Senses and Meanings of Teaching, according to a Beginning Teacher

Itale Luciane Cericato[I]

[I]Universidade Federal de São Paulo (UNIFESP), São Paulo/SP – Brazil

ABSTRACT – Senses and Meanings of Teaching, according to a Beginning Teacher. The article discusses how a beginning teacher from São Paulo public education system feels and means her profession, a theme that is highlighted in the low attractiveness of the teaching profession scenario. The results indicate the work felt as emotional stress generator, being the initial years lived with difficulty and with a desire to leave the profession. After a brief mapping of existing policies to support beginning teachers, the study points to aspects that deserve attention from the government, like the creation of systematic supporting and welcoming policies to these professionals. Finally, it is suggested the implementation of *professional learning communities* where beginners can find, when needed, resources, guidance and professional development.
Keywords: **Beginning Teacher. Educational Policies. Teaching Formation.**

RESUMO – Sentidos e Significados da Docência, segundo uma Professora Iniciante. A temática desse estudo, que ganha destaque no cenário de baixa atratividade da carreira docente, discute os primeiros anos profissionais de uma professora da rede pública paulista. Os resultados indicam o trabalho sentido como gerador de desgaste emocional sendo este período vivido com dificuldade e com o desejo de abandonar a profissão. Após breve mapeamento das políticas existentes sobre a área apontam-se aspectos que merecem atenção do poder público como a criação de políticas sistemáticas de apoio e acolhida ao professor iniciante. Por fim, sugere-se a implantação de *comunidades profissionais de aprendizagem*, em que esses profissionais possam encontrar, quando necessário, recursos, orientação e aprimoramento profissional.
Palavras-chave: **Professor Iniciante. Políticas Docentes. Formação de Professores.**

Delimiting the Study

The data here discussed originated from a study that aimed to understand the senses and meanings attributed by a teacher to her work and her profession in the beginning of the career. The interest for the issue arises in the context of the low attractiveness of the career along with the data regarding the scarcity of K-12 teachers, as shown by Gatti (2009). Based on these data, we can suppose that in a very near future the number of retired teachers tends to outnumber the graduates, making even worse the lack of teachers in some areas, as pointed out by the author.

The context shown here focuses on the issues related to teaching in its beginning years, so that it is possible to know and discuss how these years, pointed out by Garcia (1999), Huberman (1992), Cavaco (2003) and Gonçalves (1992) as especially difficult are lived by the teachers in the beginning of their careers.

In order to carry out this study, a school ranked among the top ten in the city of São Paulo by the *Índice de Desenvolvimento da Educação Básica* (IDEB) – K-12 Education Development Index was chosen. The teacher who assisted in the research was indicated by the school principal and, as a choosing criterion, it was established that she should have been working for five years at the most. Adriana, as the teacher will be called henceforth, did not take the entrance test to become a permanent teacher, has worked at the public system for four years, teaching History at High School and did not go the teaching college nor did she take any further studies after being graduated. She is single, comes from a middle class family and has no children.

The results to be presented henceforth were analyzed by means of the constructions of meaning cores, as proposed by Aguiar and Ozella (2006; 2013) and Aguiar, Soares and Machado (2015). This proposal, which is based on the precepts of social historical psychology and dialectical historical materialism, aims to allow the researcher to learn the senses and meanings constituted by a certain person toward the reality he or she is related to, in other words, to understand his or her ways of being, thinking, acting toward a certain phenomenon. In order to achieve that, the movement of the analysis is based on the word presented by Vygotski (2001) as an *unit of verbal thinking and intellectual speech*; saying in another way, a word which meaning is socially and historically determined. The word was, in this research, apprehended by means of a semi-structured interview carried out in two encounters, which covered the professional background, the work done in her school and its circumstances. The unit of analysis here chosen – the word – does not interest us in its empty expression, but when loaded of historical materiality; in other words, when it expresses the mediations of the affective and cognitive character which composes a person.

For Luria (1986, p. 45), the meaning of words corresponds to a generalization, a concept shared by all the individuals:

> By meaning we understand, the system of relationships that was formed objectively in the historical process and that is enclosed in the word. [...] The 'meaning' is a stable system of generalizations, which can found in any word, equally for all the persons.

Thus, the meaning of the words is built by the individuals along the history of humanity based on their relationships with the social world in which they live, allowing the communication and socialization of experiences. It is, however, mutable, as Vygotski (2001, p. 399) points out:

> The meanings of the words develop themselves [...] the meaning of the word, once developed, cannot quit developing and suffering modifications. The association that links the word to the meaning may be reinforced or weakened, may be enriched by a series of links with other objects of the same kind, it may, by appearance or contiguity, extend itself to a broader circle of objects or, on the contrary, it may restrict this circle. In other terms, it may suffer a series of quantitative and external changes, it cannot change its interior psychological nature, as if it ever did, it would quit being an association.

However, other meanings produced by humankind are dynamic formations, which transform themselves in the social and historical movement. But the sense, according to Vygotsky (2001, p. 465-466), is broader than the meaning because

> [...] the sense of the word is the sum of all psychological facts that it awakens in our conscience. Therefore, the sense is always a dynamic formation, fluid, complex, which several zones of varied stability [...]. The sense of the word is inexhaustible. The word only acquires sense in the phrase and the phrase only acquires sense in the context of the paragraph, the paragraph in the context of the book, the book in the context of the whole works of an author. The real sense of each word is determined, after all, by all the wealth of the existing moments in conscience and related to what is expressed by a certain word.

We understand, thus, that a word has a meaning that is formed throughout history and it is conserved by all the people. However, along with it, there is a sense which is given to it by each person according to his or her personal experiences. Therefore, we realize that the sense is closer to the realm of subjectivity, a plan that allows the individuals to express their cognitive and affective aspects. The sense of the words is resultant and result between the present social meanings and the experience of each individual person along the path of his or her life. They are subjective constructions that involve emotions, affections, pleasure and displeasure, among others. The sense is personal, although it is built on the meaning that is social.

What Aguiar and Ozella (2006) propose is a method that is able to apprehend the senses and the meaning expressed by each person, seek-

ing to go over the appearance of the phenomenon (meanings) towards its more concrete dimension (senses). To achieve it, this analytical process occurs in three phases: collecting the pre-indicators, indicators systematization and meaning cores systematization.

The first one, collecting the pre-indicators, consists in identifying words that identify the ways of being, thinking, and feeling and acting of the participant teacher of the research; in other words, it is the starting point of the researcher. In this phase, there is the selection, after successive readings of the collected material of parts of the discourse that call one's attention due to their frequency, emphasis and emotional intensity in which they appear in the person's discourse.

The second phase, called indicators systematization, articulates the pre-indicators previously selected through contents that are related by similarity, complementarity and/or counter position. It is sought, at this moment of the analysis, not only to point out elements of the totality of the discourse, but also to penetrate into them, abstracting the complexity of the relationships that compose it, therefore apprehending the way by which the pre-indicators are arranged in the constitution of the forms used by the person to signify his or her reality (Aguiar; Soares; Machado, 2015).

In the third phase, the goal is to systematize the meaning cores that result from the process of articulation and synthesis of the contents that came up since the analysis done at the first phase. This is the moment when the apparent discourse is overcome and, by means of the articulation process of the indicators, the senses, present in the speech and thinking of the present are revealed. In this process of construction of the meaning cores

> [...] it is possible to verify the transformations and contradictions that occur in the process of constructions of meanings and senses, which will enable a more consistent analysis and will allows us to go beyond of the apparent and to consider both the subjective conditions as the contextual and historical ones (Aguiar; Ozella, 2006, p. 15).

The third stage is divided into two phases. In the first one, the researcher infers and organizes the meaning cores arranging the chosen indicators. In the second one, the present contents in those cores are discussed, taking care to go beyond the person's speech, aiming to understand the contradictions present in it and to reveal aspects not always clearly verbalized. Due to that, the interaction with the social, political, economic and historical context is fundamental, so that we can understand the individual in his or her totality, as well as the process of constitution of his or her subjective senses. Aguiar, Soares and Machado (2015) point out that each one of these phases presents a differentiated level of deepening and understanding of reality.

The authors explain that the researcher, by highlighting parts of the whole (collecting the pre-indicators and the systematization of

the indicators) produce a movement that demands that the parts be integrated again to the whole that constitutes it and it is constituted by them. Therefore, at the same time that one seeks to distance him or herself from the word, it becomes necessary to return to it, seeking the synthesis of its multiple determination. For Aguiar e Ozella (2013, p. 310), the meaning cores are "[...] understood as superior moments of abstraction, which, by means of the dialectical arrangement of the parts – movement subordinate to the theory –, advances toward the thoughtful concrete, towards to the senses zone".

The apprehension of the senses zone becomes possible through constructive-interpretative work by the researcher that arranges the different moments of the analysis. Thus, the construction process of the meaning cores allows a movement that advances from the empiric data toward the abstraction, helping to understand meaning cores constituted by the beginning teacher mediated by the multiple determinations of social and historical nature.

What Literature says about the Beginning Teacher

Garcia (1999) establishes some phases that the teacher goes through in his or her process of learning how to teach. The initial two phases precede the moment of teaching in itself and are constituted by the *pre-training*: characterized by the experiences that future teachers had as students and which may influence them, even if they are not aware of them, during their career; and the *initial training*, moment of formal preparation to become a teacher, which takes place in a specific institution. The third phase, denominated initiation, is the one that interests us the most at this moment, as it covers the first years of professional experience, which prove to be the fundamental years in the teacher's career. Finally, the last one, called *continuing education* includes the training activities during the career aiming at constant professional development.

The phase of initiation to teaching is considered a significant period for the configuration of the future professional actions and the permanence in the profession. There are studies, such as the one by Huberman (1992), which indicate that this moment may be lived in an easy or hard manner. In the former case, there are good relationships with the students, a considerable sense of mastery of teaching and pleasure to accomplish the job. In the latter one, there are complaints about the excessive workload, anxiety, difficulties with the students, besides the presence of a strong sensation of isolation. Still reflecting about the difficulties found in the initial years of teaching, Cavaco (2003, p. 163) mentions that:

> The placements system moves many teachers from school to school, between localities and regions in the beginning of their career. Due to that, for the teachers, the first year may reflect, year after year, not only movement from school to school, but also the level of teaching.

Besides the mobility between the schools, typically present in the daily lives of beginners who have taken the official test to become permanent teachers, André (2013) also mentions the existence of a negative circle that keeps the more experienced and better trained teachers – due to the lack of incentives – away from those areas where they are mostly needed; in other words, from the schools with more unfavorable contexts, leaving these to the beginners. What is the profession that provides the biggest challenges to the beginners? This perverse movement puts the beginners in a limit situation, making them responsible, individually, for their own survival within the educational system. In other professions, what is traditionally seen is that beginners continue to develop under the watchful eye of a professional with more knowledge and experience. At the same time, it is observed that there is a valuable exchange as beginners contribute with their knowledge since they bring, from a more recent training, the latest studies and theoretical perspectives existing in the field. The problem is that the way schools are organized today is very far from this model of functioning, which, in the school environment, seems utopic. Anyhow, it is worth pointing out that to neglect this has high costs in the long term, as appreciating the beginner is appreciating the profession.

Gonçalves (1992) also looked into the issue of beginning teachers and states that the first five years of teaching may be lived in different manners. For one group, there is the conflict between the wish to leave the profession and the wish to establish themselves in the teaching career. This conflict arises from a feeling of lack of preparation – supposed or real – for teaching and also due to fact of not being able to make them be accepted as teachers, along with the difficult work condition, as, for example, the excessive number of students, a school without the minimum conditions due to the lack of material, located in isolated places and with a system of professional placement that may determine that a teacher, in the same school year, be assigned classes for short periods, successive or independent of time.

The abandonment of the profession is something frequent. In 2003, Lapo and Bueno published a study in which the causes that make the permanent teachers of São Paulo state be disenchanted and leave the profession. Over a decade has gone by, the scenario of lack of teachers has intensified and the issue has been little looked into. In the mentioned study, the authors inform that the abandonment of teaching does not happen suddenly, but as a process that takes time:

> [...] when the individual thinks about a profession, he or she thinks of 'something that is related to personal fulfillment, happiness, joy of living etc., however this is meant to be understood'. When this involvement with this *something* ceases to result in personal fulfillment, the involvement certainly will be diminished, diminishing the efforts [...] this weakening or relaxing of the links is consequence of the combination of several factors, which generate difficulties and dissatisfactions that had been accumulating during the professional path (Lapo; Bueno, 2003, p. 76).

There are, according to the authors, different forms of abandonment: *temporary,* which is characterized by absences, short leaves and unpaid leaves. It is the physical absence that allows the teachers to distance themselves from the difficulties they face. It is an escape, a movement of alienation that characterizes an attitude of indifference and distancing to what happens in the school environment. The *definite abandonment* usually happens after temporary abandonment, as if this were not enough to minimize the tensions suffered by the teacher.

Official data by the Municipal Government of the City of São Paulo in the Municipal Atlas of Management of People (2013) indicate that teachers are among the largest groups with the highest rates of medical leave and also of functional adaptation – a process in which the public employee takes over different positions after the return to work due to health problems identified in a official medical examination. Macaia (2013), in a study which investigated the reasons that lead to teachers' sick leaves and in what way the re-adaptation to work happens, identified that almost all of the interviewees pointed to work as the determining cause for the sickness and the medical leave. In the history of the granted medical leaves, there are mental and behavioral disorders, such as depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder and other anxiety disorders. The author of the study concludes that the public health system does not interact with the educational public system and that it would be necessary an integration to guide the teachers in their returns: without preparation for the return, the teachers end up surrounded by the same conditions that made them leave in the first place.

The different studies presented make it evident that the beginning years of teaching are the ones in which the teacher is more vulnerable to the difficulties faced in the daily lives of the school. It is not by chance that there is the so-called probative stage, which lasts three years, a period in which the beginner aims to remain in the profession, getting adjusted to the daily demands of teaching. It is, however, a crucial moment when the teacher will face school reality, having to deal with complex situation that he or she will not feel always fully prepared for.

What Literature says about Support Policies for the Beginning Teacher

André (2012), in an article about supporting policies for beginning teachers existing in Brazil, analyzes international reports about teaching in the European context and shows that, although there is agreement about the unsuitability of the knowledge and competences to address present and future education, contradictorily, there seems not to be concerns with the insertions of beginners in teaching by the governments, as the countries lack systemic programs for the integration of beginners. All acknowledge the importance of the issue, but measures to really address the issue have not been taken.

In the study carried out by him, André (2012, p. 116) points out that, among 25 countries

> [...] only ten indicate having mandatory programs of initiation to teaching: Australia (some states), England, France, Greece, Japan, Northern Ireland, South Korea, Switzerland and Wales. In Scotland, teachers choose whether to attend or not and most of them do. In six countries schools decide about the initiation and in eight countries there are no formal programs.

The author informs that in Latin America the institutional programs are rare and, among them, Argentina, México and Chile stand out. The latter country proposed a professional insertion based on an induction system in which a more experienced teacher – who works at same school that the beginner – receives adequate training to follow him or her up the first professional experiences. In Colombia, although there is concern with the insertion of new teachers, the follow up process occurs in an informal and volunteer manner, a kind of *professional sponsorship*, the link of which is established by goodwill (André, 2012).

Garcia (2010, p. 36), citing a study developed in the United States, informs that the percentage of beginning teachers that quit teaching is smaller for those who have followed a teaching insertion program. One of the characteristics pointed out as positive in these programs is the existence of an advisor:

> The fact that most stood out was that one could have an advisor from the same specialty, time to plan along with other teachers of the same discipline and be part of an external network. [...] The research about the concerns of the beginners indicate that the insertion programs should focus the class management, teaching, stress and the workload, the time management, the relationships with the students, parents, coworkers and directors.

According to Garcia (2010), besides the very aspects that involve teaching, the advisor has a very important role providing emotional support to the beginning teacher.

In Brazil, there are few studies about the issue and timid incentive policies. Papi and Martins (2009), analyzing the papers presented at the National Association of Post-Graduation and Research in Education (Anped in the Portuguese acronym), in the period 2005-2007, concluded that the issue is present in only 0.5% of the studies done in the Education field.

André (2013) analyzed the supporting policies for teachers in place in Brazilian states and municipalities. Among the five state and ten municipal education departments distributed around the country, few actions regarding the issue of beginning teachers were identified. The city of Jundiaí, for example, has a special program for the insertion of new teachers in which the recently hired teachers, receiving their pay, remain in a training process for a period of thirty days, before entering the classroom. In Sobral, Ceará state, it was also identified a specific program for the newcomers that consists of going through two hundred hours of training with at least 80% of attendance, once a week.

Still according to the author, the teachers receive a financial incentive with criteria regulated by law in order to participate of the training. An interesting datum is that part of the training is developed in cultural activities "[...] such as meetings with writers, talks with artisans, visits to museums, workshops of several languages and participation in the Annual Meeting of Sobral Educators" (André, 2013, p. 45). One last initiative was identified in Campo Grande, Mato Grosso do Sul state. The beginning teachers go through systematic meetings in a training center (Cefor in the Portuguese acronym) in which the practice is discussed, there is a follow-up of their actions in schools, an assessments of their students and a review of the training. The author concludes observing the importance of the fact that the training actions are followed up at the school and in the classroom.

What Teacher Adriana says about the Issue: being a teacher, today, is emotional distress

The collected data by means of the interviews, as well as the analysis undertaken based on the theoretical and methodological references already mentioned allowed the apprehension of the senses and meanings that Adriana attributes to her work and her profession. Such data were the basis for the construction of the meaning cores which we denominate, based on the teacher's own discourse as "Being a teacher, today, is emotional distress," an expression that, in our opinion, illustrates the experiences lived by her in the initial years of teaching, to be presented in more details as follows.

Teacher Adriana conceives the public school as a place attended, in a general way, by students of the outskirts of the city where the poorer people live, as it can be noticed in her answer about the functions of the school:

> I really thought that the school is the place where the outskirts students have in order to acquire knowledge, knowledge above anything else. However, in this short period of experience that I have had in a state public school, we can realize that, with the government policy, we really can't do that or, depending on the school, you might even be able to. In general, no: reality is different.

At the same time that she reveals how she conceives public school – as basically receiving students from the outskirts, Adriana also exposes what she understands the function of the school should be – to spread knowledge:

> There was a time when the issue, at the school, was really to spread knowledge. Nowadays, times are different, there are other values, parents are different, and all has changed. And the government policy has also changed, mainly. So, nowadays, the teacher is overloaded. One thing is having physical and emotional tiredness, having to deal with other situations. Another thing is you having to deal with that student who has already been arrested, that student who comes from a dysfunctional family. There are problems that, in other times, the teacher didn't have

to address, nor overcome these obstacles, to pass on knowledge to the student. This didn't exist. Today, it is what you see most.

The above excerpts indicate that, on one hand, Adriana understands the role as a teacher as being responsible for the conveyance of knowledge socially constructed and valued, developing in the students cognitive skills allow them participation in the broader social process. On the other hand, she understands that this is not a reality for the students that arrive at the school presently as, due to their experiences of life, they create an overload, a feeling that dealing with them is hard work.

In fact, there is no school without contents because the exercise of citizenship involves the knowledge of school contents, but it also involves the construction, among other things, of ethics, of autonomy, of values such as justice and respect to differences, aspects not mentioned by Adriana in her conception about the role of the school. It is likely that these conceptions are rooted in representations which come closer to her memories as a student, formed in a traditional paradigm, according to which the school was meant for fewer students or, at least, was attended by individuals less needy from a material point of view. It seems that there is a clash of conceptions that Adriana does not realize clearly and, therefore, cannot reflect about them.

Reading Garcia (2009), we become aware that the beginning teachers have two tasks to fulfill: teaching and learning how to teach. The problem is that they do that, in general, overloaded by the same responsibilities of the more experienced teachers, this being the reason why we imagine ii is not an easy task for Adriana to see clearly her conceptions regarding the students and her own role as a teacher in face of the present scenario of the Brazilian school.

When asked about what led her to choose teaching, Adriana explains:

> Besides that issue of spreading knowledge, I thought it was a powerful thing, which I didn't see in other professions, only in teaching. I felt that and I think that is what may have influenced me.

Adriana clearly states that, to her, teaching is having some knowledge and being able to convey to another person that has no such knowledge. That is what awakened the interest in teaching in her. Thus, we have again the mention to knowledge as the central object in teaching. When commenting about her childhood, Adriana provides us hints to understand how these conceptions about school, teaching and the knowledge associated to them are constituted in her thinking:

> Lots of studying, lots of discipline, as Japanese culture appreciates studying very much. I always had side activities: I studied Japanese *Kumon* mathematics, took swimming and English lessons. I always had something to do.

Even having graduated from a renowned university, the teacher mentions that she felt unprepared to teach. When asked about the im-

portance she assigned to continuing education, Adriana says she gives more importance to daily practice:

> Honestly, I don't believe in course, trainings, nothing of that sort... I think that it is the daily experience that is worthwhile, since it is there where we [teachers] will find the way to behave in class, in daily situations, in schools.

The above testimony shows us that Adriana is unaware of the fact that what gives teaching the status of a profession is developing the pedagogic actions based on theoretical knowledge and specialized training, assuring to each student progress in his or her social and personal development. Teaching is not, the way we conceive it, a profession that can be learned only by daily experience.

In the study conducted by Barbosa et al. (2014, p. 307), the answer for the sensation that Adriana informs having about unpreparedness for teaching after leaving college can be found:

> Quite often, the knowledge acquired during graduation is dismissed when the teacher starts working with the students. When he learns of the routine of the classroom and the reactions of his students, he chooses to incorporate certain practical knowledge, learned when he was a student, observing his teachers, discarding or giving little value to the theoretical knowledge acquired in college that bases and supports his action in classroom. [...] The sync between theory and practice is not always understood, especially for those who are in professional formation.

In this sense, it is timely to remark the importance of supporting policies for the beginning teacher as, in the practice of the professional activity in the interaction with their more experienced peers, they may be able to carry the arrangements that they, by themselves, feel insecure to do. The issue here, therefore, is improving the existing relationships, putting them in the service of good teaching.

When asked what characterizes a good teacher, Adriana claims:

> Nowadays [being a good teacher] is to know how to deal with others. For example: if before this wasn't the greatest attribute, as it was really knowledge that you needed to have, today it is not so; in order to survive in education, you need to be flexible with the coordinator, with the school management, do the same with the parents. The teacher that knows how to deal with other people is the one that is more successful in the profession.

The teacher makes reference to the power struggles which do not take into consideration the merit of the educational professionals. However, she does not mention in any moment, as it would be expected, the need to be able to teach all the children. Contradictorily, the conveyance of knowledge, so previously valued by Adriana when referring to teaching, is forgotten here. It is possible that this contradiction comes from the low expectation that she has about the students and about the functions of school in the current society.

Another aspect that calls attention in Adriana's discourse is the fact that she refers in such a negative way to the existing conditions in the school to accomplish her job:

> They are problems that, in previous times, the teacher didn't have to face, didn't have to overcome these hurdles, in order to pass on knowledge to the students. This didn't exist. Nowadays, what you see the most, although it is not the case of this school [...] But I have already taught in schools in the outskirts where, really, the problems are structural and the families are dysfunctional [...] So they are different realities [...] The physical and material resources of schools are really way below the necessary. Here, in this school, we still have some resources... But not in most of them. It is awful!

The above excerpt makes it evident that the professional experience of just four years led Adriana to build negative meanings regarding education, in a way that, although she worked in a school that she herself considered to be good, she was constantly in the expectation to face in the future a worse future. This fact has three explanations that do not exclude each other: the teacher had not taken the test to be a permanent teacher, so her future was uncertain; she seemed to have been contaminated by a widely disseminated discourse among teachers that everything is bad in public schools; and she felt little valued in her profession. This negative discourse, present in her testimonies, seems to be so strong that, even working in a school she considered to be *good*, she didn't change the meaning of her discourse:

> This school where I'm teaching is an organized school: there aren't great dramas here! Most state schools, you even go through risky situations, you are threatened by students, you are verbally or physically assaulted and, here, you still can work without great frights.

The teacher's discourse is important because the meaning cores the teachers build regarding teaching are important, as they are intimately related to the way the younger generations are educated and also as they imply a vision of their profession and of themselves. The fact that a teacher with only four years of work assigns such a negative meaning to her profession is a disaster, as this has repercussions on her expectations and herself, lowering them:

> Nowadays, honestly, I just expect appreciation and respect. Each day, it's depressing to be a teacher. In the past, we expected the students to reach their learning goals. Nowadays, you can't even expect that: you have to be pleased they get a little calmer, that you are not threatened, knocked down!

Teaching has become, for Adriana, a war without truce, as the following testimony shows:

> I think it is an emotional distress. As there are forty or more students in the classroom, requesting you all the time. And these requests are only regarding knowledge: there are students who want an advice for their personal lives. And there is bureaucracy, the daily lives of the school, the student wants to leave the room all the time to solve something with the

> management, drink water, go the bathroom... So, you need to have a great balance. The words that best define being a teacher, nowadays, are emotional distress. [...] [Teaching is] a war, a battle each day, few people fit into the profile of a state teacher nowadays. That is why I know people who, for thousands of reasons, quit the career. You are physically and emotionally worn out. The daily life of a state school is becoming something schizophrenic.

What the teacher says demonstrates the urgent need of a discussion regarding the issues that involve the expectation of teachers about the students and themselves, as the way that they are being built seems to be disastrous for the future of a nation that wants to be developed. However, our focus in this moment will concentrate on thinking the teaching profession: with such a negative view of teaching, built with only four years of work, how many years will Adriana remain in the career? Is it possible to survive in a profession cultivating feelings of fear, worthlessness and disrespect as seen above? The excerpts reinforce again the importance of systemic policies of follow up for the beginners, aiming to avoid the evasion of teachers in a career with an acute scarcity of professionals.

Due to all we have seen so far, it is no surprise when Adriana shows doubts about going on with her profession. One moment, the teacher would say that she liked what she did; another moment she would state she was living in constant conflict. Maybe she taught because she liked it, maybe because she needed it:

> I am in crisis with teaching! I can't quit because I have to support myself, but at the same time, I think if I didn't like to teach, perhaps I wouldn't be in the career any longer.

Her crisis in relation to teaching seems to be related to a conflict between being successful and emotional well-being. On one hand, there was the steady (and wearing) job of every day; on the other hand, the wellness she imagined she would feel if she worked in another activity, alternative therapies, an uncertain field of work developed in her free hours:

> Honestly, yes, (I would abandon it) and I say this based on my experience. If I could support myself only with the therapies, I wouldn't think twice. At this moment, I say that, in a while, maybe not, but in the present I would change. The work field of alternatives therapies is saturated and it is a very unstable profession, one moment you have a patient, in the next you don't.

The conflict between professional success and emotional well being is worsened by the fact that her family does not see advantages in her professional choice:

> I entered the Geography course, took a semester, moved to history. But, then, they [the family members] asked me what I was going to do with that college degree. When I said I could teach, they criticized me because there is the comparison with my cousins. In my whole family, everyone is graduated from good colleges, nobody went to a bad college, but there is a

comparison with the paying issue. The comparison is unavoidable, as if I were successful... And the others, in their vision, were successful [...]. I am worn out because nobody likes to be compared to anyone. It is bad as my family values the material aspect, the paying issue a lot! I think it is not worth teaching because I don't have any compensation in my profession.

Adriana said she was insecure concerning whether her option was good or not. Academic life could have been an alternative, as a pedagogic complementation course that would allow her to teach children of the cycle I of elementary school. The choice for such different levels of teaching seems to be justified due a desire to fit her professional lives to the reasons that led her to teaching. Her words allow us to understand her better:

> I like this part of studying, researching and taking it to the students, this is the best part! [...]. I started college wanting to teach in the public system, but, at the same time, opportunities to pursue an academic career came up. As in the beginning, I already had this idea of going to K-12 teaching, the academic career stayed on the second plan. I have doubts if I shouldn't have pursued an academic career, insisting, making an attempt to teach in a college. [...] I also wanted to teach in the initial grades, as the return would be faster: the child is there, you see the result immediately, it is different... I need to be patient...

Leontiev (2004, p. 104) teaches us that "in order to find the personal sense, it is necessary to discover the reason it corresponds to". Adriana's reasons seemed to be to reach a certain professional *status* and make use of it materially, as she would be recognized as someone who carried out an important social function. As she didn't achieve this in teaching, there was a great bad feeling in the teacher. It would be good to abandon the career and, contradictorily, remain in it, working in other levels of teaching, where she supposes that the student has a lower level of autonomy, which would facilitate her to take the role of someone that has knowledge lacking to the other one. Teaching, therefore, has two senses for Adriana: on one hand, achieving a professional status and, on the other hand, carrying out a socially important and valued function. As none of them can be fully reached, Adriana sees herself disrespected, undervalued e immersed in a universe of contradictory feelings. Patience is what she needed to have. Is that really so?

And now, what to do?

Would Adriana be building a process of abandonment by living negative experiences with teaching in her few years of profession? Would these processes be shared by other teachers? How to regard this phenomenon?

We can notice signs to the referred abandonment on Adriana's discourse when she refers to her profound discredit regarding the possibilities, in this profession, to have a life with dignity, as well as her disillusionment with the students of São Paulo public education system. The disillusionment is shown both in terms of financial terms, as well

in terms of spreading knowledge – an aspect that constitutes an important indicator in her representation about teaching; besides being also present when she says that she has no other professional option, feeling paralyzed. It is a discourse that surely reveals some of the bitterness of teaching, but it also fits in a pessimistic discourse that seems to be contaminant, being so recurrent when we listen to teachers.

How to implode discourses such as the ones found here? How to prevent a career with low attractiveness from losing professionals with so few years of work?

Two alternatives can be raised: a) to invest in the initial training, tooling the future teacher to teach well all the students. Freitas (2007) says that the teaching training needs to promote the goals of the school and therefore cannot be rushed. In fact, if the state is responsible for educating the population, it is its burden to train well the teachers that do this job; b) to discuss with the teachers their distress and desires, especially with the beginners, so that these aspects remain in the school space e receive support and care, so that one can have the peace of mind to teach real students, with real problems, but not insoluble ones.

A good way of doing that would be to think about establishing in the schools a culture of collaborative culture rather than the existing isolation culture that seems to prevail among the teachers (Thurler, 2001; Fullan, 2009). The intention is that the beginners rely on the assistance of more experienced teachers building, in the different schools and teaching networks, *a professional community of learning* in which some can learn with the others, some act as mediators and success experiences are constantly socialized. How can this be done?

The managing team can locate good teachers who perform the best practices and have a positive view of teaching and institutionalize tutorial actions of hosting for beginners, thus minimizing the impact and the typical difficulties of the early career and giving them opportunities for professional development. The literature points out that the axis that drives the creation of a community of this nature revolves around providing professional development of appropriate procedures to teachers focused on school improvement and the quality of education offered to students; moreover, it points out that the establishment of relations between the formative processes lived in initial training and those experienced at school tends to be more fruitful when it occurs in the workplace.

Fullan (2009) argues that friendship and bonds of trust are developed in cooperation, allowing assistance and improvement in teaching, so that all teachers can test their ideas, challenge their inferences and interpretations and process new information with each other: if Adriana had had the opportunity to interact with them, she might have been to able to devise other senses for teaching and make her job easier and less painful.

Mizukami (2006) alerts that various terms are used regarding professional learning communities and that each one comes from a dif-

ferent theory; however, all share the need for interaction, common interests, concern for the views of individuals and minorities and meaningful relationships among participants

While such experiments are present in some countries, for example, the United States and Portugal, in Brazil, there are few existing initiatives. So, while we highlight the need for further studies to investigate the issue, the existing data in the literature indicate that this is a promising alternative with regard to the continuing education of teachers, especially if combined with systematic policies to support the beginning teacher to fight the abandonment of the teaching profession and contribute to the achievement of standards of excellence in the Brazilian education.

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Itale Luciane Cericato is **a** psychologist, holds a PhD in Education: Psychology of Education from Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo and a professor at Universidade Federal de São Paulo, Diadema campus.
E-mail: italecericato@hotmail.com