The constitution of being a teacher: new challenges in face of a pandemic scenario

Ana Paula Gestoso de Souza and **Aline Maria de Medeiros Rodrigues Reali**

Universidade Federal de São Carlos, Rod. Washington Luiz, s/n, 13565-905, São Carlos, São Paulo, Brazil. *Author for correspondence. E-mail: ana.gestoso@gmail.com

ABSTRACT. This paper analyzes the constitution of being a teacher in the context of the Covid-19, aiming to: i. characterize the elements present in the process of reframing the teaching professional identity in the context of a pandemic; ii. identify the challenges experienced in professional practice as a teacher in remote education. This is a descriptive-analytical study of an exploratory nature, related to a more extensive research-intervention, considering the pandemic first year. This article focuses on the experience of eight experienced teachers in remote teaching who acted as mentors in the research-intervention. The data comprised written narratives recorded in reflective diaries, virtual activities, and reports by *WhatsApp*. As a complement, we will consider the deposits of experienced professors registered in virtual synchronous online meetings. It was possible to identify/understand: i. signs of anguish and helplessness when facing the professional effects caused by the pandemic, ii. sense of emptying one's professional identity and iii. challenges in designing teaching in remote education. It was observed that in this new scenario caused by the pandemic, teachers are going through processes similar to those of the novices accompanied during mentoring, experiencing tensions such as: fear and uncertainty about the future (including the return of regular classroom activities), anxiety, anguish, feeling of incapacity, doubts about the reorganization of school activities (remotely), difficulties in dialogue with the students' family members, concerns with the children and their families, lack of information and dialogue in schools and education networks, revolt at government actions, among others. It was also observed that new meanings are being attributed to the process of becoming a teacher. The imbalance in the constitution of professional identity was noticed as one of the first effects of the pandemic. Such an imbalance gave way to the empowerment of the teaching identity itself, also causing an expansion of the repertoire of professional knowledge.

Keywords: teacher training; personal identity; elementary schools.

A constituição do ser professora: novos desafios diante de um cenário de pandemia

RESUMO. Analisa-se a constituição do ser professor no contexto de pandemia da Covid-19, buscando: i. caracterizar os elementos presentes no processo de ressignificação da identidade profissional docente no contexto de pandemia; ii. identificar os desafios vividos na atuação profissional como docente no ensino remoto. Trata-se de um estudo descritivo-analítico, de caráter exploratório, relacionado a uma pesquisa-intervenção mais ampla, que tem como marcador temporal o ano de 2020. Este artigo enfoca a vivência de oito professoras experientes no ensino remoto que atuavam como mentoras na referida pesquisa-intervenção. Analisaram-se narrativas escritas registradas em diário reflexivos, relatórios de atividades e comunicação pelo *WhatsApp*. Como fonte complementar, foram considerados depoimentos das professoras experientes registrados em reuniões síncronas online. A partir disso, foi possível identificar/compreender: i. tons de angústia e desamparo diante dos efeitos profissionais ocasionados pela pandemia, ii. sentido de esvaziamento da própria identidade profissional e iii. desafios na projeção da docência no ensino remoto. Observou-se que, diante do novo cenário ocasionado pela pandemia, as professoras/mentoras passaram por processos similares aos das iniciantes que acompanhavam na mentoria, vivenciando tensões como: receio e incertezas diante do futuro (incluindo o retorno das atividades escolares presenciais), ansiedade, angústia, sentimento de incapacidade, dúvidas na reorganização das atividades escolares (de forma remota), dificuldades no diálogo com os familiares, preocupação com as crianças e seus familiares, ausência de informações e diálogo nas escolas e redes de ensino, revolta diante das ações governamentais, entre outras. Contudo, também foi observado que novos significados foram atribuídos ao processo de se constituir um professor. Verificou-se o desequilíbrio da constituição da identidade profissional como um dos primeiros efeitos da pandemia. Entretanto, tal desequilíbrio deu lugar ao empoderamento da própria identidade docente, ocasionando também ampliação do repertório de conhecimentos profissionais.

Palavras-chave: formação de professores, identidade profissional, professores de educação básica.

La constitución del ser docente: nuevos retos ante un escenario pandémico

RESUMEN. Se analiza la constitución del ser docente en la pandemia de Covid-19, buscando: i. caracterizar los elementos presentes en el proceso de resignificación de la identidad profesional docente en el contexto de pandemia; ii. identificar los desafíos vividos en la actuación profesional como docente en la enseñanza remota. Se trata de un estudio descriptivo-analítico, de carácter exploratorio, relacionado con una investigación-intervención más amplia, que tiene como marcador temporal el año 2020. Este artículo enfoca ocho maestras experimentadas en la enseñanza remota que actuaban como mentoras en dicha investigación-intervención. Se analizan narrativas escritas registradas en diario reflexivos, informes de actividades y comunicación por *WhatsApp*. Como fuente complementaria, se consideró los testimonios de las profesoras registrados en reuniones síncronas online. Fue posible identificar/comprender: i. tonos de angustia y desamparo ante los efectos profesionales ocasionados por la pandemia, ii. sentido de vaciamiento de la propia identidad profesional y iii. desafíos en la proyección de la docencia en la enseñanza remota. Se observó que, ante el nuevo escenario ocasionado por la pandemia, las maestras/mentoras están pasando por procesos similares a los de las principiantes que acompañan en la mentoría, experimentando tensiones como: miedo e incertidumbres ante el futuro (incluyendo el regreso de las actividades escolares presenciales), ansiedad, angustia, sentimiento de incapacidad, dudas en la reorganización de las actividades escolares, dificultades en el diálogo con los familiares, preocupación con los alumnos y sus familiares, ausencia de informaciones y diálogo en las escuelas y redes de enseñanza, rebeldía ante las acciones gubernamentales. También se observó la atribución de nuevos significados al proceso de convertirse en profesor. Se ha constatado un desequilibrio en la constitución de la identidad profesional como uno de los primeros efectos de la pandemia. Tal desequilibrio ha dado lugar al empoderamiento de la propia identidad docente, ampliando el repertorio de conocimientos profesionales.

Palabra clave: formación del profesorado; identidad profesional; enseñanza primaria.

Introduction

Considering the context of the Covid-19 pandemic and its consequences on the teaching activity, this article analyzes the constitution of being a teacher and the resulting changes in their professional practices. To better understand such impact, the testimonies of eight experienced teachers expressed at separate times when acting as mentors in a mentoring program1 were analyzed – synchronous online meetings, online tasks and communication via WhatsApp, between the months of March and June 2020. The following research questions guided its conduction: In face of the pandemic context, how do experienced teachers see themselves as teachers? What challenges do they face in their professional activities in face of remote education? The research objectives were delimited as such: i. to characterize the elements present in the process of reframing the teaching professional identity in the context of a pandemic; ii. identify the challenges experienced in professional performance as a teacher in remote education.

When these teachers were questioned about how they see themselves as professionals in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, Professor J. indicated that the poem 'José', by Carlos Drummond de Andrade, represented the image of the teacher-mentor that she envisioned in this scenario. According to Saraiva Silva (2019, p. 61), "[...] Drummond's poetic writing becomes a field in which it is possible to translate the existing tensions between the objective world and the subjective world, in which the ever-present feeling of anguish and helplessness is transformed into a poetic word". Specifically in the cited poem, tones of anguish and urgency are present. Furthermore, the name of the poem – José – represents collectivity, that is, the questions raised in it reverberate "[...] a general feeling common to human existence" (Saraiva Silva, 2019, p. 63).

The period experienced by Drummond at the time of writing the poem (Estado Novo) has its own characteristics, and it is not possible (nor desirable) to directly transpose the author's ideas and conceptions to the present moment. However, the tension, fear and uncertainties facing the future – hallmarks of the poem's writing period – are contemporary and we corroborate Saraiva Silva (2019, p. 66, emphasis added) when she emphasizes that "[...] the concerns of José are still experienced by human beings, which makes the theme of the poem 'José' timeless, considering that such concerns are inseparable from the human condition".

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[1] The Hybrid Mentoring Program, the scenario of this investigation, is intervention research conducted in partnership with experienced teachers (with more than ten years of teaching practice). These teachers, called mentors, accompanied, and supported beginners (with up to five years of experience) working in Early Childhood Education, in the Early Years of Elementary School and in Youth and Adult Education, helping them to expand their knowledge base for teaching and to establish new professional practices. The program was funded by the State of São Paulo Research Foundation. The Human Research Ethics Committee approved the research project. CAAE number 68145717.8.0000.5504.

Therefore, at first, J.'s representation provoked us to look at the testimonies of the teacher-mentors in the light of the poem, but the data challenged us to go beyond these first impressions.

Theoretical contributions

We understand, from the perspective of Dubar (1997), that professional identity is constituted in a process of socialization in the intersection of biographical and relational processes, since it encompasses a subjective construction of a definition of oneself (identity for oneself) and the categories that identify and recognize a subject in each social space (identity for the other). In this socialization process, subjects are questioned by other subjects and institutions; they can accept or reject this interpellation and/or even create another one. Thus, there is a constant tension between the 'acts of attribution' – which portray aspects of "[...] what kind of man (or woman) you are, that is, the identity for the other" (Dubar, 1997, p. 137) and 'acts of belonging' – which define "[...] what kind of man (or woman) you want to be, that is, your identity" (Dubar, 1997, p. 137). Attempts to approximate self-identity and identity to the other generate 'identity strategies' that

> [...] can take two forms: either that of external transactions between the individual and significant others, aiming to try to accommodate the identity for himself to the identity for the other (transaction called objective) or that of internal transactions for the individual, between the need to safeguard a part of their previous identifications (inherited identities) and the desire to build new identities in the future (targeted identities), with a view to trying to assimilate the identity-for-the-other to the identity-for-self (Dubar, 1997, p. 140).

In this way, the constitution of the teaching identity presupposes negotiations and is a continuous, unstable, changeable, and multifaceted process based on social, cultural, political, and historical aspects of each context in which the teacher is inserted (Rodgers & Scott, 2008), the modes of recognition of institutions and others and self-recognition (Dubar, 1997). This process is mediated by teachers' experiences in and out of schools, their own beliefs, and values about what it means to be a teacher and the kind of teacher they aspire to be (Sachs, 2005). Therefore, it is critical that teachers become aware of their identities and respective contexts, the relationships and emotions that shape these contexts, and claim the authority of their own voice (Rodgers & Scott, 2008).

To these ideas about the constitution of professional identity, we add the perspective of professional development as a continuous process of becoming, that is, of transformation and constitution of the subject, over time, in a specific professional field such as teaching (Fiorentini & Crecci, 2013). In the case at hand, then, being directed to the "[...] satisfaction of the right to learning that students and the social community expect from the school" (Roldão, 2017, p. 201).

Teacher professional development incorporates the teacher's personal and professional trajectory and encompasses systematically planned activities and experiences (Vaillant & Marcelo, 2012), carried out for the benefit of the subject, the group or even the school (Day, 1999), which demand a posture of "[...] inquiry, of formulating questions and problems and the search for their solutions" (Vaillant & Marcelo, 2012, p. 169).

When developing professionally, subjects expand and deepen the repertoire of knowledge and professional skills to work in teaching, as well as develop their abilities, personality, skills, and interaction with the environment. For this reason, professional development is not detached from the process of teacher identity constitution.

It is worth pointing out that the participants in this study are experienced teachers – with more than 10 years of experience in teaching. Generally, when experienced teachers act, in addition to having a more elaborate, complex and multifaceted repertoire of knowledge and skills than novices, they have more voluntary and strategic control over the elements that involve the teaching and learning process and manage to analyze a problematic situation from different angles (Reali, Tancredi, & Mizukami, 2008; Marcelo, 2009, among others). However, these professors, having an adaptive profile (Marcelo, 2009), continue to develop professionally, continually seeking to transform, deepen and expand their skills, and continue to constitute their professional identities. In this way, facing new and challenging situations results in the emergence of new capabilities (Marcelo, 2009).

Therefore, we understand that the transformations that occur in society can have a destabilizing role in the certainties of being and acting as a teacher, causing tensions, but also the reframing of the professional identity itself, the renewal of the social commitment to teaching, the expansion and the deepening of the knowledge and skills necessary for the exercise of the profession.

Methodological path

In this research, of an exploratory nature, eight experienced teachers who functioned as mentors in the mentoring program in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic were investigated, according to the objectives presented in the introductory section of this text. In this article, the initials of each teacher's first name are used for identification. During the data collection period, three teachers, identified by C., N. and J., worked in Early Childhood Education in municipal public schools. They were between 42 and 51 years old, all with degrees in Pedagogy, and had more than 20 years of career in this teaching stage. J. also has 12 years of experience as a trainer in Youth and Adult Education (EJA), which is why she mentored novices in Early Childhood Education and EJA. Five teachers – identified as V., L. Na., W. and M. – worked in Elementary School – early years – and were between 32 and 42 years old, four of them with a degree in Pedagogy and one a degree in Languages, having from 12 to 20 years of teaching career. Four teachers – V., Na., W. and M. – worked in the municipal education network, and V. also worked in the state network. V. had 20 years of teaching experience in the early years, Na. had been teaching for 16 years and W. had 12 years of teaching career, both worked as trainers in the National Pact for Literacy at the Right Age (PNAIC) and M. worked for eleven years as a literacy teacher and for the past year has been deputy director of a school in municipal network. Professor L. had worked as a teacher in the private network for 16 years, in the early years, and had 10 years of experience as a pedagogical coordinator.

To conduct this study, written narratives of these teachers when acting as mentors were analyzed recorded in reflective diaries and activity reports and messages exchanged via WhatsApp, between them and the research team. In addition, their testimonies recorded on video in synchronous online meetings held with the research team were also considered. All the data was produced between March and August 2020. Each narrative excerpt is presented in this text as follows: initial of the teacher's name, type of text (diary, for example) and production date. Messages exchanged via WhatsApp are identified as follows: date sent, application and direction of the interlocutor (for example, Message from J. to teachers/mentors and researchers).

Using the perspective of prose analysis (André, 1983), the axes of analysis were not constructed a priori, but based on the contextualization of the teachers' testimonies and the identification of main themes and concepts in this studied context, initially conducting a parallel with the poem 'José' – considering its representativeness in the face of the lived scenario. From this, it was possible to identify/understand: i. tones of anguish and helplessness in the face of the professional effects caused by the pandemic; ii. sense of emptying one's own professional identity; iii. challenges in designing teaching in remote education.

Data presentation

The mentoring program was developed between 2017 and 2019 to articulate face-to-face and online activities with experienced basic education teachers monitoring novice teachers. In 2020, the social distancing imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic required that all mentoring and research activities be conducted online. During this phase of the program, the research team began to observe the impacts that the pandemic was having on the professional (and personal) lives of experienced teachers. A new professional challenge was set. Is it possible to continue being a teacher of children in a context of non-face-to-face classes? If so, how? This situation directly affects the construction of professional identity and professional development itself; , these processes are influenced by external forces of context and social relations. Below, we present the findings of the research (the initials of the names of the teachers/mentors and the people mentioned by them in their testimonies are used).

Shades of anguish, helplessness, and a sense of emptying one's own professional identity

We observed that in the face of the unexpected and uncertain scenario resulting from the pandemic, tones of anguish, helplessness, and urgency – hallmarks of Drummond's poem – were present in the teachers' testimonies, expressed at separate times (online synchronous meetings, online tasks, communication via WhatsApp). These tones were immersed in concerns related to the world (government actions, the school, families, students, novice teachers, etc.) and themselves. The unstable, changeable, and multifaceted aspects of being a teacher, aspects indicated by Rodgers and Scott (2008), were highlighted by a non-experienced,

unexpected, frightening and confusing situation, since the premises, understandings and previous propositions, which were until then conceived as stable, were now dismantled. This scenario brought up weaknesses, inadequacies, and insecurities, making the teachers aware of a fragile identity and the shaping power of the political, historical, and social facts experienced at that time.

In some of these testimonies, we perceive a sense of emptying of the teaching identity itself. The negotiations between the representations that teachers make of themselves and their functions with the concrete working conditions, with the social imaginary of the profession (Sachs, 2005; Garcia, Hypólito, & Vieira, 2005), among other objective aspects, were tensioned, and, for the teachers, the elements that constitute this identity collapsed. The excerpts from the testimonies presented below illustrate these considerations:

> With regard to the pandemic in my life, I have moments of great anxiety, fear, insomnia and even some difficulty concentrating, but I try not to think too much and try to live one day at a time and take precautions. [...] The virus imposed social isolation, 'suddenly the schools closed, and we distanced ourselves from our children without having yet established the necessary bond to develop our activities. Just from one day to the next it seems that we stopped being a teacher'. We know that in early childhood schools, learning takes place through playing and social interaction, it is the relationship with peers [...], and also through interaction with the teacher [...] (C., Diary, June 3rd, 2020, emphasis added).

> 'I wonder daily what will happen to our profession. If the institutions do not adapt, we will be unable to exercise our function for an indefinite period'. [...] We cannot attend to all children if not through remote education. 'Either they organize themselves and organize us or it will really be a lost year, full of frustrations, anguish and fear'[...] in addition to everything that the pandemic can already 'provide' for us. [...] We left [school] without the children's material and without many of our personal objects that we used at work. Everything was strange, 'a confusing and tense situation [...] We only had the school's official group as a means of communication with the management team and the other teachers. In fact, the impression I have, remembering all this now, is that the group was taken over by silence' (V., Diary, May 25th, 2020, emphasis added).

In her statement, C. expressed anguish because the need for social distancing did not allow the performance of some of the actions that characterize early childhood education (playing and interacting with the physical and social world). V. expressed elements of the materiality of professional identity and indicated the school's social commitment to assist all children, pointing out the impossibility of attending to all of them in person; however, as will be discussed later, she also questioned the difficulties of realizing effective inclusive remote learning.

The teachers showed anguish over the loss of bond with the students, showing how much the interpersonal relationship is a constituent element of the teaching identity – specifically the affective dimension – and, in addition, they expressed some values integrated into this identity. J.'s statement is illustrative of this element that was also present in the teaching image constructed by L., specifically about 'identity for the other'.

> These last three months have been very heavy for me, as I am a person who puts myself in other people's shoes a lot, 'I wonder how the children are doing [...]. I know that there are children who are in the care of their own older siblings, who are not that much older. Others who are in need', as they contacted us to ask for help (J., Diary, May 22nd, 2020, emphasis added).

> [in the week leading up to the suspension of classes] the students also seemed to have the same 'feeling of insecurity' as I did. However, I somehow needed to demonstrate security in the recommendations I gave: avoiding crowds, staying at home, studying the combined activities, not being so close to friends, perhaps this was the hardest part of the day. 'The students always see us as a mirror, an example, a model to be followed, but showing them certainties that I didn't have, saying that everything would be fine, even though I didn't know anything, made me feel like one of the worst days of my job. In the following days, the empty room was my company' (L., Diary, No date, May 2020, emphasis added).

These data reveal an aspect that needs to be considered so that the teachers can exercise the teaching function. The constitution of the teaching identity involves an articulation between the subjective dimension – how subjects see themselves as teachers – and the objective dimension – how the other sees them (Dubar, 1997). Thus, if elements that constitute the 'identity for oneself' collapsed and prevented teachers from seeing themselves as teachers, how could they relate to the school, the children, and their families in this context; , who is the teacher, what do they do? This situation generated a feeling of inadequacy, as revealed by Na.

> [...] today we complete almost three months of other challenges and anguish. [...] the 'feeling of incapacity' that approaches with each novelty that appears. [...] 'Dealing with new challenges every day [...] requires wear and tear that is often unnecessary and has an impact on other activities'. (Na., Review of mentoring work, July 2020, emphasis added).

We observed that, in the case of the seven teachers who work in the municipal network, the anguish and questioning of their own identity was intensified, since, at the beginning of the pandemic, the Municipal Secretariat of Education (SME) – on March 20th, 2020 – canceled face-to-face activities without providing any guidance on what would happen: the teachers did not know if they kept in touch with the students' families; if so, how could they be contacted, they did not know if they were in a school recess period,2 and in the schools there was no consensus between the teaching staff and the management team on what could be done. Faced with the lack of guidance, the teachers felt helpless, and isolated initiatives were taken, revealing a tone of urgency in knowing what to do. Furthermore, the absence of guidance represented, for the teachers, a certain disregard of the teaching network with the social function of the school and with teaching, showing that these teachers did not identify with these 'acts of attribution' (Dubar, 1997) that were imposed on them by the attitude of the public authorities in the face of the pandemic. These data show how important it is for education networks and schools to seek to provoke the connection between 'attribution' and 'belonging'. The narratives reveal attempts to bring their voice and experiences to the public and assume a leading role, defining the course of some actions to face the established situations. By acting in this way, the teachers sought to build alternatives in the face of failures, relevant processes by illustrating their place of 'disputing' external demands and the meaning and desire of being a teacher. They were not silenced and possibly started to walk the trail of the configuration of a new identity (Rodgers & Scott, 2008).

In her statement, V. represents the perception of her peers about this situation:

[...] 'Since I left school, on March 18th, I have been in a constant search for strategies and tools that would make my contact with the children and those responsible for them possible. [...] We left school in a context of instability, fear, and uncertainty'. [...] The scenarios change every week, and nobody can position us because everything is new and different in all areas, situations and in all contexts. [...] 'today, 05/23 we still don't have any official position from the municipal government'. No platform has yet been defined for which the activities can be made available. 'There is still nothing concrete', all we can hear is that they are making the necessary reflections for the current scenario. '[...] It gives a feeling of abandonment [...]' We [schoolteachers] even suggested that they collect data by region on how many families do not have any type of access to social networks. We mentioned that this data is essential for us to think about effective actions. 'We're still waiting'. The only information we had [...] a 'non-mandatory' meeting about the distribution of materials to students at the beginning of June (V., Diary, May 25th, 2020, emphasis added).

During this period, all the teachers tried to stay connected with the children and their families, and in these cases, WhatsApp was the most used application. In the testimonies presented below, the teachers reveal initiatives that were conducted by them and/or by the schools while awaiting guidance from the SME. Na., for example, indicated that the school where she works chose to disseminate out-of-context activities via Facebook that needed to be print by the children's families. The teacher, as she did not consider this practice appropriate, sent other activities via WhatsApp, and thus managed to maintain some contact with the families and children. However, Na. felt more abandoned by public management when a school recess was published in the Official Diary with a retroactive date, which she interpreted as a 'lack of respect' for the work done so far.

[A few days before the suspension of classes] 'The teachers took the opportunity to put the pedagogical documentation in order (diary, portfolio, corrections...) and organize some activities to make available online about the prevention of COVID19. Until this moment, we thought it would be a 15-day suspension and we would return soon'. Everyone was anxious and a certain air of melancholy hovered in the empty school, without life, without noise, without children! Until everything changed even faster, [...] suspending school activities from March 20 to April 30, 2020, [...] 'we realized the seriousness of the situation and how unprepared we were without communication with the parents. The school management requested that we send activities, but without much guidance', [...] I realized that the best thing would be to set up a WhatsApp group. I have always been reluctant to use WhatsApp groups with the parents [...]. In conversation with M. 'I had been evaluating the possibility of setting up a group of the class, which was inevitable. Between the announcement of the decree and the closing of the school, I had 10 minutes to collect the contact details of all parents'. [...] Without them, I would not have contact with students and families. The next day, I contacted the parents, inviting them to join a WhatsApp group. Of the thirty-three students enrolled, only three were not enrolled because [...]. 'So far everyone has respected and interacted respectfully; I am very happy, resistance has become necessary, and the experience has been very positive'. [...] A planning was conducted thinking about [...] on April 4th we were surprised with the publication of the ordinance [...] establishing retroactive school recess in the period from March 23rd to April 6th, in view of that I agreed a break in activities with the parents between April 13th and 26th, resuming them on the 27th. [...] When municipal decree No. 199, of May 18, 2020, was published, suspending activities

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until May 31, 'we started to get worried about the lack of guidance from the Municipal Secretariat of Education', although some Municipal Education Council meetings were held, no concrete referral was made. 'This absence left many teachers distressed and disappointed with the lack of respect for the work that had been done so far. [...] After more than thirty working days of activities carried out with the students, we were categorically informed that this 'voluntary' work would be worthless'. [...] Evaluating the interaction of activities via WhatsApp, I consider that there is a significant return, although not everyone participates and some parents have made it clear that they will not do the proposed activities; I estimate that approximately 70% of the class has carried out the activities satisfactorily, [...]. 'During the suspension of classes, the school is making activities available on Facebook, a practice that has me a little concerned about the selection of proposals, which are generally impersonal, with many clippings and internet links and which require printing to be carried out. In this case, I continue with the specific activities for my class, exchanging activities, suggestions and talking a lot with the other teachers of the third year of the school. Although we are aligned, each one prepares the week's activities according to their class and their personal dynamics' (Na., Diary, May 25th, 2020, emphasis added).

To deal with this situation, W. also stayed connected with family members via WhatsApp, worrying about the non-mandatory nature of the activities. For the teacher, at that moment, the most important thing was to maintain a good relationship with the families and children. However, the degree of intensity of anguish was high, since W. was concerned with the social inequality that entails digital exclusion, intensified by the inertia of public power. By taking a stand in the face of such a situation, it is observed that W. renews her commitment to the moral propositions of teaching and, thus, develops professionally (Day, 1999):

[...] 'Of my own initiative, just like a few other fellow teachers, I created a WhatsApp group with those responsible for the students to try to maintain some dialogue and send suggestions for weekly activities, seeking to encourage the continuity of studies, but always emphasizing that these activities are not mandatory, as they will not be considered for replacement of classes, nor will they be evaluated'. From the reading of the text [...] made available to beginners [...], we were also able to reflect and monitor the current situation in different schools. 'Right now, the only certainty is that we must do something so that educational inequalities do not increase. Because many private schools are sending their activities, and in them are the families with more literacy'[3] and, therefore, in theory, better capable of keeping their children stimulated in the learning process. 'The greatest anguish is seeing other education networks (private, municipal, and state) offering support to students and our network remaining silent in the face of this situation. Our students are being harmed, digital literacy presents us with new barriers and increases the degree of social inequality'. [...] The support of management and supervision would be extremely important, showing us the guidelines to follow. However, we are learning to look for new alternatives (W., Diary, May 25th, 2020, emphasis added).

Due to low feedback from families through contact via WhatsApp, W., together with a colleague, wrote letters to the children and sent them by mail. She then reported that the feedback from the children was incredibly positive, as can be seen below:

Despite having a WhatsApp group with those responsible for the students, some parents left the group by choice, most do not respond to messages and communication is only with family members and not with students. Therefore, the feeling is still of distancing from the children. Thus, in conversation with a friend who is a teacher at another school in the municipal network [...] we decided to write 'letters' to the students. These 'letters' were posted in the mail on the same date, and some have already received them. The feedback was amazing. The parents' reports and the children's messages were touching. In times of technology, it was necessary to reinvent the way of communicating to try to minimize the distance and reframe teaching. Some messages from family members to warm the heart: 'Good evening, my daughter L. was very happy with your letter [...]', 'I am Y's mother. We received your letter; we were super happy, and I was moved by your attitude. I must thank you for being this wonderful teacher and this special person, Y. sends her a hug'. The next step will be to hold an online meeting with the students, [...] This initiative was also idealized only by the teachers, without interference and/or guidance from the school board. Our virtual meeting will be on Tuesday. [...] It will be the first experience with students and we don't know how adherence and participation will be [...] 'I realized that 'being a teacher' for me was centered on presence, content, results (following the evolution of the students), however, at this moment it was necessary to reframe teaching and seek to be present even in absence, create bonds and promote encounters (with the self and with the other)' (W., Diary, May 25th, 2020, emphasis added).

This testimony by W. also highlights an aspect of the 'self-identity' that is transformed due to interpersonal relationships, which, as previously mentioned, is an essential element for the constitution of this subjective dimension of the teacher's identity. W. continued her statement indicating that recording in her diary how teaching was being in the pandemic and thinking about the type of support that this situation demanded allowed her to realize that the children could also be experiencing adverse feelings and that they needed emotional support:

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[3] Quote from a report by Iodeta (2020).

Besides teaching, there is also the difficulty in reconciling home and family care, [...]; in addition to the commitments with the [mentoring program]: development of pedagogical material for students; orientation meetings, readings and soon the return of doctoral classes. 'It is a very big challenge to take on all these obligations combined with insecurities, fear for everyone's health and deprivation of leisure time, which results in a mental overload for everyone'. I ask myself — What is it like to be a child in times of Covid-19? Thinking of my daughter and my students because, if it is hard for us adults to deal with feelings, it is hard for the little ones too, added to the lack of opportunity to talk about what they are experiencing and feeling. [...] I started to think about what support I can offer my students at this time. 'We seek a support network through conversations with other teachers, professional colleagues, family members and other mothers. But at what times do children have support to talk about their doubts, fears, and dilemmas?' (W., Diary, May 25th, 2020, emphasis added).

[...] 'understanding the need to develop a work with students and novice teachers on understanding feelings'. In times of technology, 'it was necessary to reinvent the way of communicating' to try to minimize distance and reframe teaching (W., Report, June 2020, emphasis added).

It is also worth mentioning that, in the case of W., it does not mean that the teaching and learning elements of the contents have a secondary role in the characterization of her professional identity, but that the pandemic scenario shifted the focus of the attributions conferred on the teacher, and, thus, the affective dimension gained strong relevance. On the other hand, this can generate the perception that the professional competence of teachers who work in the early years would be threatened, since the specificity of their work lies in having something (the curriculum) learnt by someone (Roldão, 2017).

In this tense and uncertain context, the teachers sought support from their colleagues to think together on how to deal with the situation presented. By bringing their stories and trying to think differently than usual, the teachers questioned themselves about discourses, norms and emotions and prepared themselves for self-transformation, which is favored when it occurs in the company of peers (Rodgers & Scott, 2008). N.'s statement is another example of this movement:

[...] 'I wanted/planned a lot of interaction, games, projects [...], but the pandemic came, and we are, as Freire would say, reinventing/recognizing/rediscovering ourselves!' I believe that currently I have more questions than answers [.. .] Then I think, read, listen: EaD... None of that [...] Remote Education [...] a little bit of everything! 'In fact, we are all, some with more caution and others with less, in search of ways!' But calm down, not everything is a search, I know that I have learned a lot from this too [...] I have been rethinking methods, strategies, helping parents to observe the children and interact, learning to use apps and media, exchanging experiences, having online meetings, talking in our [mentoring program] meetings. SME and CME are researching [...] but no direct guidance at this time; 'There has been some exchanges with the management – only a few, true – but when I have doubts, sometimes I question M. and we help each other, also the CEMEI colleagues and even the mentors J. and C., it has been an intense *teastudying*'[4] (as we said to prof. N.S. and D.C.)! 'It's nothing official, but readings, lives, conversations and exchanges have been the north right now'. I don't know what I will do in the future, but I know what I won't do! When classes return, this year, I won't be hallucinating about 'making up for lost time' let's play, sing, talk, COEXIST! (N., Diary, No date, June 2020, emphasis added).

On the other hand, the state education network, right at the beginning of the suspension of classes, demonstrated a more cohesive management in face of the problem. Schools had a period of vacation and school recess so that the State Department of Education (SEE) could draw up an action plan and the government could establish partnerships with mobile phone companies, so that students could obtain exemption in the use of mobile data when accessing the educational platform that would be used by the state government. In addition, SEE was constantly in contact with management teams and professors, via web conference, to provide guidance. This situation was important for teacher V., as this way she felt supported by the state network and gained confidence to work in a context that she considers adverse, seeking to strengthen the teaching function.

[...] In the state, I am a fifth-grade teacher. Just like the municipal network, we use the week of March 16th to 20th to welcome children and their families, as well as clarify doubts regarding the suspension of classes. We had our recess and our vacation early and returned on May 22nd with replanning, ATPC and remote classes. From the 27th of May we started to have the video lessons transmitted by the Media Center [...], but it is also possible to see them on YouTube and on the Facebook of the Media Center of the State of São Paulo. [...] 'I know there are numerous criticisms regarding the use of the application and teaching, but it is not possible to compare the difference I have felt between the two institutions in which I work' (V., Diary, May 25th, 2020, emphasis added).

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[4] Originally "dodiscência". Notion presented by Freire (1996, p. 12), considering that "There is no teaching without students, the two explain each other and their subjects, despite the differences that connote them, are not reduced to the condition of object, one of the other. Those who teach learn while teaching and those who learn teach while learning".

V.'s report does not mean that there were no tensions in remote education in the state network; however, in several moments of her speech, in the weekly meetings with the mentoring team, V. said that she felt welcomed as a professional in face of the actions of the aforementioned teaching network. This professional experience could help her to strengthen her identity in a moment of fragility.

In the case of a teacher who works in a private school, the lack of initial guidance also caused anxiety; however, little by little, in their work context, the school's management team, along with the teachers, were building paths.

[...] The parents' questions, the intense demand and the difficulty in communication were very present in the first weeks. I was quite bothered by the way some parents demanded answers from us that we didn't have, but on the other hand, I found myself wanting to find answers that, in fact, nobody had. 'In the following weeks, each step was thought out and followed according to each new orientation. First, the school looked for a quick way of communicating with the school', the resource used was WhatsApp. 'The exchange between peers was very important, especially with those who worked at other schools, as we realized that everyone was looking for solutions.' As for the guidance on remote classes, millions of insecurities arose': what would be done with the recorded classes afterwards, would the teaching class later be dismissed, would we have asynchronous or synchronous interactions, which is the best way for a new interaction with the children. 'I've always thought of myself as a very practical person and prided myself on being able to come up with good solutions, but I confess that it's not easy to reconcile the demands of questioning, work, the need to maintain mental health', in short, it's quite complex to deal with all these questions (L., Diary, No date, May 2020, emphasis added).

L.'s statement also shows the importance of the management team acting cohesively in a time of crisis. In addition, it highlights aspects related to the biographical axis (Dubar, 1997) in the constitution of their professional identity.

The challenges in designing teaching in remote education

Faced with this turbulent scenario caused by the pandemic and the way the public authorities initially dealt with it, the teachers reported the challenges in designing teaching in remote education. Based on Rodgers and Scott (2008), citing the stages of development of awareness of self-formation and teacher professional identity proposed by Kegan (1982, 1994), it was possible to envision how a constructive process can be presented in these cases. Specifically, they call into question external demands and their performance, characterizing a stage of 'socialization' with the new circumstance, which is given by questions about how to act considering various aspects.

In the case of teachers working in the municipal network, only at the end of May were they summoned to dialogue with the SME about the plan of action that was being drawn up, and the development of school activities remotely began in June. This decision by the municipal network to start remote education generated mixed feelings, such as relief, doubts, and uncertainties, and imposed certain attributions on teachers, but they questioned: What will be my role in remote classes? How to reach all children in the face of social inequality and digital exclusion? How to propose educational activities? How to propose playing? How to assess children's learning?

J.'s statement, set out below, is representative of these considerations and shows the disarticulation between the acts of attribution – arising from the remote education proposal – and the feeling of belonging – due to socioeconomic adversities and the lack of training for such performance:

[...] 'How to ensure access to information for all students? How to guarantee the learning of kindergarten children if this learning takes place through experiences and interactions?' How to guarantee what the BNCC recommends? 'During this period, I thought of sending different proposals to the parents, but some demands arrived that made it impossible to propose what I thought'. For example, I thought of a play dough recipe made with flour. In the recipe, we work with the quantities, ingredients, interaction, and the final result allows for a lot of creativity, I had even prepared the recipe to send to the parents, but then an issue was brought to me, that one of the families was without food, how could they use flour to make playing dough if they didn't even have enough to eat? [...] 'During this period I needed to change my internet' so that we could use it more properly, but for me it will be an expense that was not foreseen. [...] 'Talking about the problem and discussing it allows us to clarify the paths, I confess that mine is still very obscure!! I cannot see an education in this period that allows equal access to all students within what we believe'. If we're not careful, we can turn it into a big make-believe!!! (J., Diary, May 22nd, 2020, emphasis added).

C., in the following statement, seems to seek a sense of belonging to the attributions given to her, as she sets herself in motion to learn how to work remotely with children in kindergarten. But the socioeconomic situation of the families causes tension in this attempt to redefine identity and professional practice:

The Secretariat instructed us to pass on pedagogical suggestions prioritizing play, they don't want printed activities, [...] 'We live in a moment of reinventing ourselves, [...] we are learning about working online with our children, how this interaction is possible via cell phone, or other available tools'. My school adopted WhatsApp to maintain the bond with the families, [...] I have a child who is not in the group because the mother does not have a cell phone, this child cannot be excluded, and we took this case to the management who will communicate it to the Secretariat. 'However, at the same time, when we can have this contact, we see that inequality shows the reality of the country, which lacks investments in education and public policies to face such situations' (C., Diary, June 3rd, 2020, emphasis added).

Given this scenario, the teachers reported the challenges of designing remote schoolwork with children. A summary of these challenges is presented below, together with statements that illustrate them.

i. Proposing educational activities through different technological tools that involve, motivate, and encourage the development of students, to contemplate the specificities of each one (young children, special education target audience, diversity of learning rhythms, etc.) and not to burden family members in monitoring school activities.

[...] Our uncertainties are countless, among them: How will the regulation of this period be? How to guarantee the quality and fulfillment of what we have been developing? How to engage students and families in our model? [...] As a teacher, just like them [novice teachers], I need to learn new things to continue fulfilling my mission, 'I'm learning new technological tools and especially how to interact with parents and children. [...] We modified all of our pedagogical planning to find alternatives that involve, motivate and encourage the development of students, even at a distance' [...] (J., Balance of mentoring work, July 2020, emphasis added).

[About the diversity of learning rhythms] 'And if in face-to-face education it was necessary to make specific and individual interventions, how could I make activities available that would suit the children the way I could do them in the classroom?' How to organize groups or to suggest activities in the school's Drive without pointing out the names of who and what activities they would do? How do I make sure these kids do what I need them to do? How to ensure that the interventions of parents and/or guardians were minimally adequate? All this anguish only increased every day (V., Diary, May 25th, 2020, emphasis added).

ii. Learning to interact with the students' family members online, considering that some family members do not master reading and writing, and others are not digitally literate.

J: 'The teacher's feeling – concern' [J. is referring to M.'s comment that indicates that the accompanied novice is concerned about remote education] 'that is the feeling of many of us!!! The direction of the school I work for wants parents to learn how to use the blog, but how, if we need to do a tutorial even for some teachers? Last week I didn't share the experience in the WhatsApp group, and I didn't get any feedback!!! None!!! The group was doing really well!!!' [...] at this moment we must make life easier for our parents and not complicate it!!! 'As a mother it has not been easy', today L. cried [...] 'We have to think that our parents are also facing a very difficult period!!!' (06/29/2020, WhatsApp, Message from J. to teachers/mentors and researchers).

V: 'Learning of the day: maybe those responsible for the children, who only look at your messages in the school group, don't know how to read and don't have the courage to talk to you'[...] even in private [...]

J.: That's right V.!!!

V.: That's it, people [...] It's not easy!

M.: Wow.

Na.: Wow, V... That's right. 'And I often see the parents helping the children and writing the statements with spelling mistakes in the notebook, mixing letters [...] Then how to correct or demand from the student not to reproduce that'. It's the reference they have now... There are so many situations, not to mention the reports of difficulties. That's why I say that 'many times we are offering emotional support more than pedagogical support. I have a case of AEE who the mother is unable to help. The specialist teacher and I were limited because the child needs an awfully specific intervention and we cannot demand that from the family' (07/02/2020, WhatsApp, Dialogues between the teachers/mentors and the researchers).

iii. Dealing with the lack of feedback from children and their families, often due to: the lack/difficulty of accessing the internet and/or electronic equipment by family members, the lack of adequate space at home to carry out school activities, the overload of work of family members that makes it impossible for them to accompany the children in activities.

[After the start of remote classes] [...] we are preparing Playful Experiences, which are shared on the school blog, organized by age group and teacher. 'Returns happen through the WhatsApp group. In the beginning, the interaction

was intense and today I see that it has dropped considerably. Some parents came to me and reported financial problems to maintain balance on the cell phone and lack of time' [...] (J., Task - Profile and performance at the current moment, July 2020, emphasis added).

M.: Good morning!!! My PI said she is worried. Students are tired. Parents too. [...] 'Many mothers are tired. Even watching the videos. They've told me. They said that they handle it as they can, because they work, they have only one cell phone, I just couldn't teach the content'. What anguish!!!

Na.: Good morning, M! We spent the week discussing this in my group/year here at [omitted]. 'The official classes started recently, but we have been conducting activities with them since March. The parents are tired, and we won't have recess'. The situation is quite complicated.

[...]

Na.: There are many reports of the difficulty they are facing for children to do the tasks, even reducing the amount.

[...]

Na.: Yes. ' 'Remote' activities cannot become suffering, especially for children. When we realize that they are unmotivated, we send messages and talk directly to them, it has helped'. The biggest problem is when families prioritize other activities, then it gets harder for us to deal with. 'It is a very difficult period for the PIs and for us too'.

[...]

M.: It is true. It has been a challenge for everyone, school, families, teachers, and students.

[...]

M.: 'At my school we opted for printed activities because the community has little or no access to the internet'. In interaction groups with families, there are few that interact. About twelve per class.

[...]

N: Hi N. how are you? Good morning, I'm sorry I didn't send D's activities. This week I'm taking care of my grandfather, he's staying at my house, he's very weak and needs care. We are adapting, he even played hopscotch and statue, but I didn't take the pictures, I'll send them, albeit late, ok, a thousand apologies.

N: Yes, the journey is not easy for anyone, I received this today from a super participatory mother! 'They feel guilty when they can't handle it!' [...] (06/29/2020, WhatsApp, Dialogue between teachers/mentors and researchers, emphasis added).

iv. Dealing with the effects of the child's loss of connection with the school and the teacher. During this period, the teachers showed great motivation in creating bonds with the students and promoting encounters (with the self and with the other).

V.: Good morning! I agree. 'Unfortunately, some children have completely lost their bond with the school and the teacher'. And in this situation, of remote education, I have noticed that those children who needed specific assistance in the classroom, many times, just wait for a phone call from us to feel welcomed.

[...]

V.: I have a depressed student. This type of 'attention' made all the difference for him, according to his mother (06/29/2020, WhatsApp, Dialogue between teachers/mentors and researchers, emphasis added).

v. Learning to teach remotely while teaching remotely.

'We are learning to teach at a distance within the possible conditions and immersed in the very process of teaching and mentoring'. It is difficult to build a reflection on a context as participating subjects that are inserted in the very process, space, and time of the actions (W., Reflection on the follow-up of IPs, August 2020, emphasis added).

saw. Loss of space-time for dialogue with peers. The collective pedagogical work schedule, conducted online, began to focus on lectures on the most diverse subjects, not always related to the demands of teaching work in remote education.

'At this moment, if I could put a word that expresses what I'm feeling, it would be the lack, the lack of the people we were used to exchanging knowledge with', [...]. What I am today is completed in my interactions. 'Despite having knowledge about the area in which I work, this knowledge is complemented in interactions with my peers'. With the Pandemic, these interactions have decreased a lot, meetings that used to be spaces for exchanging, today are spaces for passing messages and attending lectures that are often far from what we need at the current moment (J., Reflection on the follow-up of IPs, August 2020, emphasis added).

Returning to the parallel established with the poem José for data analysis, we understand that Drummond's poem expresses the 'solitude of the subject and the absence of a place in the world', that is, it reflects the 'emptying of disappointments' (Saraiva Silva, 2019). In fact, the experienced teachers, immersed in 'acts of attribution' and 'acts of belonging', questioned the place of the school, teachers, students, and their families and mentoring in times of a pandemic. The feeling of lack of place in the world is derived from the feeling of helplessness caused by the absence of public policies and the non-cohesion of managers' actions.

The testimonies highlighted above show that, like the character in Drummond's poem, 'teachers don't stay still', they act. However, in the poem José is prevented from acting, he does not abandon, but is abandoned. At first it seems that there is no way out for the character, the future is uncertain; however, José resists and continues marching (Saraiva Silva, 2019).

When seeking their place in this 'new' world, the teachers looked for a way out, realized that new actions were necessary and walked on, resisting. Thus, we observe that the tone of urgency present in the teachers' testimonies refers to 'reinventing oneself' and 're-signifying teaching'. This scenario – which provoked the teachers to conduct their teaching work in a unique way – generated numerous tensions but challenged them to design new actions – which may point to the empowerment of their own identity – and boosted professional development – expansion/diversification of the repertoire of knowledge and experience necessary for teaching.

It is observed, then, how these teachers develop professionally, after all, alone and accompanied, they analyzed the situation, questioned, and sought to build solutions (Vaillant & Marcelo, 2012). In this process they

> [...] review, renew and develop their commitment as agents of change, with the moral purposes of teaching, acquiring and developing knowledge, skills and emotional intelligence, essential for professional thinking, planning and the practice with children, with young people and with their peers [...] (Day, 1999, p. 4).

In addition, it is identified that the teachers demonstrated clarity on the forces that affect their performance, how they define themselves and what they can do. This new positioning signals the fact that they are no longer mobilized only by external demands, but that their way of being and acting predominates in the new actions and projects carried out (Rodgers and Scott, 2008).

Final considerations

It was observed that, in view of the new scenario caused by the pandemic, especially in its beginning, experienced teachers went through processes like those of the novices they accompanied during mentoring. Tensions such as fear and uncertainty about the future (including the return of face-to-face school activities), anxiety, anguish, feelings of incapacity, doubts about reorganizing school activities (remotely), difficulties in dialogue with family members, concerns for the children and their family members, lack of information and dialogue in schools and teaching networks, anger at government actions, among others, are present in the testimonies of experienced teachers expressed at different times.

When identifying some of the ways manifested by the teacher-mentors to manage tensions, whether they are related to conflicts, doubts, dilemmas, etc., they often brought to the mentoring program their concerns related to their performance as teachers in an analogous way to the novice teachers accompanied. These transitions, between being a teacher and being a mentor, suggest that, in a general context of life and work that is uncertain, fleeting, and confusing, the situations experienced demanded that they remain active and elaborate the meaning of new scenarios (Pérez Gómez, 2019). In these movements, there was a redefinition of their professional identities (as teachers and mentors) through an extraordinarily complex process. The imbalance of the constitution of each of them was verified as one of the first effects of the pandemic, that is, the professional identity itself was on the verge of collapse. Gradually, based on added information and exchanges with peers, these teacher-mentors began to use the available resources and showed more of their emotions.

Regarding teaching activities in early childhood education, it is important to consider the specificities of this educational stage. Children's knowledge and learning result from the relationships they establish and build, through different languages, with the physical and social world (adults and children), based on their own meanings produced in their contexts and by their cultural and expressive manifestations. (Buss-Simão & Rocha, 2018). Thus, the proposition of educational practices in early childhood education should focus on these relationships, listening and dialoging. The difficulty of providing practices with these characteristics in the remote context jeopardized being a teacher in early childhood education and caused the collapse of the teaching identity itself.

In the case of the initial years – primary education – the loss of the specificity of teaching (knowing how to make someone learn something) was possibly caused by the fact that the effects of the pandemic context often required a focus on the human/affective dimension of the process of teaching and learning. Although these teachers have designed remote education practices aimed at the school contents of the said teaching year in which they work, many times what prevailed was the concern with maintaining/increasing the affective bond with children and families, as well as the empathy for the families in the of the difficulties faced to provide conditions for remote education to materialize with quality.

However, we observed that new meanings are attributed to the process of becoming a teacher. Because of the pandemic, we found that the imbalance evidenced, at first in the constitution of the professional identity, gave way to the empowerment of the teaching identity itself, also causing an expansion of the repertoire of professional knowledge. Apparently, this movement reveals the relevance, in the case of these mentors, of investing in the adaptation/adjustment of their teaching identity as a fundamental previous step for the reconfiguration of an identity as a mentor.

Added to these considerations, in the second half of the year, these teachers put forward the unpredictability on what would happen and when, specifically on the return to face-to-face classes. This was configured as a tension between the recognition of the teaching social role and the attribution of responsibility to them for the non-return to face-to-face activities. On that occasion, these teachers reported experiencing adverse working conditions, such as the excessive number of hours dedicated to their professional activity and the number of documents to be forwarded to the school management due to the fragmentation of the teaching activity as they were not responsible for the entire process of teaching-learning and as they shared tasks with peers from the same class and with the families of their students. This certainly generated/caused tensions in their previous teaching identities, but it could also trigger the development of their professional identities towards new profiles.

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Ana Paula Gestoso de Souza: MsC and PhD in Education from UFSCar, bachelor in Pedagogy from UFSCar. Adjunct Professor at the Department of Pedagogical Theories and Practices at UFSCar and at the Graduate Program in Education.
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2015-0829
E-mail: anapaula@ufscar.br

Aline Maria de Medeiros Rodrigues Reali: PhD in Psychology from USP, MsC in Special Education from UFSCar and bachelor's in psychology from FFCL in Ribeirão Preto, USP. Full Professor at the Department of Pedagogical Theories and Practices at UFSCar. Publisher of the Electronic Education Magazine (REVEDUC) linked to the Graduate Program in Education at UFSCar.
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4915-8127
E-mail: alinereali@gmail.com

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