Debut in teaching experience: a qualitative analysis

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ABSTRACT. Present research evidences indexes that characterize success or failure in teaching debut of schoolteachers of the Portuguese language as a mother tongue. By means of guided questions the authors interviewed elementary school teachers who were able to remember details of their teaching debut. After transcribing the interviews, the following categories for the analysis of the teachers’ statements were established: schooling, professional experiences, expectations, remembrance of teaching debut, stimuli, remarkable facts, personal evaluation, and search for causes.

Key words: Portuguese language, teachers, teaching debut.

It is a well-known fact that the beginning of a professional career may be underlined by ups and downs, failures and successes. Expectations are formed along years of study and of professional preparation to face a highly competitive labor market. The latter has high demands with regard to a reality that may cause professional success or failure. The same rule is applied to the teaching professional. To identify the signs that might characterize the first successful or unsuccessful experience of a teacher of the Portuguese language as a mother tongue, an investigation was undertaken through the qualitative approach.

Teachers who experienced professional and personal satisfaction in their first class experience were approached. At the same time, we tried to understand why others did not have the same satisfaction and became frustrated in their first experience. They consequently failed in their projects and turned up to be disappointed with their lack of expectations. We believe that it is crucial to highlight the importance that initial teaching activity may play in the teacher’s life since she can benefit from her first experience. In fact, it may be an incentive to her future actions. Otherwise, the teacher may become totally unmotivated to carry on her teaching career.

It is known that there are many positive and negative factors that influence teaching professionals and which give them success or failure. Among others, inner factors involving emotions, feelings, anxiety and low expectations may be common because the teacher is a vulnerable human being. On the other hand, there is a context that involves the teacher, such as external factors that can influence her role as a teacher. Although no one has entire access to internal factors (Cohen 1989:8), external ones may be detected so that positive experiences would be the rule in a school context. Negative experiences, if they occur, would function as a model of reflection to be avoided or may be taken as an experience for people involved.

It is still important to mention that when a teacher is not satisfied with her job, she feels herself frustrated and unmotivated. This state of affairs does not affect merely the teacher herself, but the students as well. The teacher of Portuguese, the subject of this research, has a double responsibility due to the importance of literacy upon the student’s life. If the teaching/learning is not built on a strong
basis, providing an interaction between the teacher and the students, the children’s future, both as a reader and as a pupil, will be impaired.

If we perceive the differences between two teachers in their first professional experiences, a successful and an unsuccessful one, and trace the context of one’s success or the other’s failure, we have hit on the great discussion regarding failures in the classroom. The whole school team, or rather, headmasters, educational supervisors, pedagogical coordinators and teachers should adopt such investigation. It will be a strategy that brings to the surface problematizations and questionings and causes more down-to-earth actions with regard to problems that are an obstacle to intellectual growth in the teaching profession.

Methodology

Qualitative research was carried out in two interviews with two teachers of Portuguese from a public school in the northwest region of the state of Paraná, Brazil. Interviews for data collection have been used since they are proper to the type of investigation undertaken. According to Pereira de Queiroz (1987:272), oral procedures “catch the non-explicit, besides being the best adequate method, since they enhance the verbalization of experiences and interpretation of events that have been lived through by the interviewed person”.

Although qualitative research is rooted in anthropology (Érickson, 1986), it became a constant methodological option in the educational field (Monteiro, 1991). Researchers (Cohen, 1989) believe that learning occurs at the unconscious level and thus inaccessible. However, the verbal expression may be an efficacious instrument in qualitative research. In fact, there is no better person to narrate her feelings than the person involved.

In spite of hearty references for this research, its limits and the technology used should be enhanced since documents are obtained by audio or video recordings, which constitute partial cuttings, and by recorded transcriptions from oral transmission (in the video case there are also gesticulations) to the written (descriptive) mode. Such transports may involve losses.

Another illusion may be coupled to that of the perfect tool, or rather, the total exemption of the investigating subject. The researcher is influenced by his/her interest in the object of research and thus, when seeking a narrator, does so selectively. After the transcription of the narrative, the researcher selects such parts as will satisfy his/her aims. This boils down to the fact that even if the researcher lets the narrative flow exactly as it is constructed by the narrator, the monitor of the development of the narration process is in fact the researcher himself/herself.

From the start the researcher is the person that commands the collection of material and its activities. His/her particular interests caused the narration. Although one may leave the narrator at ease to be the subject of what she is saying, the researcher will always have the dominant position (Pereira de Queiroz, p. 274).

Admitting that the researcher covertly directs the colloquium with the narrator, the same author says that for a decrease of such predominance the interviewer should be silent as much as possible and leave the interviewed-narrator to decide what to say. The interviewer may interfere only when his/her interpolations are necessary for the understanding of certain information. In the oral narration the narrator should lead the colloquium. One should never forget that it was the researcher that chose the research theme and formulated the problems for discussion.

In view of these methodological caveats, procedures were as follows: (a) subjects interviewed: teachers of the Portuguese language as a mother tongue who were able to recall their first experience, a successful and an unsuccessful one, as teachers; (b) interview outline; (c) recording of semi-directed interview in audio mode; (d) decoding of interview; (e) analysis of interviews and categorization of information provided by the teachers; (f) summary of results.

Transcription of interviews followed standard orthography and particularized as much as possible the modulations of orality in the discourse of the interviewed. After transcription, narrations were analyzed. The analysis was monitored according to indications on the research theme.

Theory

Brief review of research on teachers. Some decades ago teachers’ worldview with their practice and beliefs became the object of research in the educational field. Silberman (1970: 414, apud Lanier and Little, 1985: 527) says that:

Teacher education...has been the object of recurrent investigation since the end of World War I; indeed, the preparation of teachers has been studied as frequently as the plight of the black man in America, and with as little effect. Since 1920, in fact, ten major studies of teacher education have been published, one of them running to six, another to eight volumes. In addition, the National Society for the Study of
Debut in teaching experience: a qualitative analysis

Research on teachers’ practical knowledge and the manner they describe their environment and activities were more frequent from 1980 onwards. In his 1970s research Lortie\(^1\) (1973, apud Feiman-Nemser and Floden, 1985:507) investigated how male and female teachers are compensated through the pupils’ gratitude, with the due difference between male and female, older or younger teachers, married or single. In a research on authority and control in school Metz (1978) distinguished between teachers who teach subject matters and teacher who teach children.

Hoy and Rees (1977) write that teachers-students consider the control of pupils as teaching’s principal aim. In the same vein, this is Ryan’s (1970) research too. Silver (1973) says that teachers do not have colleagues but partners and rarely use interactive opportunities to discuss their activities. These results have been somewhat given by other researchers (Lortie, 1975; McPherson, 1972; Sarason, 1982). Cohen (1973) states that vertical immobility in the teaching profession is extremely baffling for primary school teachers. Lightfoot (1978) speaks about the vulnerability of teachers with regard to complaints or exigencies for change by parents, especially when their uncertainties are greater than their personal opinions or social status.

Hall (1982) declares that secondary school teachers are frustrated because of rising difficulties in the teaching of pupils. They are worried on the constant danger of physical abuse by students. In his study on retired teachers from Vermont, Nelson (1983) shows the importance of asking teachers to speak about themselves on the meaning of their educational activities.

In Brazil Lüdke and André (1986), Fazenda (1992), André (1995), Magalhães (1994), Kramer and Souza (1996) undertook qualitative research on teaching, learning, life histories of primary school teachers. These studies somewhat contributed towards much educational research. However, there is a gap on the success or failure of the teacher of the Portuguese language. The present article is a essay to discuss the verbalizations of these teachers with regard to their first experiences in teaching.

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\(^1\) All authors (except the Brazilian researchers) in this item as from Lortie (1973) have the same references: Feiman-Nemser and Floden, 1985, pp. 507-509.

The issue of the individual’s identity. According to Ciampa (1990, apud Baptista, 1992:14), the individual’s identity is a process that occurs throughout all his life. From birth up to all the consequences of his social relationships, the social structure keeps on providing identity patterns. Identity may assume the form of many characters. In distinct moments these characters remain, disappear, react, improve, and regress. During his/her lifetime the individual goes on building his/her identity, taking into account his/her similarities and differences, as compared with those of others. Self-identity, called “sameness”, remains stable during his/her lifetime. On the other hand, during metamorphosis, characters change through time and space. According to Ciampa (1990:171, apud Batista, idem: 19), “as a whole, identities reflect the social structure; at the same time they react upon it, preserving it (or transforming it)” The same author believes that there is interdependence between the individual’s identity construction and organizations.

One of the tasks of Social Psychology has been to understand the individual’s building of his identity. Meanwhile, it has also been adopted by other social sciences. One of the methodologies employed to understand the building of professional identities during interviews, is life history. Haguette (1987:72, apud Baptista, idem: 40) says, “it captures the process in movement ... it is noticeable, although not too easily. It demands an intimate comprehension of the lives of other people ... a wealth of details”.

According to Sarbin and Sheibe (1983) socialization processes experienced by individuals, constituent of identities, may have a rising or falling mode. In the view of these researchers, identity is based on social positions occupied by these people within the social network. Social positions give status to people and this depends on two factors: valorization and involvement. The former is related to time, context and the individual’s good or bad performance in his/her social tasks. Good and proper performance means respect, deference and consideration by members of the groups he/she is inserted in. Bad performance is devaluation and may enroll him/her in a non-person list, or start a stigma process that vilifies the individual (Goffman, 1982, apud Baptista, idem: 25). Involvement means intensity with which the teacher’s role is interpreted, generally conditioned by status.

Finally, within the process of socialization, legitimation occurs. It is a process of explanations and justifications which presents reality as a unit. They may be traditional statements, such as proverbs, maxims and theory constructions.
Motivation in the acquisition process. As Kuethe (1977, apud Viana, 1990) points out, motivation is closely related to aims, a desire to achieve a goal. Concerning acquisition, the author says that "when a situation (or something) catches someone’s attention, acquisition is established". According to Green (1968, apud Viana, 1990), a motivation problem depends on variables related to acquisition. They consist of the students’ objectives and needs, the teacher’s personality and the environment.

Some variables increase motivation, whereas others impair it. With regard to the former, one may mention praise, high school marks, prizes. For the latter, one may mention fatigue, boredom, frustration, and sarcastic criticism. Therefore, prize giving or punishment as a form of motivation is not the golden rule for good results, since effects on the students may vary considerably.

Paulo Freire (1976) believes that motivation is part of the activity. He says that we motivate ourselves when we become involved. From this point of view, the learner should realize the importance of what he/she is doing, why he/she is learning, and what he/she is learning. These self-motivations depend on the learner’s activities as well as on his/her previous knowledge. When he/she achieves the real meaning of his/her activity, interaction is established and he/she interacts with the subject matter. Motivation is involved in such interactions.

Teachers’ history through their voices

In this research the collaboration of two teachers was employed. They reported their very first experience as teachers of Portuguese as a mother tongue some years after the start of their teaching experience.

Based on the semi-directed interviews, it was possible to come to the conclusion that one of them felt that her first experience was a success. The other narrated with a certain unhappiness her first professional experience, listing frustrating and boring events during this period. Why such different professional results? Why two opposing reports, a satisfactory and a frustrating one?

Before answering these questions, we must first consider the factors that would have influenced the teachers’ performances. Selecting extracts from the interviews, we perceived that similar points between the teachers exist. In general, the initial phase of the teachers’ careers was underlined by very different situations. We shall call A the teacher who was successful in her first experience, and B the teacher whose class experience was not successful. Thus we may identify the extracts from interviews without difficulty.

Teacher training. The two interviewed teachers took the Teachers’ Training Course to teach Portuguese as mother tongue in the first stages of the elementary school. Why did they decide to take the course? Was it a personal option? Did someone influence them?

A- “… No, it's not that. I took the preparatory course and failed. Then I got frustrated, I got discouraged to take the propedeutic course again, and I did not feel that it would be useful, I even felt that I wouldn’t get my certificate in anything … Then there was a friend of mine who was sitting for the Teacher’s Training Course at Santo Inácio, and she liked it very much, she encouraged me... she offered to sponsor my course at the same school. (…) Then she said: “You must do it, yes, you must do it”, but I got a bit worried about going to Santo Inácio, it is a private school, because all my life I had studied in a public school and I was afraid I wouldn’t be able to follow the program, level was extremely high there. (…) Then I enrolled again, I confess I was not willing to do it, then I enrolled in another school, Branca Motta, where I finished my course … because if it weren’t for her encouragement, I wouldn’t have done the Training. I had no idea to attend any Training classes.

B- “…Ah... I did it because it seemed that I didn’t have any other option at that time, and because my mother had done Teachers’ Training … (…) No! That wasn’t the ideal. (…) Ah, it was… it was good, though it wasn’t that good, because it didn’t give you the basics, you know…”

The two teachers didn’t choose teaching as their ideal profession or as an option they had been thinking about for some time. Needless to say, it is difficult to have a teenager at this stage with a clear idea of what she wants to do. It is relevant to observe that both teachers undertook courses through external influences, one by a friend’s encouragement and the other by lack of option or, perhaps, by using her mother as a mirror.

Pre-Training Period. In this section we are going to check whether the teachers had already had some experience in the classroom before they finished the Teachers’ Training Course or whether their first experience after the course caused a great impact in the classroom.

A – “Before I finished my course, I worked for two years at a kindergarten (…) Then I started to work. My headmistress
Debut in teaching experience: a qualitative analysis

helped me in the classroom for a week, because it was my first experience in a classroom, it was a Prep Class Two, rather, it was Prep One..."

B- “...I finished my Teacher’s Training Course in 1988, in 89 I got my certificate and that year I entered the university, I didn’t start working, and I started working only in 90. Before that, I had other experiences as a secretary, an assistant in a dentist’s office... (...) Nothing. Only...the first experience in the first grade...”

Interviewee A was proud when she recalled her first experience as a teacher, since she had had already been in contact with the school environment and with children. She had had some experience before, though teaching Pre-Kindergarten I is really different from teaching reading and writing. The second teacher had different experiences in entirely different fields. Her teaching debut occurred only after she had finished her Training Course.

Expectations. When we start a professional activity expectations abound and we experience sensations of fear and hope. The same experience happened to the interviewed teachers too.

A “...After the start of the Teachers’ Training course I began to appreciate it and I decided to take my studies seriously (...). Then when I started my life as a schoolteacher at Prep. One, I was convinced that teaching would be a joy...”

B “... No, I did not have a clear perspective, eh, whether it would be good or bad....”

The difference is more than evident. While interviewee A felt during the training course that she was on the right track, interviewee B showed that the teaching profession didn’t give rise to any expectation, neither positive nor negative.

The beginning of the teaching career. Since the first steps are crucial for the rest of the teachers’ lives, we will now observe how they started their professional life:

A “...I started to work in a state school ... I finished my course in 90; in 91 there was a public selection contest, I sat for it, and I was successful. I was given my first class of students, a Prep. One (...). I started teaching a class which had been in the hands of a substitute teacher. On the second week an assistant teacher was giving lessons. However the class was waiting for a permanent one (...). We became friends right way. I think that as I was the youngest teacher, the newest in the school, I was pampered by all; so, they helped me and provided everything for my class...”

B- “...Well, when I started teaching, I did so in a public school. At that time, there was no selection test to sit for, or CV to show, just nothing, I just gave my name to the Government Department for Education. Then I got my Stage One class, because the first stages are always available, see? (...) Then I asked someone which class was available, since I hadn’t sat for any public selection test. So I got Stage One, class D; the last group, you see, because it was always done by selection: A, B, C and D. And mine was Stage One D. There were 42 students in class.

Even if one has never met the two teachers personally or never talked to them, it is possible to see a joyful tone in the first statement and a gloomy one in the other. The way B tells us her story shows indignation and dissatisfaction. She stresses the negative aspects to justify her failure.

Further, we notice that the first teacher was well received by the schoolteachers when she started her teaching activity. She herself declared that she was pampered by them and by the school principal. However, the other teacher, as she herself states, received the class rejected by all and which nobody wanted. Or rather, it seems that the class was the weakest of all. There is a practice in school to classify with the first letters of the alphabet the best classes (A, B and C) and the worst classes with the other letters (in this case, a D).

Incentives and stimuli. It is common knowledge that the teacher, as educator, has a tremendous responsibility in a satisfactory teaching-learning process. Needless to say, with a mere chalkbox the teacher will not work miracles. She needs support, an excellent environment, and good physical conditions to improve teaching quality. Help from a pedagogical team is a must. This does not occur frequently, as we may perceive from the following sections of the interviews:

A: “... So, while chatting with the other colleagues that used to give lessons to other Stage One classes in the morning, that is, during the same period I taught, they helped me a lot through their experiences (...) they gave me all I needed: stencils, sheets of paper. There was someone in charge to take stencil copies. We had just to prepare the original in advance, number of students, right number of foolscap paper. When the copies were ready, they were sent to our classroom. (...) People at our school were very kind, so, I had everything I needed...”
B: “...I was alone in the classroom. I didn’t have any experience (...) I asked my colleagues for help, those that gave lessons to Stage One classes. And I implored them “Which lesson should I give to the students?” I did need some orientation, but they simply stared at me and said: You won’t have any problem, you are young, yours is a fresh mind, you still do not have any methodology. Shortly you will assimilate the Basic Cycle (the educational restructure of the first Stages). And they did not help me, neither the monitor nor the supervisor...”

We will now have the opportunity to see what the second interviewed answered when she was asked if the school provided material to develop different activities:

B—“...No, they did not. They used to say that everything should be provided for by the children...”

Unlike A, who used to receive pedagogical support and material provided by the school team, B felt herself without any support. Practically put aside by her colleagues, she ignored which measures to adopt in a Stage One class.

The difficult mission of teaching reading and writing. Besides the teacher’s general responsibility in the exercise of her profession, the Stage One teacher faces the challenge to teach reading and writing. One has to imagine that the teachers under analysis had the task of teaching reading and writing a classroom of 35 or 40 students. However, the process of teaching to read and write should not be a nightmare for the teachers, once the school provides good teaching conditions. What follows are the interviewee’s statements on this matter:

A—“...It was an excellent class. The class consisted of a group of children that had taken Prep. Class in the same school (...). Mainly because that group had been sorted out, selected, yes, a selection was made with children who already had some notions of reading and writing. They came from the Prep. Class of the same school...”

B—“...In class I had some seven or eight students, I do not remember well, who had failed in their first year. They were all in my classroom (...) There were some children who were unable to hold a pencil. Nobody showed me how to deal with a situation like that, I did not know what to do to develop the child’s motricity skills, so... I was left by myself in the classroom...”

The above passages from the interviews show the difficult situation experienced by the second teacher.

While A’s group had received reading and writing instructions, it seems that some of B’s students had not assimilated the school environment since, according to teacher B’s opinion, they did not even know how to hold a pencil.

The distinguishing facts. Another interesting aspect in this study is related to the teachers’ statements on important facts during their first experiences. Besides the issues related to teaching reading and writing and to the teaching-learning process, the two interviewees reported situations that in their opinion were unforgettable:

A: “...When I entered the classroom, I had a big surprise. The classroom was adorned with balloons, posters, banners. And there were seven or eight students’ mothers chatting around. In the center of the room a table was prepared with candies, hors d’oeuvres and a big cake with encouraging words for me. Then the children entered and gave me flowers (...) After that the school principal came in, followed by the supervisor and they greeted me and embraced me, so I said: “Wow! What day is today?” Then the students said: “Nothing special, teacher, we like you very much”. They made a satin banner (...) a red satin mantle, with white feathers. Around it was written “I LOVE YOU” on the back, with white beads, as well as a crown and ... a sort of a scepter, see (...) banners, cards, small vases of flowers, a bunch of flowers...”

B: “... I had a student, well, out of 42 students; one day I was giving my lesson and perceived that my wallet had simply disappeared. Where’s my wallet? I thought I had lost it. It was one of the students from Stage One who had stolen my wallet (...) he threw away all my personal documents in an empty field, then through the telephone directory someone found out my father’s surname and they called me up. My documents were soaked, and even now my ID card is a bit “wrinkled”, and I never saw my wallet again. I talked to his mother, but I didn’t report the case to the police...”

Needless to remark, there is a huge difference between the teacher’s statements! Whereas “A” reports a very rewarding experience in which, in her opinion, she was honored by the students, their mothers and by the schoolteachers in recognition of her work, “B” had the unlucky experience of having her wallet possibly stolen by her student. She got very upset since, as she herself stated, she had never had the faintest idea that a First Stage child would do such a thing.

Personal evaluation. The type of evaluation undertaken by the teachers about their first
experience as teachers will be analyzed. Each has her own way to narrate the first encounter with the class.

A: “... I consider my first year a success. (...) I may one day, who knows, many things happen, but I may even have a new job, I may do something different, but I think that this experience will remain forever, you see, the fact that these children learned how to read and write ... I believe they were schooled, and I'm sure they will continue their studies...”

B: “...I couldn't manage things, it was downright frustrating. Why should I try to work with something that was not working well (...) I think that there are more negative aspects than positive ones. I don’t have, I mean, anything positive to report on my first year of teaching experience, no definite...”

Interviewee A recognizes that she developed a good working policy in the classroom, and is convinced that her first experience was a success. On the other hand, B's speech is marked by frustration and assured the interviewer that there was nothing positive in her first experience as a teacher.

Time tunnel. We know man is incapable of harnessing time. However, every time we think on our past activities, we always remark, “If I could go back in time, I would do this and that”, or “If I could go back in time, I wouldn’t make the same mistake”. With these reflections in mind we will see how the interviewed teachers would act if they went back in time once more.

A: “... I would do the same, I would do the same, yes. I would do it because since the first year, at school, when I started teaching First Grade children, I started, well I started a bit annoyed with the bad experience of the previous year, but in the first semester I started doing some different activities, I used to give extra classes at school to reinforce the students’ learning, then I started enjoying what I was doing. And today if I had to go back in time, I would do the same, yes...”

B: “...Wow! What a difficult question! I still don’t have a clear idea ... I mean I haven't reached any definite conclusion. I like teaching very much, I think I learned a lot, there's something positive in working with children ... Because I think, yes, there are fine days, the relationship you establish is very nice. You are very glad, very happy, and you go to school eager to work; and the students are capable of giving you the worst frustration, they destroy you, you leave school feeling low, you think you'll never teach again, and you say out loud: “What am I doing here, it's not my place!” But there are days in which you are feeling bad, you're not well, and you enter the classroom completely down, and then you see those little eyes waiting for you, or caring for you. Then everything helps you to change your mood and you leave the school much happier...”

Once more, A is convinced that she had a rewarding experience and she has no doubt in answering the question about going back in time. She would do it all again. We have to observe B’s report with extreme attention. Although she does not show a definite position and rather finds the question difficult, through the organization of the discourse one may perceive that B has an affinity for teaching. So, why did she feel frustrated in her first experience? This aspect will be discussed shortly.

Teaching at Present. Though the core of this research lies in the first teaching experience of teachers of the Portuguese language and the factors that involve it, it is also important to observe their position as teachers nowadays. After all, as we previously said in the introduction, the first experience may significantly influence all future experiences. Our question was: “Do you feel fulfilled as a teacher?”

A: “... Yes, I am. Though today I ... well, the school I work at today demands much more than the schools in which I worked in already... (...) It's another reality. In this private school, I worked during two years, a year and a half, in the morning and in the afternoon. Really, at present, I can't manage teaching in two periods anymore, it has to be just one to do things right, otherwise...”

B: “... Well, in terms of money, it's not, see? But I like teaching very much, I have a good relationship with the students (...) I teach Stage Four now, but I taught Stages Three and Four. (...) Never, never will I teach Stage One anymore (...) I won't allow it, I won't allow it, and I don't want, even if they offer me twice the money, I won't ... (...) Today I can say that my experience is much better, eh, my self-confidence in teaching is much better; well, you acquire that by experience...”

First of all, it is a fact that the interviewed teachers accepted the teaching career, once they have been working in the classroom since their first experience. Changes occurred in A’s case since currently she works at a private school. She states that much is being required of her and she needs more time to prepare the lessons in a responsible way. Since A has always received help and support
she does not have any criticism on the collaboration received and the transmission of experience. It seems that she uncritically accepts the impositions of the new type of school she currently works at as she had done at the first school she started working.

B raises the financial issue and does not state that she feels fulfilled as a teacher. She merely remarks that she “likes teaching” and she is definite in her conviction that she will never want to teach First Grade again. She also stresses that years of experience evidence the possibility of good teaching performance as a professional of education.

Who is responsible? Taking into consideration the above mentioned aspects and the interviewed teachers’ statement about their success or failure, who is responsible for the result that each obtained from her professional teaching performance? A check on the reason for their success or failure will be undertaken.

A: “...I think that many things were involved (...) People at school were very kind, the material I needed was always ready (...) In some schools, I’m aware, people don’t help, ... I met colleagues who had to give up teaching, and the reason was lack of material, low salaries, children with great difficulties, no extra lessons, no help at all...”

B: “...I think there were many negative things at the same time. Lack of experience, lack of school support, lack of support from the supervisor, the worst, however, was the sheer lack of teachers’ support in transmitting their know-how. They just didn’t care, otherwise they would have done something, see (...) I’m convinced that they just placed me in a classroom. “It’s up to you now!” or as if one had been thrown into the sea and someone said: “Come on, swim; you take care of yourself!...”

The last issue shows an interesting aspect. Interviewed teachers A and B have a common point of view on the fact that the background support, management, supervision and teachers play an important role in the teaching experiences. Even though successful in her teaching experience, A raises the question about teachers that do not receive the necessary support, technical, institutional or otherwise, from the school management.

Confessing her lack of experience (at that time she only had teaching apprenticeship in her curriculum vitae), B attributes the responsibility of her failure to the school team. She recalls her first experience with indignation, since she felt herself “thrown” into a classroom without any support.

Final considerations. In the last part of our research the divergent aspects contained in the statements of the interviewed teachers will be analyzed. The conclusions the data revealed will be then discussed.

Let’s imagine a surgical intervention of sorts. What comes immediately to our mind? A room with lots of instruments and a patient on a bed are visualized. There are also several people, the physician (surgeon, anesthetist), nurses, nursing attendants, in short, the whole team working together to help the patient to recover. What has this to do with our research?

Our analyses revealed that the divergent aspects, nine out of the eleven analyzed, are more in number than the convergent ones which are down to two. Since our study should not merely be limited to indexes of success and failure, but to problematize the training of the teacher of Portuguese as a mother language and the classroom, we will restrict ourselves to the convergent aspects which will surely give interesting conclusions.

If the first interviewed teacher had chosen the teaching course by vocation, as the popular saying goes, or through a professional option, we would say that her success was the result of having followed the profession she desired from the beginning. However, the two interviewed teachers took the teaching course after being influenced by external factors, or rather, one was influenced by a friend and the other by sheer lack of options. Such reasoning is insufficient to reach the conclusion that previous professional determination interferes in success.

Another aspect in which the two teachers made similar statements concerns the attribution of responsibility for the teacher’s success or failure in her first experience. If we go back to the surgery scene, we may ask what will happen if the doctor needed a nurse and she was unavailable when required. What will a nurse do if she is wholly unprepared for a surgical intervention? What will happen if surgical instruments such as scissors, bistoury or any other tool are missing? The surgery will fail and, worse still, the life of the patient, endangered. When the subject of education is raised, only the characters and the scene change. The need for a responsible team is the same.

A public or private educational institution needs a good team. Attendants, cooks, teachers, managers, all have their proper function to carry out. When one of these pieces fails to work as expected, when one does not do one’s part with responsibility, the school inevitably will suffer the consequences. Based on the teachers’ statements, it is not
Debut in teaching experience: a qualitative analysis

Preposterous to assume that the teacher’s success or failure in her debut depends on the whole team. It is obvious that the teacher’s inner motivation greatly influences a satisfactory teaching-learning process. However, according to interviewee B, it is not possible to attribute all responsibility exclusively to the school team. She herself declares her frustration on her first experience and assumes part of the failure.

It is clear that incentives and the right stimuli coming from someone that has already accumulated personal and professional experiences can do a lot of difference for those who are starting the teaching career. Teamwork in which friends and not mere partners are involved is an absolute must (Silver, 1973). The building of individual identities is processed through relationships with people and with institutions (Ciampa, 1990). This is why analyses of institutions should be undertaken. The latter should be investigated to see whether they are motivators of the intellectual development of their members. Freire (1976) remarked that motivation is part of the activity, which boils down to the fact that alienated teaching activity can give neither personal nor collective satisfaction.

We have students not patients in the classroom. We do not need bistouries and scissors, but copybooks, books, pens, pencils and a qualified team. We are not required to heal the body, but we must stimulate the spirit through the reading and writing process. Similar to a surgical operation, we are responsible for a human being. Whether professional teachers or not, we need some day or another a hearty encouragement to attain success (Sarbin & Sheibe, 1983). We do not need anaesthetic doses that paralyze us and lead us towards failure.

References


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