

# Teacher Education: Perceptions of teachers who are entering the municipal education system in Rio de Janeiro

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## Abstract

This article aims to discuss the meanings attributed by beginning teachers to their experiences in initial and continuing teacher education. It builds on data collected in a study titled *O trabalho docente e a aprendizagem da profissão nos primeiros anos da carreira* [The Teaching Profession and its Learning in Early Career Years], which investigated how teachers who entered the public education system in Rio de Janeiro from 2010 to 2012 experienced teaching and the work socialization process. That study had as its main interlocutors authors who have been studying teaching and teacher education (Gatti and Nunes, André, Nóvoa, Zeichner, Tardif, Tedesco and Fanfani). The studied subjects were teachers in their early years in basic education. The data collection instruments consisted of an interview with an education department official, questionnaires, and discussion groups with teachers. Data analysis showed a positive evaluation of initial teacher education in terms of the opportunities it provided for reflecting about different aspects of the educational reality, as well as participating in research/extension activities at supervised internships. However, teachers also evidenced a disconnection between academic knowledge and the practical dimension in their teacher education. The study also found an absence of public policies dedicated to support teachers who are beginning their career, and an absence of on-the-job education initiatives that could offer those teachers favorable and suitable conditions regarding their needs as they begin teaching.

## Keywords

Beginning teachers – Teacher education – Teaching.

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# **Formação docente: percepções de professores ingressantes na rede municipal de ensino do Rio de Janeiro**

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## **Resumo**

*Este artigo tem como objetivo discutir os significados atribuídos por professores recém-ingressados na profissão sobre suas experiências de formação inicial e continuada. Tem como referência alguns dados construídos na pesquisa “O trabalho docente e a aprendizagem da profissão nos primeiros anos da carreira”, que investigou como professores que ingressaram na rede pública de ensino do Rio de Janeiro entre os anos de 2010 e 2012 vivem o trabalho docente e o processo de socialização profissional. Teve como principais interlocutores autores que têm estudado o trabalho docente e a formação de professores (Gatti e Nunes, André, Nóvoa, Zeichner, Tardif, Tedesco e Fanfani). Os sujeitos da pesquisa foram professores dos anos iniciais do ensino fundamental. Os instrumentos para a coleta de dados foram uma entrevista com representante do nível central, questionários e grupos de discussão com os professores. A análise dos dados evidenciou uma avaliação positiva da formação inicial no que se refere às oportunidades de reflexão sobre diferentes aspectos da realidade educacional e de participação em atividades de pesquisa / extensão e nos estágios supervisionados. Contudo, os professores evidenciaram também a desconexão entre os conhecimentos acadêmicos e a dimensão prática da formação docente. Constatou-se ainda a ausência de uma política pública voltada para acolher os professores que começam na profissão, bem como de iniciativas de formação em serviço que possam oferecer a esses professores condições propícias, favoráveis e adequadas às suas necessidades no início de carreira.*

## **Palavras-chave**

*Professores iniciantes – Formação de professores – Trabalho docente.*

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## Introduction

With the purpose of reflecting about the possible relations between initial teacher education, continuing teacher education and the work context in teaching, the present text aims to discuss the meanings attributed by beginning teachers to their experiences in initial and continuing teacher education.

To that end, it builds on data collected in a study titled *O trabalho docente e a aprendizagem da profissão nos primeiros anos da carreira* [The Teaching Profession and its Learning in Early Career Years], which investigated how teachers who began in the public education system in Rio de Janeiro from 2010 to 2012 experienced teaching and the work socialization process.

Various studies have pointed to the importance of studying teaching in the school environment as well as from a work perspective (TARDIF; LESSARD, 2005; ZEICHNER, 2009). In this respect, Tardif and Lessard (2005) indicated that research on teaching and, more broadly speaking, research on education has often relied on abstractions, without taking into account phenomena such as the real difficulties facing teachers in their practice, the institutional and social context in which that practice takes place, and many other factors intrinsic in teaching. Therefore, considering these perspectives, the study above sought to investigate the work learning process of beginning teachers by articulating three dimensions: teaching practice, teacher education and the social and institutional context in which that practice is embedded.

In this direction, the investigation sought to hear not only the perspective of the ones operating at the center of the municipal education system of Rio de Janeiro, but also, and in a privileged way, teachers who were entering this system to teach in the early years of basic school. Eighty-one teachers participated in the study; they were allocated at different schools under the ten Cordenadorias Regionais de Educação [Education Coordination Offices]

(CREs) that formed the municipal system at the time the fieldwork was conducted.

With regard to methodological resources, an interview was initially conducted with a member of the education system's central management section in order to map the places where new teachers were working and define the rules to approach them and the schools. Following a recommendation heard at this interview, we visited the CREs, which directed us to the schools with new entrant teachers in the system. Thus, an invitation to participate in the study was sent to the new teachers working at the schools indicated and who met the criteria above (having entered from 2010 to 2012 to teach in the early years of basic education). The initial idea was to invite ten teachers from each CRE, but we decided for a more flexible target due to teachers' greater or smaller interest in participating. So, we invited from seven to twelve teachers at each CRE.

After the initial visits to the schools indicated and the initial contact with the teachers, the collection of data was conducted by administering a questionnaire that was sent by e-mail to the 98 teachers who accepted to participate in the investigation. Of these, 81 answered the questionnaire. Sending the instrument by e-mail allowed answering it at any time, since all that was required was an internet connection. The link provided was individual and exclusive, thus ensuring the instrument's confidentiality and credibility. The questionnaire was comprised of 97 questions divided in the following core areas: socio-economic profile; cultural practices; school background; work background, teaching practice; and work conditions.

On a third stage, the study involved holding three discussion groups to which we invited the 81 teachers who had already answered the questionnaire. Of these, sixteen agreed to participate. The groups were formed with a variable number of teachers according with each one's availability. The discussions about the themes proposed at the collective

interviews followed a semi-structured roadmap and were audio-recorded with the consent of the participants.

The present article presents a segment of the analyses conducted about some of the data collected in the three stages of the study. It aims to discuss the perceptions of teachers about their initial teacher education processes, their work integration process, and the educative actions provided to them by the education system.

To that end, the text is organized in two parts. In the first part, we situate the learning of teaching in face of the new social demands and present the teachers' perceptions about initial teacher education. Then we outline a few reflections regarding the process of work integration and discuss the meanings attributed by teachers to the continuing education actions they have participated in. Finally, the article presents our final considerations.

### **The Learning of Teaching and Initial Teacher Education**

Studies have highlighted the complexity of teaching in the present, and have shown the impacts of social transformations in contemporary societies on the daily life of educational institutions. Authors such as Tedesco and Fanfani, 2004; Tardif and Lessard, 2005; Nóvoa, 2006, have highlighted, among others, the impacts of information and communication media, new family patterns, women's inclusion into the job market, change in the models of authority, the banalization of violence, social and economic inequality, tensions between difference and equality, all of which tend to end up implying a multiplicity of functions with significant reflexes on teachers' work.

In view of this scenario, sometimes "teachers are regarded with suspicion, accused of being mediocre professionals and having a deficient education", sometimes "they are bombarded with an increasingly abundant rhetoric that considers them essential to improve

the quality of education and the cultural and social progress" (NÓVOA, 2001, p.1).

Tedesco and Fanfani (2004) also stress that if we were to make a list of what is considered as "the desirable characteristics in a new teacher", we would certainly find a series of such varied elements, that understanding the meanings attributed to teaching today would be a difficult task in terms of determining it. As the authors highlight, "if one comes to believe the 'new teacher' should combine all the characteristics which have been pointed by specialists in various documents, the result would be something like an ideal type that is as contradictory as impossible to realize in practice" (TEDESCO; FANFANI, 2004, p. 67).

Bringing the remarks above to the sphere of our reflections in this paper, if, on the one hand, they evidence the necessity to better understand and determine the nature of the knowledge necessary to exercise teaching, on the other hand, they point us to the implications this has for discussions about teacher education, particularly about the place that initial teacher education experiences occupy – or should occupy – in teachers' professional learning process.

Even though we know that teaching learning takes place through a continuous process, one which transcends what is experienced in the context of initial teacher education, we sustain that such learning cannot dispense with this initial education. In this perspective, in spite of the initial character that forms them, there seems to be a consensus that these initial education experiences can and should contribute to teachers' professional development. Thus, if what reality has evidenced in most cases reaffirms the diagnosis that the current modes of initial teacher education do not prove suitable to meet the demands of the school, it seems urgent to advance in the pursuit of routes that point to an agreement on how to proceed to achieve the necessary changes in this field.

As the literature in the area has stressed, various aspects must be considered so that educational institutions can contribute to improve the quality of professional learning for those who decide to become teachers. To Gatti (2010, p. 505), “with regard to teacher education, a real revolution is required in the institutional framework”.

One of the paths to this revolution resides in the need to bring university and school closer together in order to minimize the so-called shock of reality, thus allowing the new teacher to face the demands of practice with less tension and more confidence, in an environment that was always familiar to him as a student. In this respect, as Libâneo (2001, p. 192) notes, “from the time students enter the course, it is necessary to integrate the contents of disciplines into situations of practice that can pose problems to future teachers and allow them to experience solutions with the help of theory”.

The disconnection between academic knowledge and the practical dimension in teacher education has also been highlighted in other countries. Zeichner (2010), for example, in referring to the North American reality, points to the distance between education and work contexts as one of the central issues in initial teacher education.

In the Brazilian reality, even though we can recognize an effort on the part of teacher education institutions to change this situation, this still seems to be a challenge to be faced. In this scenario, Nóvoa (2014) seems to have proposed a timely question at the IV Congresso Internacional sobre Professorado Praticante e Inserção Profissional à Docência [4th International Congress on New Entrant Teachers and Teaching Career Entry] held in the city of Curitiba: “Why don’t we do what we say it’s necessary?”

In order to know the perceptions of beginning teachers about these and other questions situated in the discussion on teacher initial education, we present below a few analyses which are based on the data obtained

from the questionnaire administered to the participant teachers and from the discussion groups we held.

A first aspect we highlight with regard to teachers’ perception of their initial education experiences concerns the distinction they make about the quality of that education, in relating it with the type of institution (public or private) where it took place. This is highlighted in one of the dialogues established in the discussion groups, where we can see a positive evaluation of pre-work education, particularly when obtained at public institutions:

I agree with her in... it’s happened, talking with people who graduated from public higher education institutions, I realize that the difference is curricular (...) I feel that it’s much greater than what I had in mine, which is private, for example.

I agree with M, the question of the curriculum being more detailed, and I think the demands too, isn’t it? I think it demands a little more.

At the public one, they’ll teach you... they’ll teach you to think, to create a goal in a way the private one won’t. And they carry that to their lives! It’s not just work... it’s for everything!

In the discussion groups, the general tendency was to value that education, particularly the innumerable opportunities to participate in various projects, programs and internships. Significantly enough, we verified that 65.7% of the teachers participated in research groups, and 58.2% participated in extension activities. It is also worth highlighting, although with much lower percentages, monitoring (22.4%) and career entrance programs (10.4%), namely: the Pibid program and a “training” program at the university’s child care center. The low participation in the Pibid can be explained by the fact that only in its third edition, launched in April, 2010, did that program include the

licentiate in pedagogy (bachelor's level) for teaching in early basic education grades as an area to be prioritized. Because our subjects had already graduated by the time they entered the municipal education system from 2010 to 2012, only the ones who entered in the latter year could have had the opportunity to participate (or not) as students in that program at their higher education institutions.

In the discussion groups, participation in these various academic activities was enthusiastically reported. The teachers mentioned, particularly, the contributions that participating in research groups provided to teaching practice. According with these teachers, their involvement in this activity favored developing reflexive and critical capacity, as one teacher summarizes:

In the research group, you'll observe and you'll have to analyze that reality, and you'll have to think of a possibility, a discussion, (...) it really helped me, in this sense of realizing this relationship of the school, the teacher, the analysis of teachers' notebooks, the planning, so, in a way, it helped me.

Some of the teachers also stressed how the processes experienced within research groups helped them start at their schools. According with them, the importance of socialization, the possibility of exchanging with peers, and the guidance they received from trainers encouraged them to keep an attitude of constant investigation of their own practice:

It was, it was... It was really nice, because at the research group, first you have a relationship with several people who are there with the same purpose as you, to research. Then you'll read, you'll take all those authors who are being worked on [...] so that really stirs you and develops on and on, and it grows and grows. So when I started at the school, the only thing I knew

for sure was that, to improve myself, I had two things: one is my professional side, which was very sharp... and the other was through research...

I was part of the Research Group on Assessment and Curriculum, and it really helped me in this sense... I was able to establish that theory-practice relationship, I can still visualize theory in practice.

The college contributed... it'll give you that question of the researcher's view, which we must have. So, this the college gave me, definitely...

The accounts pointed to the necessity to think about the role that research and teaching entry activities, study groups, extension projects, and, particularly, the research attitude therefrom, can and should play in initial teacher formation. The literature has pointed to the necessity for the "teacher to reflect in a critical, systematic, and theoretically founded way about the factors that affect their practice and school's daily life" (TANCREDI, 2009, p. 17). This attitude, as we found, was the most significant element that remained from these experiences provided by undergraduate courses in teaching.

In this respect, two aspects stood out in our study. Firstly, we found that a significant number of the teachers we heard participated in these activities during their initial teacher education, which evidenced the existence of opportunities for doing so in public universities, as well as the existence of actual support from funding agencies. Secondly, we observed that this participation in research, extension, teaching entry and other groups is recognized by teachers not only because of the knowledge acquired from readings and discussions, but most of all, because of the collective work practice therein.

Based on the idea that the offer and possibility of participation in activities of this type

represent an important differential in the teacher education process, and that they can provide a fundamental learning space for building the different types of knowledge necessary to future professional development, it is worth stressing, as some other studies (BARDAGI et al., 2006; CALDERANO, 2006,) have, the importance of efforts to ensure a greater involvement of students in such activities.

Still with regard to the contributions of initial education courses, another aspect is worth mentioning: the one concerning teachers' experience in participating in supervised internships. In this respect, it is worth noting that the teachers' answers about this theme in the questionnaire indicated a diversity of perceptions. On the one hand, 41% considered that the internship "contributed greatly" both for their knowledge of the reality of public schools and for building an identity and learning about work demands; on the other hand, a somewhat higher percentage (about 45%) of the teachers answered that internships had contributed only "reasonably" or "little" to their professional education.

This diversity of perceptions regarding internships, indicating they provide a relative contribution to teachers' professional education, is probably related with the differences in internships' orientation and organization at different educational institutions. In a recent study, Gatti and Barreto (2009) noted that, in the curriculum grids of most of the undergraduate licentiate courses they analyzed, internships are registered in a vague way which shows no indication about the fields of practice or the supervision activity they involve. These findings point to the necessity for internships to be well structured and include teaching practice and school contexts as an object of reflection, which could help to surmount the existing divide between both teacher education poles (the university and the school), as it is so often pointed by the literature on the subject.

The importance of internships was also a subject approached by the participants in the discussion groups, as we can see below:

The fundamental thing was the internship, I took the internship in the municipal system with a grant, it wasn't just that mandatory internship. It was a two-year internship. The school was very problematic, small, but 80% of the students were children who were sheltered by the municipality. So, if I hadn't had that internship experience, it would have been very tough [...] so, when I got to the classroom, it was no big deal for me, it was all normal.

The internship was fundamental. In college, I went for a little bit of each area... So, I did special, early childhood, youth and adult education. [...] That period of internships was fundamental as, particularly when I talk to my friends from college who didn't do anything...

Some of the teachers we heard reported that, many times, they didn't wait for the curriculum-assigned time to come to approach the context where teaching practice takes place. In this perspective, we believe that the internship should not be restricted to the final years of undergraduate licentiate programs as is so often the case in teacher education curriculums, given its importance for the learning of the profession.

Still with regard to teachers' perceptions about their initial teacher education, we highlight the one concerning the contribution of their higher education courses to a deeper reflection about the Brazilian educational reality. In this respect, the questionnaire results show that most of the teachers (over 60%) emphasized the contributions of their courses to reflections about their own education and teaching, the quality of public education, illiteracy in Brazil, the profile of students who attend public schools, and the cultural diversity. Other noteworthy answers were the ones indicating that the courses provided important reflections about public policies and educational reforms, school management and

curriculum organization, and teacher wage and work conditions.

On another question, when asked what aspects of initial education had marked their practice most, the teachers highlighted their professors' commitment to the teaching career, a better knowledge of the political, social and cultural aspects of reality, and the teacher-student relationship they had experienced.

In spite of the relatively positive evaluation of these aspects of initial teacher education presented thus far, it is worth stressing that only 15% of the teachers we heard highlighted the theory-practice relationship as a contribution of their courses to professional practice. In this respect, as pointed by the literature, we can say that there is, in general, a tendency among teachers to value the learnings that come from practice, while disregarding to some extent the knowledge denominated theoretical according to themselves. As analyzed by a few studies, when this dichotomy is "triggered", it is common for teachers not to consider that the knowledge acquired in teaching courses can help, among other things, to found practice, widen conceptual horizons, and build professional and ethical stances (TANCREDI, 2009).

On the other hand, one can also argue that teacher education curriculums still very often express a predominance of theoretical studies in comparison with an education for building specific professional skills to work in schools and classrooms (GATTI; NUNES, 2009; ANDRÉ et al., 2010). In the words of a participant teacher: "it's too much theory... I think there should be disciplines in the course curriculum that already put you in a school even before the internship...". This finding goes to highlight again the importance of rethinking initial teacher education programs in the pursuit of strategies that bring future teachers closer to the real context where teaching practice takes place, whether in curricular activities considered as practical or in the ones thought

of as theoretical, which, in our view, is still a serious obstacle to the learning of teaching.

Finally, it is worth addressing the results concerning the meanings that the teachers attributed to initial education with regard to the aspects more closely related to teacher preparation. In this case, we found a percentage always below 28% for teachers who believed to have been "really prepared" during their initial teacher education concerning various aspects involved in it, which agrees with the perspective of an education that is only initial, as its own name already makes explicit.

However, many of the teachers (always above 60%) perceived themselves as "prepared" to some extent, particularly concerning aspects related to teamwork, knowledge of the purposes and goals of school education, knowledge of education's philosophical, sociological and historical foundations, the teacher-student relationship, work planning, learning assessment, knowledge of students' learning and development processes, and knowledge of teaching methods and strategies. To these teachers, the aspects in which they felt "least prepared" were the ones related to communication with parents, knowledge of characteristics of the realities found in schools, mastering administrative and school management aspects and the contents to be taught (sciences, history, geography, mathematics, and Portuguese).

About these results, it is particularly noteworthy that the teachers considered their courses' contribution to be small with regard to mastering the knowledge of the various knowledge areas and their teaching methodology. In this respect, the account of one participant in the discussion groups also stands out:

Some disciplines, well, they really marked my practice. It was methodology of history, teaching-learning of geography and history, where my teacher, she worked a lot with games and classroom dynamic,

it really helped me, that part (...) It was the only model I had, you see? (...) Other disciplines, I can tell you the contribution was small.

To Saviani (2009, p. 171), in the root of this problem is the dissociation between two indissociable aspects of the teacher role: form and content, as he notes:

Considering how college specialties are constituted, one might say that students who have experienced the unity of both aspects in basic education will have acquired the right to focus on just one of them by the time they enter higher education. Consequently, the ones who passed the admission test for higher education in pedagogy will no longer have to worry about contents. And the ones who passed the test for the various disciplines in undergraduate licentiate programs can focus only on their respective specific contents, unconcerned about the forms that correspond to them.

This conclusion reaffirms results obtained in a study conducted by Reis (2008) with one hundred students and eight teacher trainers at five teacher education courses at different institutions in the city of Rio de Janeiro (three public and two private institutions). Only 24% of students considered that the courses could help them acquire knowledge of the “contents of specific areas”, whereas according to the teacher trainers interviewed, what seemed to be requiring greatest attention in teacher education courses’ curricular reform concerned the difficulties to treat in greater breadth and depth the contents necessary to the preparation of students to teach the different knowledge areas that form the curriculum in early grades.

Likewise, Gatti and Nunes (2009), in analyzing the curriculums of various teacher education institutions, found that the group “specific didactics, methodologies, and teaching

practices” (the “how” to teach) accounted for 20.7% of the set of disciplines in the courses, and only 7.5% of disciplines were dedicated to the contents to be taught in early grades of basic education, i.e., the “what” to teach, thus evidencing how the specific contents of the disciplines to be ministered in classroom are not the object of initial teacher education courses.

Our intent in showing the perceptions of this group of new entrant teachers about initial education is to contribute to the reflection about teacher education curriculums in our country. We start from the assumption that a greater approximation between practicing teachers and the ones who design teacher education curriculums can favor the construction of initial education curriculums dedicated to solid theoretical education and the field’s real necessities.

### **Entry into Teaching and On-The-Job Education**

As it is known, the first few years in a teaching career are extremely important for learning the profession. It is a time of confrontation between the work stereotypes one has acquired over one’s life and reality (DUBAR, 1997), which can determine even the professional future of a teacher and his relationship with work (TARDIF; RAYMOND, 2000).

A few authors such as Dubar (1997), Huberman (2000), Tardif and Raymond (2000), who have conducted studies on work socialization refer to the beginning of this process as a time of shock with reality, of “survival”, discoveries, and great learning.

In analyzing the challenges for the future of teaching, Nóvoa (2006) highlights the need to dedicate special attention to young teachers. To him, we can judge the level of professionalism of a group based on how it takes care of those who enter it. In this respect, the author notes that, in teaching, this evaluation is the worst possible, since new entrants usually go to the worst schools, have the worst hours, the worst classes,

and no support of any kind. To the author, “if we are not able to build more harmonious and coherent ways of integrating these teachers, we will be precisely intensifying, in these early work years, individual survival dynamics that necessarily lead to an individualistic closing off on the part of teachers (NÓVOA, 2006, p. 14).

In this respect, it is worth highlighting the importance of the institutional environment, as well as integration and on-the-job education strategies, to new teachers’ professional learning and development. Research about schools has shown that a favorable environment is built when teachers feel encouraged by their peers to express their opinions, doubts and problems (personal and/or professional ones), have the opportunity to participate more in decisions involving the school community, and trust the professionals who coordinate practice and manage the institution (NASCIMENTO, 1996). The existence of a space for collective work where teachers can have the opportunity to be in touch with their peers to study, reflect on their practices, collectively seek solutions for the problems faced, and build a collective project, has been considered an important professional development factor.

Based on these reflections, the investigation sought to hear teachers about how they perceived this initial moment of starting in the profession and how they were received by the education system. The various feelings described in the literature were pointed by the teachers we heard, both in the questionnaire and in the discussion groups. The accounts reveal, on the one hand, the enthusiasm and optimism in face of a career beginning, and, on the other, the “fright” before the realities they found. Being incorporated into a school, having their own classes, and assuming responsibilities towards them were the aspects highlighted by the teachers.

However, we noticed, in general, some disillusion as to how they were received or how they experienced their first moment at work as they started at the schools:

[...] Nothing can take away from you that fright of arriving with your term, that document you carry to report yourself at the school in the morning to be taken to the class you are going to be with, immediately. They just take you there and it’s like: You’ll be with them from now on!

The coordinator received me really well, and the teachers welcomed me. The teachers asked: “So, did you prepare something for today?” Me? Oh! More or less... Then she introduced me to the class. I had the feeling they didn’t really know I was starting that day...

I left the city hall and went straight to the school, on the bus I was already thinking what I’d do, what projects... I’m gonna change the world!... The next day came the class, and then, on the first day I already wanted to quit...

It is noteworthy that, by the time they started to work, most of the teachers had never participated in any kind of training promoted by the educational system as a preparation between their arrival at the school and their start in classroom. When asked about it, 54.4% of the teachers reported to have participated in some type of education activity promoted by the Municipal Education Department (SME), but only 3.8% said they had participated in some educational action before starting to work. All the other teachers who had participated in some training did so after having already started to teach at their schools. A slightly smaller, yet very significant number of teachers (45.6%) reported they had never participated in any education action dedicated to starting into work until the time we questioned them.

This absence of an institutional action specifically dedicated to getting teachers started in the municipal system could also be seen in the interview with the teacher in charge of “basic education management” in a central

position in the system. According with her, until early 2012, what was foreseen was “only a monitoring by the pedagogical coordinator at the school unit and by the management responsible for that teacher”. However, still according with her account, “that monitoring... was not an actual monitoring”, since although it was foreseen, some schools were able to carry it out, while others showed difficulties.

When asked about policies for introducing teachers into work, this teacher mentioned the creation, in 2012 (the year the interview was conducted), of the Escola de Formação do Professor Carioca – Paulo Freire [Rio’s Teacher Education School – Paulo Freire], which, according with her, would be responsible from then on for the training of the municipal system’s future teachers. She also mentioned the creation of a tutorship system to monitor new entrants within schools. However, the teachers we interviewed, who entered the system from 2010 to 2012, had not gone through those education experiences.

When asked about their participation in continuing education actions promoted by different government entities in the two previous years, approximately 75% of the teachers said they had already participation in some education action. According to them, 75.8% of those actions were promoted by the SME, 4.8% by the school itself, 4.8% by higher education institutions, 3.2% by companies, and 1.6% by the Ministry of Education (MEC). None of the education actions the interviews participated in were promoted by the teachers union or by NGOs. To us, it seemed very significant that a quarter of the teachers had never participated in any such action.

To look deeper into this question, the subject was brought up in the discussion groups. There, all of the teachers declared they wished more support to their work. This pursuit of support was confirmed by the teacher at the central management section. In her interview, she noted: “everything that is offered in terms of education, most of the new teachers... And they

go for it”. The various accounts also stressed the importance that these teachers conferred to continuing education, reaffirming what Marcelo Garcia (1999) also found in his study conducted in Spain: beginners wish to improve, as they are fully aware that their education is incomplete.

However, until the time we heard/read them, many of the teachers had not identified opportunities of continuing education.

The opinions of the teachers who affirmed to have participated in educational actions promoted by the Education Department were divided between the ones considering them hardly relevant to improve classroom practice (56.9%) and the ones considering them important and having contributed to classroom practice.

In our view, these results, as the literature on the subject has often stressed, serve to indicate the insufficiency of the strategies regularly used by education systems to change educative practices. Many factors have long been pointed as reasons for that insufficiency, such as a normative, prescriptive attitude towards teachers, disregarding the knowledge they build in their practices, the distance between those who design proposals and schools’ realities, the climate of confrontation between the systems and teachers, given the denial of fair wages and satisfactory work conditions, among many others (NASCIMENTO, 1997).

In respect to the present study, in addition to these factors, there is also the fact that many teachers work very long hours without the time or space foreseen for studying, exchanging with peers, or being more closely supervised by managers as they get their start in teaching.

Among the justifications that teachers gave for negatively evaluating the actions they had participated in are the ones concerning time and space organization, as well as the ones related with these actions’ concepts and models.

With regard to time and space organization, it is noteworthy, among others, that there are no strategies in place to allow teachers to be absent from the classroom.

According with the teachers, in these cases, most schools choose not to send a teacher, but rather the pedagogical coordinator to courses that are ministered and promoted by the system's central and intermediate areas. Some teachers reported they had not even heard about these actions, which end up not being divulged within the school as a whole. The main critique in this respect was that educational actions are not for everybody. This perspective was also confirmed by the central management interviewee:

You have no room to put everybody at once. [...] In fact, you work with a representation. You'll bring a teacher from each school, and then he's responsible for going back to the school and multiplying it, and then it goes like this: those who can do it, they will. Those who can't, who've some difficulty... you can't reach 100% of that.

Other aspects highlighted by the teachers refer to the scarcity of these actions, the lack of time, the disorganization of some initiatives, and the places where lectures and courses are held.

Many of them are held in places hard to get to for those of us from the west zone and who are not always released to attend.

There hasn't been much encouragement for teachers to seek these lectures or seminars, besides, they never start on time and we have to get away from our workplace.

With regard to these actions' concepts and models, some teachers highlighted that many courses are conducted by means of video-classes directed to all of the teachers in the system and actually thought out as "classes". Others pointed that many of these courses are focused on test results, thus evidencing a primarily quantitative concern, or, in some cases, that they are too detached from the realities facing teachers, failing to look deeper, as one interviewee said, into the "pedagogical

practices and/or discussions and possibilities of new horizons in the teacher's action".

Lecturers ignored or seemed to ignore teachers' notes regarding the problems they are faced with at their units.

Normally, at the day of the training, we have to go in the afternoon, since we have to stay with the class in the morning. Also, the courses are very superficial, as although they recognize the problems teachers are faced with, we are never listened to, and the demands are always top-down. The wage doesn't help much, as we have no new horizons in sight and schools' structures are the worst possible, all this contributes for the failure of SME's continuing education strategies to achieve their goals.

Now with regard to the continuing education strategies taking place within schools and considering that one of these strategies, which is implemented across the system, is that which the system denominates Study Centers, we sought to identify how the teachers in the discussion groups perceived it. In the accounts obtained, we saw various perceptions which, for the most part, seldom identify these Study Centers as an educational action, whether because they occur so seldom, or because of the way they are managed.

Once each two months... the school wouldn't have classes so we could have the Study Center, and then we didn't have much of an opportunity to see what the others were doing so we could... be talking: "I'm having this problem..." And then, in the teachers' room, you know, then I'd go: "no, do it this way, try that way", so the talks with peers is how it's been helping..."

But the Study Center would be with everybody together, all the teachers together, coordinators, management, only it

would end up turning into an administrative meeting and all that whining, you know? And then you don't solve what you have to solve, and there isn't the exchange, the time that would be meant for that, it ends up being distorted. At least that was the experience I had with the Study Center, already teaching, you know...

These accounts confirm, to some extent, the absence of a public policy dedicated to strengthening educational actions within schools, although this is a perspective mentioned by the teacher at the central management in her interview:

What is being invested in is holding training in loco, within the school unit, so the teacher can constitute himself from the discussions they have there, at the study centers, so they can have their studies, so they can study in these spaces and at regional centers.

However, this same teacher enumerated the difficulties for achieving this intent: the lack of teachers and support personnel, the lack of training on the part of pedagogical coordinators, among others.

We have no teachers nor ways of hiring the numbers to achieve that. [...] with the question of the lack of teachers, even people at regional centers are teaching classes.

Based on what we verified in the various accounts, the absence of a public policy specifically dedicated to receiving new entrant teachers, thus favoring an effective articulation between initial education and practice and offering them favorable conditions for a continuing education that is suitable to their early career needs, remains a challenge to be faced. In our view, such conditions could favor, moreover, a collective professional development process.

## **Final Considerations**

One of the reflections the study allowed points to the diversity in this education system, which is probably related with its size in terms of number of schools and its geographic distribution, as well as how it is organized.

In view of the above, we can say that the study generally indicated a relatively positive perception on the part of new entrant teachers regarding the contribution provided by their initial education; points worth mentioning are the reflections about various aspects of the Brazilian educational reality, teachers' participation in complementary academic activities, particularly the study groups, which awoke in these teachers an inquisitiveness in face of the complex teaching reality, leading them to constantly question and pursuit better practices, in a permanent process of education, in addition to the internship experiences. However, results also indicate, as evidenced by the literature on the subject, the inexistence of a teacher training for early grades of basic education that is more concerned about preparing teachers to teach specific contents of the different knowledge areas.

Given the presupposition that initial teacher education plays or should play an important role in the process of learning to teach, and taking into account the orientation that pedagogy undergraduate courses should be founded on educating for teaching, one would expect that, based on the 2006 guidelines and by means of a greater amount of study hours, a more reflexive and productive treatment of that knowledge could be ensured, thus providing a teacher education that would be more favorable to the articulation involving the theory-practice relationship.

Today, more than seven years after the CNE's resolution establishing these guidelines took effect, one can assume that the process of transition and expectations regarding the changes intended still deserves attention. In this respect, and in a more comprehensive

way, we believe, as Aguiar (2006), that the issuing of these guidelines does not extinguish the controversies that accompany discussions about pedagogy courses' character and identity. Because our study surveyed teachers who had recently graduated from various pedagogy courses, we expect our findings to be able to widen reflections about tendencies and perspectives of change in the sphere of initial teacher education which have been occurring in pedagogy courses in general.

With regard to the integration of new teachers into the profession and to continuing education, what we found was an absence, until the time of the study, of a public policy dedicated to integrating new teachers. We also found that some orientations and intentions manifested at the central management sphere fail to reach

the whole system equally: sometimes they fail to reach teachers, others, they do reach them, but, for want of physical, material and human conditions, they are not put into practice.

Considering also how teachers value their opportunities for exchange with peers, which take place within schools, it would make sense to ask ourselves what, then, would the role of the system in this process be? We advocate here that it would make more sense to support the implementation, at the place where practice occurs – i.e., the school – of a space/time that allows teachers to reflect, both individually and collectively, about the training needs of the teaching team, not in the asystematic, spontaneous way we verified, but rather in an institutionalized way, i.e., foreseen in the school calendar, being planned and ensured to all teachers.

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*Received on June 23rd, 2015*

*Approved on June 21st, 2016*

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