that, I would like to propose some ideas that I had recently when I attended a course offered by UNESP to beginning teachers. That course was very important for my development these months, when along with other teachers in the same situation as mine, we could reflect and help each other.

Well, one of my ideas is exactly that the secretary could offer courses like that one, where more beginning teachers can interact, and help each other to make our entrance in the education system easier. I also suggest providing beginning teachers with lectures and seminars given by experienced education professionals. Instructing the management team to welcome and integrate new teachers would also help us at this moment (excerpt of a letter written to the municipal education secretary by teacher Denise).

Dear... (coordinator).

I am a beginning teacher in this education system and go to work highly motivated to do my part for education. I know that I graduated in a good university, but this does not mean I know everything. In fact, everything here is quite new to me, and I feel insecure. Many times I feel lost for not knowing everything that I should know, and people talk to me as if I knew it. The truth is, I had never filled in a class diary, I don't know exactly where to start with my log book, I've never assembled a portfolio, or written a descriptive report card.

The truth is that, in the middle of all that, I have been feeling frustrated and questioned my teaching practice. I always think I am doing everything wrong, and that I am not good enough. But, in fact, I need some help. I need somebody to sit with me and say: "Look, this is how you do it".

For this reason, what I ask you, coordinators, is that you help us, teach us, because we need this confidence so as not to feel demotivated when facing challenges (Letter written to the coordinator by teacher Noemi).

The power of these teachers' writings in raising our understanding of the relevance of the development processes experienced by teachers who are beginning their career resides in the fact that they revealed how such processes occurred, and which contributions they made to these teachers' constitution. Next, we address some issues that were raised by these writings, revealing a process of support for teachers in the career insertion period:

* *Supporting does not mean controlling.* As pointed out by teacher Nanci, supporting should not be and is not the same as "regulating and controlling". For support processes to be truly effective, beginning teachers must be provided with some specific spaces of development,

¹ This research project was approved by the Ethics Commission, with the Technical Opinion n. 2.479.581. The participants' names are fictitious.

created from partnerships and contribution so that mutual help and reflection are naturalized making the entrance in the career less stressful and problematic.

* *Welcoming culture inside schools.* These teachers' writings are a cry for help and welcoming as expressed by teacher Noemi: "I need somebody to sit with me and say: 'Look, this is how you do it'". All participating teachers expressed their expectations regarding management teams in terms of providing a welcoming and integrating environment and specific courses/lectures focusing on their difficulties. They also pointed out the relevant role of the pedagogical coordinator, as someone that for being closer to them in their professional routine, should be the one to clarify practical issues that are still unknown to those starting the career (specifically regarding school documents).

* *Need for help.* The participants' writings show explicitly this need for help as reported by teacher Denise: "I am asking help not for myself only, but for all beginning teachers". They seek help to learn how to do everything that is expected from a teacher. Such help must come from someone that is reliable, someone who dialogues and offers support, to scaffold the construction of the teaching practice, sharing with the new professional the way in this starting period.

Their writings express the difficulties experienced by teachers in the career insertion period and point out paths of development for these teachers. In addition, they reinforce the need for the creation of programs to promote professional support to these beginning teachers. Such programs must be provided by both the education systems and the public policies. (ROMANOWSKI; MARTINS, 2013).

Another important aspect addressed in their writings is the fact that the teachers that took part in the development course expressed the need for support in the teachers' career insertion that privileges reflection upon their school routine. This was evidenced in their last written production at the end of the course in 2019.

Next, we present the writings of three teachers who took part in the three years of the course. They are Noemi, Giovana, and Luana. The writing proposal was to explain the contributions given by the course to the constitution of these teachers at the beginning of their careers.

The year is 2019. It is March, first meeting of the beginning teachers' course, which I'm attending for the third time. Some of the teachers are here for the first time and are also starting their teaching career.

Listening to these teachers' anguish and desires took me back to 2017, reminding me of how insecure and nervous I felt with the teaching routine at the time. It gave me a huge feeling of peacefulness in my heart to see how my anguish reduced from that time to nowadays. How I feel stronger every day.

And this is exactly what the beginning teachers' course gave me these three years: strength, knowing that I was not alone, knowing that my colleagues had the same problems as I did. Every meeting, I could expose my anxiety, every text written made me reflect deeper upon my work.

This is another point to be highlighted, that is, how this course made me reflect upon my practice. For being a beginning teacher, in schools where other teachers had been for a long time and used to their own type of work, we find difficulties to work the way we believe it should be. It would be easier to accommodate and follow everybody else's pattern, and keep quite. But in the beginning teachers' course we are made to think, question, and reflect all the time....And such reflections made me keep moving. I didn't accommodate, I want to seek more, I want to do more.

And this desire to do more only increases when I'm among other incredible teachers, where our common objective is to seek comfort and comfort each other. Unlike many situations experienced inside the school, in the group we feel safe to get things off our chests and share. We can share our successes too and nobody will think "this one is a show off", on the contrary, when one of us shares, the others are interested in learning about it.

I am grateful for having participated in this beginning teachers' group, [...]. (Noemi).

I was exhausted in 2019 due to personal problems, new adventures, search for professional development, I tried to "handle" everything and do my best! And I can say it was worth it... [...]

The group continues with its welcoming, friendly, and understanding character... and this year I got a new place in it, even if I still have unresolved issues and still need support, this time I also felt I was there to support others since I had some baggage from some situations of oppression, sadness, dilemmas, sorrows, and doubts as reported by my colleagues. And now, I could be the one providing "comfort"... We were again a group seeking the best for education and mainly a space of support to our practice, exchange, doubts, and therapy...SPEAKING, getting things off our chests, unburden/unchoking...

Over the years our "mentor" professors guided us and taught us how to take over our place in the schools where we worked, and we felt more empowered in our workplace

I learned to improve my view and see why I chose this profession and focus on what makes me happy... the children and the transformation of their reality, creating opportunities of new views and hope, and creating dreams with them! [...]

I learned to relate with my peers in a better way, let them talk, listen to them, consider what they say, be patient, understand them, and sometimes disagree with them, but always showing the importance of working together... [...]

I learned that good teachers help their colleagues to find the teacher in themselves and demystify this feeling of lonely work, and that's what we did in the group! (Giovana)

It's never easy to analyze ourselves. Today, when I sit to write, several moments cross my mind.

2019 was a heavy year, [...]

I was a chaos. The children were my fuel to continue, I'm very grateful for them. Next, and without exaggerating, our meetings really "saved" me.

Talking to the others, being advised by teachers with more experience, words of confidence I could hear in critical moments were fundamental to help me be back on my feet, so that I could see another way out of hard situations.

Every time I thought it was difficult, I immediately remembered that the meeting was close and felt strengthened, leaving the education department room, I had that feeling of relief and felt refueled to continue.

Together we studied another possible education, we analyzed our own practice, evaluated childhood under different perspectives, we discussed interpersonal relationships in school and their importance, we could expose our records and relive positive moments and situations. I see these facts as highly encouraging and positive!

We were touched by our colleagues stories, discussed our own education, reevaluated strategies, and exchanged views and feelings. We saw that work in a different way does not mean to work wrongly, we encouraged each other, we got stronger with the theory to carry out a more efficient practice. [...] There was always somebody presenting and others transforming that report into learning.

[..] I know it cannot have been easy, but those responsible for the group always provided us with readings that were very enlightening! And yes, theory was highly relevant to shed light on our way and improve our practice. And best of all, based on our own needs.

It was interesting to notice that those that attended the meetings in other years could identify with the speech of those starting this year, and we could express our experiences as a certain "comfort" to them. Facts that they did not know, because we get very little help or advice, we could help them, guiding them with what we had already learnt. I thought it was very rewarding to have this exchange...

Affection was always present and I believe that it was crucial in this trajectory. It helped me a lot and feel that it helped my colleagues too! Being among peers that will not judge you, but that will help you no matter what was really strengthening in this period. We work in school where many times there is huge competition, rivalry, and humiliation. Being able to exchange ideas with so many peers fighting for education made me feel I was not alone and that our group provided a lot of strength and partnership, and this made me a more confident professional in my attitudes and my own potential! [...] (Luana)

Our particular interest in these final writings by Noemi, Giovana, and Luana is justified by the fact that they attended the three years of the course. In this sense, they could really capture signals of the teachers' constitution importance over these years.

An issue that calls our attention is noticing the feelings they expressed when meeting new beginning teachers that joined the group in 2019. They realized that the course leveraged the overcome of their conflicts. Their feeling in the third year of the course was that, at that moment, they could look after other teachers, advise them, and notice how much the anguish experienced at the beginning of their careers was comforted in that development period.

A second issue that we would like to emphasize is the relevance that those participants gave to the course: a place of help, study, sharing, that is, a place for learning.

A third aspect to be highlighted is the valorization of the course for having promoted the constitution of a group, which is considered in this way when the participating teachers address the whole experience. This possibility implied in the establishment of partnership, of their feeling of not being alone in the fight for education, promoting greater feeling of security and confidence in their practice.

A fourth issue to be emphasized is the valorization of the course coordinators/educators, who played the role of encouraging teachers to take over their place in the schools they worked for, motivating them. And, beyond all these feelings, the participants' understanding of the relevance of the theory proposed.

The fifth issue regards the fact that the course promoted an attentive look at the others in schools, both children and colleagues, building up new relationships.

The last texts produced in 2019 by Noemi, Giovana, and Luana, which were highlighted here, also revealed relevant evidence to think the process of supporting these teachers. Their views indicated that throughout their development process, they acquired conditions to recognize successes when facing dilemmas, reflecting upon the reasons for their actions, identifying difficulties and seeking to overcome them. All these movements were optimized by collectivity, word circulation, dialogue, interlocution, and confidence promoted by the development course.

Considering that there are few studies on teachers' support at the beginning of their career, this article points out the participant teachers' views of a development course assisting this audience and with a well-succeeded proposal of development that they experienced, which might become inspiration for future development proposals targeting teachers in the professional insertion period.

5 Final Consideration

This study saw teachers as subjects that are attentive to others and, therefore, present investigative attitude and posture that is kept in the interlocution with their peers. This means to propose professional development in which teachers feel as part of the collective construction

of knowledge, in the constant exercise of dialogue and listening, valuing these teachers' authorship. Thus, the course provided for the exercise of reflection upon the teaching practice, teachers' constitution, and life in schools, considering the collectivity dimension, discussion, and legitimization of knowledge produced in the school context. It also provoked some thought on the rationale behind teachers' actions and the construction of collective learning processes.

It seems relevant to emphasize that the development movement promoted by the course was built up over time, in the meetings, in the shared experience, and through the dialogue between peers, and gained life from these professionals' daily life. The writings produced by the teachers evidenced the relevance of the course for their constitution in the career insertion period.

We think that for both groups the educators or a group of beginning teachers and the participating beginning teachers life must be seen as an ethical act. It does not mean a finished process, thus, we must renounce easy solution and unchangeability, because human completeness is never finished, as proposed by Bakhtin (2011):

I cannot live out of my own completeness and the completeness of the event, nor acting; to live I need to be unfinished, open to myself – at least in all essential moments –, I also need to oppose axiologically to myself, not coinciding with my present existence (BAKHTIN, 2011, p. 11).

Finally, we reaffirm our position of fight for the development of teachers during their professional insertion process and seek support in Bakhtin (2012). We understand development initiatives as responsible actions towards the minimization of an urgent need for the elaboration and implementation of public policies, at the federal, state and municipal levels, to propose projects to support teachers in their professional insertion process.

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