ARTICLE

The beginning of teaching in two countries: reflections in an online forum

O início da docência em dois países: reflexões em um fórum online

El inicio de la enseñanza en dos paises: reflexiones en un foro online

Rosa Maria Moraes Anunciato[2] iD

Abstract: The beginning of teaching is generally experienced as a period of doubts, uncertainties, and startles. On rare occasions, beginning teachers find formal support from the institution or from their peers. Therefore, we ask ourselves: does this happen in the same way with teachers from different countries, such as Brazil and Portugal? In this research, the use of a common language allowed Portuguese and Brazilian teachers to be included in a process of ongoing education in an online collaborative group to dialogue about their development processes. Narratives and group discussion about the beginning of teaching in both countries were analyzed. Looking at the past, the participants' data revealed: a raising of the awareness of the need for change, not forgetting the difficulties and constraints of today's contexts; transformations in the attribution of meaning to what was experienced; and the narratives' contributions to the professional development.

Keywords: Beginning of teaching. Online narratives. Teacher education.

Resumo: O início da docência é geralmente vivido como um período de dúvidas, incertezas e sobressaltos. Em raras ocasiões os professores iniciantes encontram apoio formal da instituição ou do grupo de pares. Então nos questionamos: será que isto se dá da mesma forma com professores de diferentes países como Brasil e Portugal? No delineamento de uma investigação, o domínio da mesma língua permitiu colocar professoras portuguesas e brasileiras em um processo de formação continuada em grupo colaborativo online para dialogar sobre seus processos de desenvolvimento profissional. Foram analisadas narrativas e discussões em grupo sobre o início da docência nos dois países. Ao olhar o passado, as participantes revelaram atitudes como o despertar da consciência sobre a necessidade da mudança, sem esquecer das dificuldades e constrangimentos dos contextos atuais; transformações na atribuição de significados ao vivido e contribuições das narrativas para o desenvolvimento profissional.

Palavras-chave: Início da docência. Narrativas online. Formação de professores.

Resumen: El comienzo de la enseñanza es em general vivenciado como un período de dudas, incertidumbres y miedos. En raras ocasiones los profesores principiantes encuentran apoyo formal de su institución o del grupo de congeneres. Entonces se pregunta: ¿sera que esto se da de la misma forma con profesores de diferentes paises como Brasil y Portugal? En el diseño de una investigación el dominio de la misma lengua permitió colocar profesoras portuguesas y brasileñas en un proceso de formación continuada en un grupo colaborativo online. Se analizaron narraciones y discusión en grupo sobre el inicio de la enseñanza en estos dos países. Al mirar el pasado, las participantes revelaron el despertar de la conciencia sobre la necesidad del cambio, sin olvidar las dificultades y limitaciones de los contextos actuales, transformaciones en la atribución de significados al vivido y contribuciones de las narraciones para el desarrollo profisional

Palabras clave: Inicio de la ensenãnza. Narrativas online. Formación de profesores.

ARTICLE

Introduction

Beginning teachers are required to demonstrate abilities and knowledge which are not completely developed and demand diverse learnings which must be built simultaneously and in a short period of time. In their first years, they must perform several tasks, such as the socialization in the school system, the appropriation of the role of teacher, and the construction of their professional identities. Their work is influenced by multiple variables related to their life and education histories, the schools they have attended, how these schools' classes were, the student-teacher relationship, the school subjects, etc. Moreover, teaching is not separated from social context, educational policies, economic and social environment etc.

The experiences had in this period provide beginners with feelings and emotions alternating happiness and discoveries, sorrows and frustrations. According to García (1999, p. 39) the beginning teacher only survives the shock with reality due to the other side of the coin, the discovery, defined by the author as "[…] the initial excitement, the exaltation of being, finally, in a position of responsibility (of having their own classrooms, their own students, their own syllabi), of feeling part of a certain work group". This discovery can, therefore, overcome the feeling of simply surviving, and it enhances the teacher's drive and the motivation with the entrance in the career. This stimulates beginners not only to do a good job, but also to continue in the profession.

These experiences from the beginning of teaching and the feelings associated with this profession produce such a lasting effect that teacher with years of experience, when asked about their initial years, reveal not only the joys, charms, and discoveries encountered, but also the doubts, uncertainties, and dilemmas faced in a rich period of professional learning.

We have conducted a research aiming to investigate the professional development of teachers in two national contexts[i]. The use of a common language allowed us to place Portuguese and Brazilian teachers in an ongoing education process in a collaborative online group through the sharing of their education narratives, socialization, and group discussions[ii]. Our objective was to investigate the professional development of teachers in an ongoing education process in a collaborative online group. Especially for this text, we have analyzed the web of meanings from the initial years of teaching in two national realities, in Brazil and in Portugal. The narratives about the beginning of teaching and the online discussions are the sources of the data presented in this article. At first, we discuss aspects concerning the constitution of learning communities in online environments.

This study was conducted with the participation of 14 teachers, all women, 8 of whom are Brazilian and 6 Portuguese, referred to, in this text, as participants P1 to P14. Most of these participating teachers are aged 40 to 50 and have 10 to 33 years of experience in the profession. Only one of the teachers, a Portuguese woman, can be considered a beginner, with four years of experience. The Brazilian teachers work as pedagogical coordinators either in schools or with ongoing teacher education in their municipal offices, while the Portuguese participants work as language teachers and are master's degree students at the University of

Minho. Two researchers, one from Brazil and the other from Portugal, and two doctoral candidates also participated in the group acting as course tutors.

The source for this research's data is the narratives produced in the online environment, composed by the participants' own profile descriptions in the Virtual Learning Environment (or AVA, from the Portuguese *Ambiente Virtual de Aprendizagem*), the forum about beginning teachers' experiences, and the evaluation chat. In the forum activity, participants were solicited to post their narratives and at least two comments on their colleagues' stories. Therefore we had two segments: **initial narrative**, in which participants presented registers in a forum or tasks soliciting the elaboration of narratives, such as reminiscences from their initial years as teachers, evaluations of their school lives and their teaching experiences, etc; and, **Commentary**, in a posterior moment, participants should also discuss their posts with their peers, commenting on the life experiences of the other participants regarding their education or the teaching activity.

Learning Communities in Virtual Environments

Since the turn of the twentieth century into the twenty-first, the concept of virtual learning community has gained prominence. Some authors debate the pertinence of using the term community, since the virtual environment does not entail a circumscribed place or space, something central to the term's definition.

The concept of community, for Recuero (2005, p. 3-4)

> has evolved from an almost "ideal" meaning of family, a rural community, and now integrates a larger set of human groups. With the advent of modernity and, especially, of urbanization, rural communities have tended to disappear, losing ground to big cities. Hence, as the author posits, the idea of "community" as conceived by classic sociology - of a rural kind, based on familial connections, opposed to the idea of society - seems to disappear not in theory, but in practice.

According to Oldenburg as quoted by Recuero (2005), there are three important types of spaces in our daily lives: home, work, and the "third spaces", those places where the social bonds at the basis of communities are formed, such as churches, bars, squares etc. For this author, there has been a decline of these so-called third spaces in modern societies.

Recuero (2005) indicates, yet, that the notion of community as a limited territory has been replaced by the notion of community as "like minds", or as people with similar thoughts. From this perspective, a defining element of a community are common interests. This is present in the virtual environment where, as Recuero (2005, p. 6) observes "in public discussions people meet each other multiple times, or even keep in touch through the internet (in order to advance the discussion), time and feelings. These elements, combined through cyberspace, can form social networks, constituting communities".

A community requires a base in cyberspace for the establishment of communication, it requires a public space where most of the interaction can take place. For Recuero (2005, p. 6) a virtual community has, therefore, a base in cyberspace, a sense of place, a virtual locus.

This space can be abstract, but it is 'limited'". Hence, mutual interaction can generate exchanges able to construct social relationships and, consequently, virtual communities.

It is possible to affirm a learning community exists in a "virtual locus" if some characteristics can be found. One of them is member stability, since permanence favors the depth of the discussion, the feeling of belonging, and the responsibility for the keeping of the relationships. These characteristics depend, essentially, on common objectives.

Beyond common objectives, Santos (2010) affirms that online education and its devices configurate themselves as formative spaces of research and pedagogical practice, contemplating: the discursive plurality of participants' personal, professional, and academic narratives and experiences. According to Santos (2010, p. 29):

> an online learning environment is more than a platform used as a repository of content and tasks for reclused study. It is a set of interfaces (of content and of communication) brought together in a single program, in which subjects involved in the teaching and learning process can communicate, sharing information, understandings, and knowledge.

In the initial and ongoing education of teachers, if we use a Virtual Learning Environment designed to favor the sharing of experiences and reflections, we will be enabling the establishment of bonds, the development of feelings of belonging and of shared responsibility between participants. In these conditions, we have created a learning community in a virtual environment, a space where, according to González, Castro-Tejerina, and Carlucci (2014, p. 389), while sharing common objectives,

> […] subjects use knowledge originated from their virtual space experiences and base, in this knowledge, their acts of identification, even when they are dedicated to writing their own texts or to intervening in the other forum participants' texts. In the virtual world, according to these authors, there are histories and identity complexes which are continually built and shared by communities and which offer support in a device halfway between the forms and potentials of orality and those of reading-writing.

The authors consider that the biographical-narrative structures are the ones which better characterize this identity-construction process in the virtual space, emphasizing narrativity - a key element in the exchange of meanings - and the multiplicity of voices through the opening to and genuine contact with/between these multiple voices in the global context we are inserted in. The virtual space, then, according to González, Castro-Tejerina, and Carlucci (2014, p. 389), "blends with the more general real-world dynamics, from the broader socio-cultural spaces of which individuals take part - and can take part".

By opening themselves up to the multiple voices of a peer group, sharing narratives with each other, teachers can experiment broader contexts. In this text, we aim to open ourselves to the experiences of teacher from two different national contexts who shared "pieces" of their school lives with similarities and discrepancies. Afterwards, we discuss some of the premises guiding the framework of this research in the field of teacher education, such as the adopted concepts of ongoing education, of reflection, of narrative, and of collaborative group.

4

ARTICLE

Teacher education in online environments: the research and some of its theoretical bases

The ongoing education of teachers has gained relevance in the last 30 years. In this context, two perspectives have stood out and even today continue to guide the actions and policies for the ongoing education of teachers. One is based on what is "lacking" and is underpinned by discourses highlighting the lack of training in courses and the lack of content for teaching due to a deficient initial education. Information is then "dumped" on teachers, based on a concept of education **towards** practice, as opposed to a set of knowledge **in** or **from** practice such as defined by Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999). The emphasis of this concept of knowledge **towards** practice is associated to ongoing education initiatives - the most known and used ones - in which learning is based on general theories and in research findings which teachers are trained to implement. It is a perspective focused on the transmission of content, based on the premise that the emphasis on content acquisition leads to better work from teachers.

The second perspective, which we have adopted, does not prioritize content-transmission, though it does not exclude it, focusing instead on investigative, reflective, and emancipatory practices. This is similar to what Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) indicate as an education underpinned by knowledge **in** or **from** practice, in which university professors' function as external support teams and the activities aim to make group participants question their own suppositions and reconsider the bases of their actions and beliefs. It is from this perspective that we sought to develop an education in a collaborative group through narratives in an online environment. This allowed us to bring Brazilian and Portuguese teachers together in an online collaborative activity using the Moodle platform from the website *Portal dos Professores* from the Federal University of São Carlos/SPiii.

We consider that the participation in a collaborative group can enable favorable conditions for the development of critical thought, reflection, and transformative learning through the intense interaction with different perspectives on the same subject, associated with the need to produce and justify one's own opinions in forums and chatrooms. Moreover, it provides the use of digital means as a support for new learnings, for the exchange of information, and for sharing experiences, research, and discoveries. From the writing and publishing of narratives, comments, and suggestions in the forums, we have investigated aspects such as the initial years of teaching, the evaluation of the learning process, and reflections on the practices experienced as students and/or as teachers.

By using the writing of autobiographical narratives in the ongoing education of teachers, we place the participants at the center of the educative action. Initially, we verified that narratives give access to teachers' references, because, according to Cunha (1997, p. 189),

> teachers build their performances from several references, such as their family histories, their school trajectories, their interaction with their work environments, and their cultural insertion in time and space. Enticing teachers to organize narratives from these references is making them experience a profoundly pedagogic

ARTICLE

process, in which their existential conditions are the starting points of the construction of their development in life and in the profession. Therefore, as this author proposes, from these narratives**,** teachers discover the meanings they have attributed to the facts they have lived and, thus, they reconstruct their understandings of themselves.

Oliveira (2011, p. 292) reinforces this educational aspect of narratives since they "allow for the construction of several points of view, as a result of a constant process of reflection and reconstruction of the experienced facts, contributing to personal and professional development". The writing of narratives as an educational instrument for teachers demands working with the memories of positive and negative experiences, which, depending on the produced meaning, might result in changes, transformations.

The reflection process powered by writing and discussing autobiographical narratives allows for the understanding of the knowledge built by teachers in the educational experiences of which they were protagonists (OLIVEIRA; GAMA, 2014). Hence, during the construction of knowledge produced by teachers regarding their work based on their life histories, a portrait of education emerges from their individual choices associated to historical conditions.

Bosi's (1987, p. 48) well-known proposition, "that the past is not simply what came before the present, but it is actually the present's source"**,** makes us question the roles we play in the different moments of our histories and of the history we share with our generation.

Narratives grant us access to these sources which are in the past: the references and circumstances; the dilemmas and the decisions. The dialogue between Portuguese and Brazilian teachers produced echoes and bewilderment regarding the initial years of teaching in both countries. Their narratives refer to the beginning of their careers, in a period ranging from the 1980s to the 2000s.

The initial years of teaching in Brazil and Portugal

Studies from Mariano (2012) and from Cunha and Zanchet (2010) about the initial years of teaching evidence that, in Brazil, the first years of teaching constitute a particularly complex period, since beginning teachers are usually placed in the most difficult classes of the most problematic schools. André (2013) points out that, even though new teachers have been the subjects of several international investigative projects, research with this theme is still rare in Brazil.

Corroborating these studies, our research participants describe a problematic picture of their initial moments in teaching. From Brazil, we present three non-mutually exclusive situations as effects of common practices in the insertion of teachers in the profession, and which demonstrate the lack of policies focusing on this step of the career. Firstly, we address the situation of teachers with no employment contract.

ARTICLE

The angsts of a teachers hired as a contingent worker

In Brazil, the aforementioned studies evidence that the first years of teaching constitute a particularly complex period and, although we do not have access to statistical data regarding work contracts with beginning teachers, our experience and the participants' accounts indicate that the first steps in the career are usually in situations of substituting a class's regular teacher who is unavailable. The figure of the temporary teacher is common, as the Brazilian participant P1 illustrates:

> The start of my career was in two different segments. I started in a private/religious school and as a substitute in public state schools in the city in the mornings, and at night substituting at all grades and subjects of the second cycle, Middle School, and Youth and Adult Education. This was a really great challenge, a great discomfort too. I was called on short notice to substitute unavailable teachers without even knowing what subject they were responsible for, from Portuguese to Chemistry and Physics. Since I was the substitute, students did not respect me and I suffered, because I wanted to teach, but was not able to. Truth be told, what student would want a substitute teacher if they could have a free period instead? I worked for a while like this, which brought me a lot of angst, I knew that somehow, even though I had good will, I was not apt for it. I was never good at handling teenagers and my classes were not good enough to maintain their discipline. I really wanted it to be over soon, it was not what I wanted. There was no guidance from the principal or the coordination, in fact, I did not even know who the school's coordinator was at that time. I knew I had to go there and "babysit" students until the class was over. I believed if I were a really good teacher the class would simply be disciplined, but it did not happen, and it was very frustrating. I was becoming a little neurotic, I could not hear the phone ringing that my heart would race, thinking I was being called to substitute a class. Sunday nights I wanted to disappear so I would not need to teach. I almost gave up on the profession, indiscipline was my biggest problem (P1, 15 years of experience as a teacher, Initial Narrative)[iv].

This narrative exposes the angst experience as a teacher in a precarious contingent work situation, acting as substitute in state schools in the mornings and, at night, in all classes and subjects of the second cycle of Basic School, Middle School and Youth and Adult Education. As an aggravating factor, there was no guidance from the principal or from the coordination. This situation is observed as recurrent until today, and it damages the self-esteem of beginning teachers, left to look after themselves.

We must also highlight the lack of relation between the teacher's area of education and the classes attribute to her. Thus, the education system itself undervalues the demand for qualification and the teacher feels she is in a situation of "babysitting" and blames herself for failing: "my classes were not good enough to maintain their discipline […]" or "indiscipline was my biggest problem". A perverse situation with consequences for the teacher's health which almost made her quit the profession.

The precarity of the work contract - or work without an employment relationship -, instability, the distance between the area of a teacher's education and the activities attributed to her, the lack of support, among others, are a series of elements from the school's operation, from politics etc, which contribute to a feeling of diminished value as a professional.

7

Educ. Perspect. | Viçosa, MG | v. 10 | p. 1-15 | e-019028 | 2019 | ISSN 2178-8359

ARTICLE

Premature insertion, lack of specialized education and of assistance

Other problems faced by Brazilian beginning teachers include: a premature insertion in the workforce, while teachers are still undergraduate students; the lack of specialized education for work with classes containing special-needs students; and lack of assistance and supervision.

> My first experience as a teacher was when I was still in the sixth semester of my Pedagogy course, I was then invited by two college colleagues to work at the APAE (Association of Parents and Friends of Special Needs Individuals) which here was called *Gente Esperança*. My colleagues had always told me about the experiences they had with the children, whom they liked very much, and these stories made me want to work with this teaching modality. My first day in the classroom was in a room for students with syndromes and intellectual disabilities. In this classroom, the work proposition was to forward them to "normal" regular schools. I was informed by the principal how the school routine functioned and that my first activity consisted in welcoming students, who would arrive by bus, and in leading them to the classroom. I did not know who these students were, and my coworkers helped me identify them. I led them to the room, sat them in their chairs, and began the class. The children looked at me as if I were from another planet, a girl suddenly started crying, I did everything I could to calm her down, but I could not. I opened a door and called for a coordinator, who took a long time to answer me. She simply told me: "This ritual happens every day, you had better get used to it". I wanted, at that time, to drop everything and leave, but not only did I really need the job, I also saw that as an opportunity and, at the same time, a great challenge that I needed to overcome (P7, 11 years of experience as a teacher, Initial Narrative).

In P7's experience we find a recurrent theme, the insertion, in the workforce, of teachers who are not yet graduated. Costa and Oliveira (2007, p. 23), discussing the issue from the perspective of the initial education, indicates that in several Teaching-degree courses in Brazilian universities we find students "who learn the teaching profession at the university and in a school at the same time". The authors affirms that the difficulties related to the planning and the development of education in complex realities - which include tending to several solicitations and tasks, the differences between the idealized and the real student, the feeling of insecurity, the awareness of the precarious knowledge of the content to be taught, the need for new teaching methodologies - challenge the education teachers receive in the Teaching-degree courses.

The elements of reality shock found in P7's story are related to this problem, because beyond the lack of qualification to deal with students' special needs, we can identify a romanticized vision of these students. The coordination's interference focused exclusively on indications of the school's routine procedures and on informing the teacher about the school's objective of forwarding students to regular education. When asked to act in a situation involving the interaction, the emotions, the crying of the children and the insecurity of the young teacher, the coordinator used a catchphrase declaring that those issues were part of the school's everyday life and that the teacher "had better get used to it". Once again, we can see the problems related to the beginning of teaching being dislocated from the sphere of the school, of politics etc, to the personal sphere. "Get used to it!" said the coordinator. The same phrase, or similar ones, are heard several times at the beginning of teaching, spoken by

ARTICLE

superiors or even by peers.

One of P7's characteristics is the fact that she faced the situation as a challenge to be overcome. According to Day (2014) this is one of the traits of the daily resilience of teachers which helps them remain in the profession and not give in to the impulse to quit teaching. However, this does not mean we can dispense with the necessary assistance to beginning teachers.

Lay teachers[v] in some regions

One of the participants illustrated the beginning of her career as a lay teacher, when, while she was still a teenager, she took over a class from the first years of basic education, while still being, at that time, a student of the sixth grade of the same educational level.

> I want to share with you my teaching experience at the beginning of my career. I first started my experience while I was still a teenager, only 14 years old, at a *Ribeirinha*[vi] school. I had concluded only the fifth grade of Basic Education, but, in the year of 1987, there were few people with this level of education mostly in the rural area. Due to the lack of available teachers, I was hired by the town to teach a multigrade class. For those who do not know, a multigrade class is a class with students from different grades at the same time and space. There began the difficulty, because there should be a specific methodology which was not there; the content was the same as in a regular class, but I had to tend to every student according to their grades. At that time, my town had no pedagogical advisor, due to a lack of qualification, so I had to make do with what I had. I started with 11 students. Although there were many students in the area, the problem was that parents did not believe I could be a good teacher and even said the children would be wasting their time because I was too young, they did not know what I could possibly teach, and the children would not respect me. I was frustrated and wanted to quit in the first month, but my parents and the Education secretary asked me to continue until they found another teacher. On the first day of school, I did not know what to do, because most of the students was starting then and I had first-grade, second-grade, and third-grade students so I did not know how to begin, with no experience, but really wanting to do it right. There were many attempts, which did not make me satisfied in relation to students' performance. So, I got sad (P10, 10 years of experience as a teacher, Initial Narrative).

In this account, the precarity and temporariness usually associated with the beginning of teaching are elevated to their highest degree: adolescence, an education equivalent to the sixth grade of Basic Education, a multigrade class in the rural area, the lack of a pedagogical advisor etc.

This narrative was disconcerting to the group, especially to the Portuguese participants, who reacted similarly to P3:

> I was dumbfounded by your narrative! How can a teenager (14 years old!) have the maturity to handle a classroom? How did the students react? After all, the age gap was certainly minimal! It must not have been easy to balance the promotion of students' freedom and creativity, due to their heterogeneity, on one hand, and establishing limits to their impulses, on the other - aspects which are inherent to the educative process […] (P3, 17 years of experience as a teacher, Comment).

The different Brazilian realities and, sometimes, our immense social inequalities seem

9

incomprehensible to participants from the Portuguese context. P3's comment discusses the impossibility to fulfil the demands of the teaching profession, such as promoting the balance between the promotion of student's freedom and creativity and the establishment of limits - demands seemly unattainable to an adolescent student.

Beginning to teach 10 years after the Carnation Revolution in Portugal

Portuguese teachers' narratives also addressed some difficulties experienced at the beginning of teaching, reflecting on learning how to teach and on questioning the received education, the teaching models, and also the counter-models in their experiences as students which guided their decisions in the initial years of their careers as teachers. These narratives highlight the attitudes when facing the students, when facing their own social conditions, and their commitment with their development.

In some narratives, it is possible to identify, in the life histories, some aspects of the history of education in Portugal. A teacher narrates that, in 1984, she started her career in a village's school located in an isolated place "at the top of a hill".

> I remember at the beginning of my career (about 30 years ago) I was placed in a small village from the municipality of *Baião* which forced me to leave my home and, more importantly, my first baby son. An isolated place at the top of a hill, a bunch of children between 6 and 10 years old… a desire to run away… I remember somewhat fondly the thoughts I had while I went up or down the narrow road connecting the place I was staying to the small hovel where "our classroom" was: - what am I going to do with these children, from four different school levels, I do not know how to work with them, what I am going to say? Well, I am the fourth teacher and we are still in the first period, I must do something; - what type of person am I, leaving my son with his grandmother so I can be exiled here, with nobody to help me or to talk to? … - I know nobody… there are no other schools near here. It was a time of great angst and great suffering, but also of great growth. On the second weekend back at home, at the comfort of my home, I could see I needed to talk and communicate with other teachers, to share my doubts, and, mostly, to find a helping hand which would embrace me and feed my "passion for being a teacher". Then I joined a discussion group from the *Movimento da Escola Moderna* [Modern School Movement] which met once a month. A small account like many others, but which for me was the actual start of my profession, of the dream of becoming a teacher in a country looking for its self-affirmation. We were in November 1984, the Carnation Revolution had taken place 10 years before and the Portuguese educational system was establishing a dialogue in an attempt to answer to each and every one (P9, 33 years of experience as a teacher, Initial Narrative).

In the process of the constitution of her identity as a teacher, P9 narrates having experienced the dilemma between maternity and the responsibility over a distant classroom. In her almost poetic narrative, P9 addresses the difficulties of having to leave her young son so she could live distant from everyone. She also writes about the difficulties with socialization in the school system, the solitude, the precarity of the place, exemplifying how teaching is influenced by several factors and, as we have indicated before, is not detached from the social context, from educational policies, from the economic and social environment etc. P9's joining the *Movimento da Escola Moderna*, according to her, represented a moment when the country's education, 10 years after the Carnation Revolution, experienced the

ARTICLE

consolidation of Portugal's democratic ideals. Hence, the discussions in the peer group represented to P9 the "actual start" of her career, when she felt part of a national project at the same time political and pedagogical in a broad, innovative, and inclusive sense.

Sharing pieces of life in online educational spaces

An already classic study by Clandinin and Connelly (2011) points out that teachers usually know what teaching is by images, rituals, habits, cycles, routines, and rhythms based on their own experience and evidenced in the stories of teachers and of schools. The online forum granted access to some of these stories from the participants, and in our analysis we have focused on three aspects: the transformation in the attribution of meaning of the stories themselves, the unveiling of attitudes regarding the profession and the career, and the indication of the contributions to teachers' own professional development.

11

Transformation in the attribution of meaning

The transformations in the attribution of meaning to the narratives are perceived in teachers' realization of either the similarities or the discrepancies between their stories. We can observe a general perception that, even in such geographically distant places, difficulties were (and still are) practically the same.

The situation that mostly bewildered the Portuguese participants was the existence of lay and adolescent teachers in Brazil, a possibility never thought possible by the European participants, who strongly questioned these teachers' maturity to handle a classroom, as we have presented above.

The aspect which caused the greatest sense of identification between both groups was the experience of "skipping around different classes, throughout a school year" as a teacher characterizes the situation of substitute and contingent teachers. Participants exposed the emotional consequences, the frustration, the impacts in their families, the emotional instability, and the consequent loss of their emotional bonds with the school, with the students, and with the community.

Another aspect considered similar were the consequences presently felt in the preparation for the exams which guide the school curricula and in the construction of school rankings which evaluation policies nowadays favor in both countries. In Portugal and in Brazil, thus, we can verify a situation in which the evaluation through standardized exams shapes the curriculum and the practices.

Attitudes regarding the profession and the career

The attitudes regarding the profession and the career in the present context reflect a

ARTICLE

state of pessimism. In Portugal, the discomfort seems to be related to what a participant called "an unfortunate combination of badly thought-out policies, the devaluation of the public school, and society's condemning eyes, seeing teachers as the main culprits for school failure". This has brought significant angst and uncertainty to teachers in relation to the future of their profession.

In Brazil, pessimism seems related to a lack of continuity in the policies, since whenever a new political party takes over state or city government, for example, a new pedagogical project begins as if nothing had ever been done before. A participant indicates that in the period of a year and three months in which she has worked in a city's Department of Education, she has witnessed the exchange of three directors. This situation makes work more difficult and produces angst and concern.

As Antunes and Peroni (2017, p. 182) explain,

> both in Brazil (in the redemocratization period, after 1985) and in Portugal (after the Carnation Revolution in 1974 and the institution of a democratic regime), the advancements in the fights for social rights happened post-dictatorship moments, at the same time that the Fordist/Keynesian model was entering a crisis. The authors affirm that in place of this model, capitalism proposed a set of strategies to reinstate the increase in profit rates, reducing rights, with grave consequences to the construction of democracy and to the consolidation of social rights.

12

Antunes and Peroni (2017, p. 207) also affirm that the consequences of this macro-context led to "the constitution of an often-precarious workforce, whose work conditions, of even its characteristics, distance itself from the public system standard, even though it operates as a public response".

The narratives evidence that teaching is a complex activity marked by dilemmas and defined by meaningful experiences which, when confronted by other experiences, are at least as important to the construction of teachers' identities as the theoretical contributions of their academic and professional educations.

Teachers also shared positive similarities in their priorities when educating students and in their concerns with a relevant quality education, promoting significant and liberating learnings.

Contributions to the professional development

The narratives allowed for the expression of experiences with lasting consequences, of conflicts not yet solved. The sharing of positive experiences was less frequent, possibly because they do not necessarily demand further questioning. Initially, the accounts make us realize what is/was not well so that afterwards we can advance through alternative paths towards the current practices.

Therefore, an important learning was discovering that, beyond noticing what is not well, it is necessary to advance. The narratives reveal an awareness of the need to change, without losing sight of all the difficulties and embarrassments faced. An important learning,

for example, was understanding that evaluations are a set of practices which reflect the social, political, historical, and ideological context conditioning and being conditioned by them.

Narratives, then, become a way to give order to the lived experiences. P9 asks herself: "What should I share? There are so many stories to tell…". Stories are told to give meaning to what was lived, to better understand what happened and its circumstances, to ponder over past decisions etc.

Remembering, writing, reading, and commenting on their peers' narratives were experiences surrounded by the difficulties inherent to the process of writing and permeated by sometimes painful memories from the beginning of their careers or from their initial education. It also meant the possibility to reconsider feelings, to notice the constitutive nature of these experiences, and to seize their own professional development processes.

The conversations in the online forums placed time and space in the foreground. This was evident in several ways in the creation of a third space - in the sense of a virtual space which brought us closer to our local histories, according to the expression coined by Zeichner (2010) -, from the *ribeirinha* school in the state of Pará, Brazil, to the school in the municipality of Baião, in Portugal. Both stories took place in the 1980s, a period of redemocratization in Brazil and in Portugal, which also indicates the marks of our historical processes. In Portugal, collective groups of teachers mobilized to rethink the curriculum in a new democratic state. In Brazil, in P10's narrative, city administration attributed a multigrade class to a 14-year-old girl who had concluded only the fifth grade of basic education.

Hence, if we analyze the beginning of teaching by comparing both countries, it becomes evident that, if teaching only develops itself in context, our national context in Brazil is remarkably more precarious.

Final remarks

In the online narratives, different times and spaces articulate themselves when reading others' stories. A contextualized reflection is required, based on personal and professional history, opposite to the mere repetition of readymade sentences. For the participants, the act of telling each other about their initial years of teaching, of reading each other's stories, and of reflecting about the school from a different time and the one from the present in two different countries enabled an experience with different times and places brought closer by the virtual environment and by the conversation in a common language.

This research, entailing an educative practice for the production of data, potentialized the questioning and the recognition of oneself and of the other as professionals of education who are each constituted by their own private history and by the history they share with their contemporaries.

13

ARTICLE

References

ANDRÉ, Marli. Políticas de apoio aos docentes em estados e municípios brasileiros: dilemas na formação de professores. **Educar em Revista**. Curitiba, n. 50, p. 35-49, out./dez. 2013.

ANTUNES, Fátima; PERONI, Vera. Reformas do Estado e políticas públicas: trajetórias de democratização e privatização em educação. Brasil e Portugal, um diálogo entre pesquisas. **Revista Portuguesa de Educação.** Braga, v. 30, n. 1, p. 181-216, jun. 2017

BOSI, Ecléa. **Memória e sociedade**: lembrança de velhos. São Paulo: EDUSP, 1987.

CLANDININ, D. Jean; CONNELLY, F. Michael. **Pesquisa Narrativa**: experiência e história em pesquisa qualitativa. Uberlândia: EDUFU, 2011.

COCHRAN-SMITH, Marilyn; LYTLE, Susan. Relationships of knowledge and practice: Teacher learning in communities. **AERA.** Washington, DC, v. 24, p. 251-307, 1999.

COSTA, Josilene Silva da; OLIVEIRA, Rosa Maria Moraes Anunciato de. A iniciação na docência: analisando experiências de alunos professores das licenciaturas. **Olhar de Professor**. Ponta Grossa, v. 10, n. 2, p. 23-46, 2007.

CUNHA, Maria Isabel. Conta-me agora! As narrativas como alternativas pedagógicas na pesquisa e no ensino. **Revista da Faculdade de Educação.** São Paulo, v. 23, n. 1/2, p. 185-195, jan./dez. 1997.

CUNHA, Maria Isabel da; ZANCHET, Beatriz Maria Boéssio Atrib. A problemática dos professores iniciantes: tendência e prática investigativa no espaço universitário. **Educação.** Porto Alegre, v. 33, n. 3, p. 189-197, set./dez. 2010.

DAY, Christopher. A resiliência, os professores e a qualidade da Educação. *In:* FLORES, Maria Assunção; Coutinho, Clara. **Formação e trabalho docente**: diversidade e convergências. Santo Tirso, Portugal: De Facto Editores, 2014. p. 101-130.

GARCÍA, Carlos Marcelo. **Formação de professores:** para uma mudança educativa. Porto: Porto Editora, 1999.

GONZÁLEZ, Maria Fernanda; CASTRO-TEJERINA, Jorge; CARLUCCI, Ana Paula. Identidade profissional na formação docente em contextos virtuais. **Linhas Críticas.** Brasília, v. 20, n. 42, p. 383-403, maio/ago. 2014.

MARIANO, André Luiz Sena. A aprendizagem da docência no início da carreira: qual política? Quais problemas? **Revista Exitus.** Santarém/PA, v. 2, n. 1, p. 79-94, jan./jun. 2012.

OLIVEIRA, Rosa Maria Moraes Anunciato de. Narrativas: contribuição para a formação de professores, para as práticas pedagógicas e para a pesquisa em educação. **Revista Educação Pública.** Cuiabá, v. 20, n. 43, p. 289-305, maio/ago. 2011.

OLIVEIRA, Rosa Maria Moraes Anunciato de; GAMA, Renata Prensttteter. Desenvolvimento profissional docente e narrativas em diferentes momentos da formação e

14

ARTICLE

atuação. **Revista da FAEEBA - Educação e Contemporaneidade**. Salvador, v. 23, n. 41, p. 205-219, jan./jun. 2014.

RECUERO, Raquel da Cunha. Comunidades virtuais - Uma abordagem teórica. *In*: V Seminário Internacional de Comunicação. **Anais...** Porto Alegre, PUC/RS, 2005.

SANTOS, Edméa. Educação online como um fenômeno da cibercultura. *In*: SILVA, Maria. *et al*. **Educação online**: cenários, formação e questões didático-metodológicas. Rio de Janeiro: Editora WAK, 2010. p. 29-48.

ZEICHNER, Kenneth. Repensando as conexões entre a formação na universidade e as experiências de campo na formação de professores em faculdades e universidades. **Educação.** Santa Maria, v. 35, n. 3, p. 479-504, set./dez. 2010.

Notes

[i] *Professores Brasileiros e Portugueses em Grupo Online: Narrativas de Formação* [Brazilian and Portuguese Teachers in an Online Group: Education Narratives]. Process number: 2013/12954-9. São Paulo Research Foundation (FAPESP).

[ii] The ongoing education activity which served as the study field of this research was certified by *Pró-Reitoria de Extensão da Universidade Federal de São Carlos* [Assistant Dean's Office of Extension from the University of São Carlos]. The participants received extension certificates.

[iii] More information available at: http://www.portaldosprofessores.ufscar.br/. Access in: March 28, 2018.

[iv] In this paper, we have translated all participants' quotations from Portuguese into English.

[v] The term "lay teachers" used here refers to uninitiated, unschooled teachers who do not possess the required qualifications to teach at the level they were hired to. This is more common in the poorer areas of Brazil.

[vi] The *Ribeirinhos* are traditional Brazilian communities who live near rivers, especially in the Amazon region.