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Sharing, studying, seeing more broadly: teachers' narratives about continuing education*

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Abstract

The present article is based on a study which aimed to examine the meanings and discuss the contributions of continuing education to the pedagogical practice of early childhood education. Relying on (auto)biographical theoretical-methodological approaches, it primarily sought to record teacher narratives, making way for memories that weave stories of teacher education processes, of knowledge and practices, from our meetings with teachers working at the municipal education system of the city of Itaboraí, RJ, Brazil. The biographical material that shapes our study's main data was generated through narrative interviews that included the following aspects of teaching: fundamentals of early childhood education, contents, goals, the knowledge necessary for teaching, factors related to learning them, as well as those related to child learning, the teacher's role. Focusing our analysis on the theory-practice relationship existing in these teachers' education trajectory, our results point to conceptual and formal questions related to continuing education approaches: continuing education is viewed as a place to think and reflect, to share knowledge and experiences; it cannot be just about passing on methodologies, but a space-time of study; theory and practice articulate together when daily life and bibliographical sources are put into dialogue. Among the contents listed, it is worth highlighting those related to planning and routine organization in early childhood education, which should continuously be part of studies, according to the narratives. These are powerful recommendations for thinking about and informing public policy for teacher education.

Keywords

Continuing education - Early childhood education - Theory and practice - Autobiographical narratives - Teacher education policy.

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Early childhood education in Brazil: between achievements and challenges

Since the second half of the twentieth century, we can see the emergence of new discourses about childhood. The conformation of a citizenship status for children of all ages indicates, from a sociopolitical and cultural perspective, the need for new practices related to them. In the Brazilian context, the enactment of the Constitution of 1988 and, in its wake, the enactment of the Statute of the Child and Adolescent, in 1990, were milestones in policymaking for the age groups in question. With regard to the right of Brazilian girls and boys to education, the National Education Guidelines and Framework Law (BRASIL, 1996) established early childhood education as the first stage of basic education and, thus, day care centers and preschools, regardless of the population or age group served, were included into the educational field, generating significant changes.

Historically linked to public welfare or health care rather than education agencies, childcare institutions were marked by policies which dealt “poorly with poverty” (FRANCO, 1989), primarily focusing on food and health care. In turn, these roles and goals justified the hiring of poorly educated staff without specific training: among the rare teachers, there were monitors, interns and, at times, mothers were called on to collaborate.

In the conjuncture opened by the new legislation, which implied moving towards confronting and overcoming a charity-like education (KUHLMANN JR, 2010) – committed to forming habits and attitudes, a low-quality, more moral than intellectual education, predominantly focused on child supervision and welfare, conceived as a favor rather than a right –, defining a professional profile and specific training for teaching for the first stage of basic education became essential. Establishing that the early childhood education professional would be the teacher with a college degree or a secondary vocational training in the ‘normal’ modality (BRASIL, 1996) certainly represented a major achievement.

In this process, amidst struggles, achievements and challenges, many other issues still need addressing so that each Brazilian child can be provided with quality early childhood education and fairness of conditions. In any event, establishing curriculum guidelines based on ethical, political and aesthetic principles – reaffirming care and education as inseparable goals of early childhood education, the conception of children as subjects of rights (who are not only produced in culture but also produce culture), playing and interacting being the major structuring lines of pedagogical approaches – to be fulfilled by the plans of any early childhood education institution across the country (BRASIL, 2009) meant a significant advance which, in turn, increased challenges in teacher education and practice.

Considering the historical construction of the professional field and education trajectories of those who have taught/still teach in early childhood education institutions, we can identify today, in addition to the specific initial teacher education required, the need for continuing education based on the required and outlined professional profile. Thus, we raise the following questions: How should this teacher education be thought about today? What are the educational limits and possibilities of initial and continuing teacher education proposals? Which educational paths could be followed according to teachers’ wishes and needs?

This article presents the results of a study that sought to gain further insight into continuing teacher education in the field of early childhood education by making way for teaching narratives – for the memory that weaves stories of teacher education, knowledge and practices (REIS, 2016).

Education, educational experiences, autobiographical narratives

Like a balance game between traditions, socio-cultural milieus, socio-political pressures and tensions, the teacher education process presupposes a social construction – involving beliefs, values and professional and epistemological convictions – which goes on throughout life, between visions of future and professional needs (NÓVOA, 1995). Thus, there is no a priori teacher education, but, rather, an on-going, permanent process encompassing one's changing and learning about oneself through the social interactions and relationship with one's personal and professional environment.

Teacher education is a synthesis of appropriate experiences and knowledge prior to and during initial and/or continuing education, ranging from events experienced as a pupil to those experienced over professional practice as a teacher. What is more, it comprises a process that starts long before entry into initial teacher programs, i.e., since the earliest days in one's school life, even before that, and continuing throughout one's career.

From this viewpoint, the experiences-stories of the person-teacher play an essential role in their professional education: personal and professional experiences are the threads that are woven and unwoven over life, forming and expanding the person-teacher's meanings as a professional (NÓVOA, 1995, 2010).

In presenting the concept of formative experience, Marie-Christine Josso (2004) examines the idea of experience related to events in people's lives, though such events often go unassimilated by conscience. In order for an event to reach the level of experience, it is necessary to conduct some reflective work on what happened. Thus, certain daily teaching experiences – such as teaching, learning, the teacher's role, among others – can benefit from a re-signification through the narratives of the stories experienced, thus making way for the multiple possibilities of being and self-constitution.

From this perspective, experience cannot be conceived as an adornment of education, but rather as a potential basis that stimulates the apprehension and assessment of situations and promotes new knowledge. By understanding experience as the relationship existing in a given culture between the different fields of knowledge and socializations and forms of subjectivation, it is possible to build educative processes as a formative experience, i.e., as learning that articulates:

[...] know-how and knowledge, functionality and significance, techniques and values in a space-time that provides each person with the opportunity to be present both for themselves and for the situation, by mobilizing a plurality of registers. (JOSSO, 2004, p. 39).

The formative experience thus brings in itself a dialectic between the subjects, society and culture, in a non-hierarchical, non-fragmented manner. It is a whole that

emerges in education and promotes the building of other experiences, with learning ruptures and/or consolidations, since “the dialectics between know-how and knowledge, between interiority and exteriority, between individual and collective are always present in working an event into becoming a formative experience” (JOSSO, 2004, p. 49). To her, the laborious process of turning what one goes through into experience – by means of a reflective learning and by organizing the existential significance of a set of experiences in a given story – allows widening the field of conscience.

This process not only opens a knowledge path to existentiality and to knowing-living, but it also calls on the teacher to shoulder his part of responsibility in the teacher education process, which is oriented to the autonomization of thought, to knowledge about oneself: the subject of the education process “walks towards himself” (JOSSO, 2004, 2010a). The (auto)biographical approach, by shedding light on formative stories, recognizes that teachers are producers of knowledge about themselves, about others and about everyday life; it recognizes that the experiences in the course of his life can be ordered and made visible through autobiographical narratives, thus enhancing reflections pertaining to what is learned in the trajectory. As we set about discussing continuing education, it is worth emphasizing the importance of this theoretical-methodological contribution as a perspective and a prolific instrument of production of a type of knowledge that makes sense to the teacher, confronting the formative and the prescriptive.

Indeed, building a narrative focusing on the educational trajectory enables the person who tells his own life story to look into his past and/or present experiences in past-present, individual-collective, person-world interfaces, thus enhancing the educational character of this process. From a procedural perspective, self-narration comprises an intellectual elaboration and a sharing of thought, reconstituting what was experienced based on its meanings in the living context of the person who expresses and reveals himself through the autobiographical narrative (DOMINICÉ, 2010). Thus, in autobiographical narrative-based research, in the sphere of interiority, the narrator lets himself go with free associations that evoke his experiences and organize them into a narrative coherence around his education, while in the sphere of exteriority, sharing the self-description of a path, with its continuities and ruptures, involves verbal and intellectual competencies situated at the border between the individual and the collective (JOSSO, 2004).

In this process, the narrated experiences are accessed through memories – landmarks that symbolically represent what the narrator considers as the constitutive elements of his education, since they mean, at the same time, a visible dimension, which appeals to perceptions or social images, and an invisible dimension, which appeals to emotions, feelings, meanings or values, thus constituting:

[...] experiences we can use as illustration in a story to describe a transformation, a state of affairs, an affective complex, an idea, as well as a situation, an event, an activity, or an encounter. And this story introduces me to the other in sociocultural ways, in representations, knowledge and valuations which are different forms of speaking about myself, my identities and my subjectivity [...]. (JOSSO, 2004, p. 40).

Education narratives are a material based on memories that narrators consider as significant experiences from their past learning, analyzes of their evolution in socio-cultural trajectories and of representations they have built of themselves and their natural human environment. Therefore, research with autobiographical narratives has a fundamental purpose of listening to the subject-person of the investigation and, thus, also creating opportunities for learning, growth and development from those very personal-professional experiences.

At the meetings, teachers' voices and stories

About narrators, narratives, and history, Walter Benjamin's (2012) essay, written between 1933 and 1936, is a classic that considers the experiences passed on from person to person the source to which storytellers turn to tell stories. From this perspective, the narratives take on a special status, i.e., a specific form of communication with the marks of craftsmanship, which is life and authorship. Experience.

In examining narrative research, Clandinin and Connelly (2011) ponder two terms that need clarifying: narrative and experience. The authors say:

To us, narratives are the best way to represent and understand experience. Experience is what we study, we study experience in a narrative way because narrative thinking is a key form of experience and a key mode of writing and thinking about it. It is worth noting that the narrative method is a part or an aspect of the narrative phenomenon. Thus, we say that the narrative method is both the phenomenon and the method of social sciences. (CLANDININ; CONNELLY, 2011, p. 48).

Along the same lines, Delory-Momberger (2008, p. 37) says that:

[...] it is the narrative that makes us the very character of our life; the narrative is, in short, what gives our life a history: we do not make the narrative of our life because we have a history; we have a history because we make the narrative of our life.

From a different perspective, as Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2012, 110) say, "the narrative privileges the reality of what is experienced by storytellers: the reality of a narrative refers to what is real to the storyteller." Thus, man legitimizes his role as a narrating being, sharing with masters and sages the power to tell stories, whose challenge is to tell them in full and with dignity.

Larrosa (1998, 38), too, tells us that: "when we tell our stories and experiences to others, whether written or spoken, they are no longer just ours, since they become part of someone else's life." Thus, narratives enable the intertwining of the lives of the narrator and the listener, who by sharing the former's stories can reinterpret and re-create them according to their own ways of thinking, feeling and acting.

In the field of studies on teacher education processes, narratives have been widely used. In speaking about this perspective, the researcher Inês Ferreira de Souza Bragança (2008), ponders:

Narratives do not just describe reality, they are producers of individual and collective knowledge and, in the case of teachers, they potentiate reflection about their own experiences, theories and practices. Knowledge from experience takes on centrality, involving the various educational dynamics throughout life, as well as movements towards the future. (BRAGANÇA, 2008, p. 75).

In telling stories about a professional event, the narrator-teacher does something more than record that event: he ends up changing his ways of thinking and acting, feeling motivated to change practices and keep a critical and reflective attitude about professional performance. By building narratives, teachers reconstruct teaching and learning experiences, as well as teacher education paths. Thus, they explicate the pedagogical knowledge built through experiences, allowing their analysis, discussion and eventual reformulation.

In our case, if the goal of our study was to listen to teachers' voices in order to capture meanings of continuing education, then we had to create spaces for their narratives and put ourselves in a position to listen to and receive the many stories they had to tell. Thus, articulating foundations and principles of (auto)biographical approaches, the main methodological tool we used was the *narrative interview* (JOVCHELOVITCH; BAUER, 2012), a device specific for generating and analyzing narrative data.

Based on the assumption that storytelling is an elementary form of human communication and that regardless of standard language performance it is a universal capacity, Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2012) propose conducting narrative interviews that begin with the interviewer asking the interviewee (considered an informant) to tell his life story, using a broad, non-directive invitation; specific questions can be formulated at the end.

The participants were early childhood education teachers (four female and one male) at the municipal education system of the city of Itaboraí, RJ, with whom we met individually to listen to their memories and narratives about their education processes.³ The following criteria helped define the participants for the study: being a teacher hired through public exam to teach for early childhood education, and having attended at least two years of continuing and/or permanent education offered by the Municipal Education Department.

The interviews were audio recorded and, after being transcribed, were textualized to identify and give better visibility to the different topics the participants enunciate, without removing them from context. To that end, we treated the biographical material produced (both in terms of presenting and analyzing interview contents) using methodological procedures suggested by Prado et al. (2008); Rosa et al. (2011) and Rosa; Ramos (2015). In dealing with teacher memories and narratives, these researchers use a particular type of narrative-memorialist textualization, which they call the *monad*.

The monads, a notion derived from the work of Walter Benjamin, are fragments of stories that, together, narrate the circumstances of a given time and place. Methodologically, they are excerpts

3- The interviews followed the ethical procedures established for scientific research; the participants signed the informed consent form, and authorized the disclosure of their names.

from interview transcripts that are recreated by textualizing, editing and producing a title to them. They emerge as little chronicles, short stories, usually with an open beginning and end, leaving rifts so that the reader or the listener, too, can creatively perceive the truths they contain. (ROSA; RAMOS, 2015, p. 147).

According to Prado et al. (2008), using this procedure to treat biographical material from narrative interviews requires considering that the production of monads:

[...] is not simply about selecting excerpts from interviews in order to illustrate a discussion, but rather the deliberate formulation of narratives that explode in polysemy as they become a short story often titled with a provocative intent. (PRADO et al., 2008, p. 64).

From this perspective, as the excerpts from narrated memories are deliberately textualized, they become more powerful than mere interview excerpts: they are powerful, polysemic stories – of life, experiences, education. In turn, conceived by these authors as monads, they become short stories which follow no prior categorization or classification, but reverberate fragments of the experienced and remembered, thus unfolding to the reader in a richness of meanings.

Thus, inspired by these notions that have been used in the field of (auto)biographical approaches, for presentation and analysis purposes, the teacher narratives arising from the interviews were (re)organized into short stories, and each was given a title. Based on the questions we identified about the theoretical and practical dimensions that pervade the teacher education process, we present certain sets of textualized narratives like blocks. Analytical considerations are made on each set, with focus on some possible meanings, while expanding the possibilities for multiple interpretations about teacher education processes, especially those involving continuing education experiences.

Articulating stories and weaving threads about education, theory and practice

Within the limits of this article, we selected a few narratives and, based on them, we make considerations that articulate questions pointed out, taking into account the general goal of our study: to reflect on the meanings and contributions of continuing education to early childhood education practice, in the voices of its teachers.

The teacher stories that our narrative interviews captured are full of reflections on the theoretical and practical dimensions of the profession. In the education paths described, these teachers, who became storytellers, point out the need for theory, tough it has to be tried out, experienced, to become practice. The theoretical reflection must be anchored in practice.

When talking about the theory-practice relationship, they point us to the reflection on professional trajectories, wrapped in questions of the profession, surrounded by practice. The hurdles when they started in teaching, the lack of the necessary support to

face daily challenges, the task of becoming a teacher of young children, are difficulties experienced, as can be seen in the contents of the following short stories.

In the beginning: with nothing but guts.

When I came to early childhood education, I went to a very poor school. It wasn't until I took a nursery class that I found out how big their needs were. It was a class nobody wanted, a lot of children in diapers. And it was like, 'Do you have experience with early childhood education?' 'I know a little of early childhood, I have some experience.' 'Oh, then you're taking the nursery!' And so I did, with nothing but guts. (Juliana).

Between theory and practice, experience.

When I came to the school, I had many difficulties. But by and by I tried to direct my theoretical knowledge, it was time to put it into practice. I picked some things from college, to try and read it, I also looked for people who were teaching, my friends who were teaching, I turned to them for help: 'Help me!'. And they did, they gave me lots of tips. Come to think of it, what I was able to put in the balance in relation to knowledge from college, and that beginning, it was the knowledge of theorists, the development stages. That's where I actually saw it in practice: 'At this age they do such and such things'. But even so, there were times I'd be like: 'Oh God, what am I gonna do? What now? No, I didn't study this in college.' Then, experience's what I lacked. (Fernanda).

Practice made me the professional I am.

I came into practice, like, raw. The normal course [Secondary vocational education for teaching – translator's note.], I think it was hardly a preparation. There was so much inside the classroom, and I wondered, 'What do I need to learn that for?'. Because, in practice, you don't see it the way they show you in classes. What really made me learn something was the paid internship I took at this school back in Rio. Practice made me the professional I am today. So, because I saw what I didn't want to be, the professional I didn't want to be, I discovered what I wanted to be. (Alexandra).

To overcome inexperience or learn to carry on, getting involved in everyday school life, with courage, disposition and openness, watching the children, observing other teachers, studying and participating in school dynamics becomes essential. In this process, there is a clear criticism on initial teacher education, whether in secondary vocational education or higher education programs; even though interviewees indicate the need for theoretical knowledge, the essentiality of experiences is evident: it is through them and with them that the teacher moves on, asserting himself professionally as the person he is, expanding his values and strengthening his identity in the knowledge-practice involved.

How to carry on, how to move forward, how to become a teacher? Though it may be fundamental, it is not enough to consider initial education and experience, it takes more than the discourse on and the search for articulating theory and practice. It takes attitude. About the trajectories, about the education process of those teaching for early childhood

education, the narratives tell a few paths, strategies, conditions: being open to learn; the teacher cannot stop being a student; against routine, stopping to see/think the actions.

Practice-theory-practice: a cyclical exercise

In my initial education, I got off with that feeling, 'All right, now I'm gonna learn how to teach for early childhood education'. And no, there they made me think, they made me reflect. When you observe a practice, an action, you think, "That may be good for my class, for my group, I can apply that; now, that other thing such and such teacher did is not gonna work". To me, this kind of education is really cool. The theory is extremely important, but you need practice. And in practice you have to go back to theory. I think that's a cyclical exercise that cannot have an end as long as you work in the education area. (Maicon).

To overcome difficulties, one must experience theory in practice.

What I learned in college, it was really quick, I can say I actually learned by attending permanent education. There I experienced theory in practice, I experienced practice itself. To accept more what the child produced. I've had a bit of that difficulty: I wanted to take the child's hand to write. I was really interested in the question of oral and written language, from reading books, theorists, talking about the subject, about the child himself producing and you accepting his production. Because I had that difficulty. (Luicilia).

You need to stop to realize the theory involved in practice.

The day-by-day is complicated when you talk specifically about theory. There are certain things that sound really good in theory, but in practice, you have to move around if you want to do it. That's where you see theory with practice, when you talk about flexible planning. Quite often you're doing it, and you don't even notice you're doing it. How important it is when you stop to look at what you're doing! Then you can see the theory of practice. (Fernanda).

The teacher can't stop being a student. Work and study as we might, our practice tends to stray from theory and we work more and more in a mechanical way. That's why this exercise of going back to the classroom, to teacher education, that's very important to the educator. I think we shouldn't leave the classroom – the teacher has to be a student for the rest of his life, the more he studies, the more he's able to develop his practice. (Maicon).

It is also noteworthy, in the contents of the narratives, the motto enunciated by Freire (1997), which is widely known: to teach, one has to continuously become an apprentice, because education does not end, since our condition in the world is the unfinished

Moving forward in listening to the voices that enunciate precious indications, in the following stories, we highlight: the importance of sharing (doubts, knowledge, ways of doing things) among peers in continuing education approaches. It is in the dialogue and reflection provoked among peers that practices can be enriched and/or modified. One needs not templates, nor just indications (instructions) of how it is done (recipes). The reflection and testimony of those who have done it are fundamental.

Sharing makes the difference!

Really, continuing education helped me a lot! You had the talk circles, you had these communications that the girls talked about the day-by-day, their experiences, and I'd write everything down. They'd say, 'I did such and such'. And I'd write it down. And so, the strength of teacher education programs is the theoretical wealth, but I think sharing with other colleagues makes a great difference. And it did! I'd write down everything they said, such and such activity worked, such and such dynamic. Then, at school, I'd use it. Of course, I do it my way, there was the way of the class. It helped me a lot, the course. (Fernanda).

Sharing and growing.

Sometimes I am upset, people don't use the time, which should be for education, as a time to learn, but a time that's mandatory, to fulfill work hours. That's not the idea. Teacher education... is what? It's about helping our work, adding something to it. It is, so to speak, it's sharing what we know, what I know, what you know, sharing and growing. And then, our students stand to gain. (Alexandra).

From doubts to experience exchange.

What I value most about the courses I attend is the time for exchanging experiences, about the applicability of theories. Sometimes the theory is not bad because I couldn't apply it, or someone else did because they had the conditions that allowed it. I think good education theory is the one that works. Because if there was one single best theory, there'd be no others. (Maicon).

You don't need a model.

I remember that I'd do the activities with the children and then I'd bring it to present at the course. A nice thing to me, which wasn't far at all from my classroom reality, was what I experienced with the students. And every time, back in permanent education, they'd say to me, 'Look, you can go this way, it will be better; let's deconstruct it a little, you don't need a model. (Luicilia).

When it feels automatic, it leaves to be desired.

A lot of speakers are a bit on the automatic side. It sounds like you're listening to the same talk, changing just one or two little topics. And sometimes you worry so much about doing it differently, and they're up there, setting a lecture they've already done at the symposium, and then you go see a lecture by the same speaker in Rio, even the jokes are the same! So I think that leaves to be desired, you expect more. You'll go on, but you always manage to add something. (Alexandra).

Teacher education is no ready recipe.

When you look for an education program, what you really want is an answer, to some anguish, some longing that you have. The course gives you elements to answer your question, so you can build on that element that caused this anguish. It gives you this process of overcoming. I think every time you go to a course, and there they give you a ready recipe, I feel that courses are gonna end. The nice thing about teacher education courses is the debates and the possibilities of construction. (Maicon).

The interviewees' support for educational praxis is evident: it is not enough to do it, it is not enough to say it, the meaning comes from the practice-theory-practice fabric; in other words, it is a necessity of everyday life, a demand of practice that new appropriations may form. Or, still in another way: a continuing education approach needs to dialogue with teachers' everyday tasks. After all, "The practice of thinking about practice and studying it leads us to a perception of the previous perception or to knowledge of previous knowledge, which generally involves new knowledge" (FREIRE, 1997, p. 74-75).

By emphasizing the importance of the theory-practice relationship, the narrators propose another relational term: experience. They speak of experience accounts as an integral and meaningful part of continuing and permanent teacher education, and through those they have the opportunity to share their own experiences with their classes, successful experiences, but also something that did not work which may serve as a warning or a new idea. Knowing that what is being proposed has already been put into practice and tried by a peer is no theory 'outside' reality or a collection of information to be followed and applied, they say: listening to the experiences of other teachers encourages and helps cultivate a sense of competence and security.

At this point, it is worth returning to the concept of formative experience (JOSSO, 2004), based on the subject immersed in a work of conscience, a work that allows identifying instances of learning and knowledge in the interactions and transactions occurring in his life.

They always mix theory and practice together.

In permanent teacher education programs for early childhood education they always mix theory and practice together: there's this time you'll listen, you'll speak and you'll exchange, and then there's this time you'll put into practice what you've heard. A time for interacting, getting to know the whole group, that exchange time, someone who can always add something to your practice, whether an outside speaker, or even someone at the school system. (Alexandra).

Teacher education stirs you, shakes you!

Initial teacher education, it's all too fast. What I managed to learn was in practice, every year is a child. I can see it with our time in the course, it's the same, researching practice itself, it's about relating theory on practice itself. I can see that when I didn't attend the course, often I didn't bother to do a slick, well-founded job. Teacher education stirs you, shakes you, every time you have to take what you did with your class, which has to do with theory, which has to do with theoretical sources. In permanent education you can bring that theory and experience in practice. (Luicilia).

That I want! That's no good, I'll delete it!

Some time in teacher education can add to your professional life, including what you already do, only improving it. In continuing education, I always try to take what is best for my practice: 'That I want!', 'That's no good, I'll delete it!' Some courses did help, yes, others didn't. I can select, those times that I think are good for me. What's not, I'll delete it, 'in one ear, out the other'. I began my year using everything I learned in the last course. (Alexandra).

Teacher education: opening your eyes.

At the course, everyone was after some pedagogical support, looking to specialize, to get qualifications, to make their practice more meaningful. And a more theoretical basis, too, so it won't be just about care. Man, you go to early childhood education and people say you just play around! But you play because it is in your theoretical sources, you play because that's the way of socializing, you play to make knowledge more meaningful and enjoyable. So the course I attended at the municipal department, it was pretty much in that direction, opening my eyes to things I had already studied but had forgotten. When you're in practice you don't have much time to go back to theory. This course time is important for teacher education so you can get this theoretical return. (Maicon).

I felt like a researcher of my own practice.

The trainers bring texts for you to read, for you to write, for you to discuss. The activities they propose are done with pupils, with the children. And those activities, they have to be based on all curriculum sources, so you take it with you: because you worked on oral language, the activities, etc. It was theory and practice all at once. I felt like a researcher, really, of my own practice, you could relate theory and practice there, and you saw that was the idea. (Luicilia).

It's tiring, but it helps opening your view, getting out of the box.

I really believe in continuing education! Earlier today we were talking, 'Next year I'm not going to continuing education, I'm tired, guys, I'm not going!' I met this friend of mine, we took the course last year, and she said, 'It's really good, isn't it?' And I said, 'It's enriching for us. Because there you have new things coming up.' In everyday life, you lose a lot in that school world, and you find you're not opening your view to the whole. Then someone at the course brings an account, 'Look, I did this!'. Some technology, some dynamic, they bring something new and that wakes you up. No, I really need to get out of my little box. (Fernanda).

Exchanging and learning.

I want teacher education at all times! Unfortunately, there's no room in our work hours. I wish we had more of it, more course time. No doubt our education would be much better then. Because it's a time for exchanging and learning. Sometimes people think permanent education courses are all the same, so you don't have to do it anymore. I used to be one of those people. Very resistant to those courses. I thought it'd be a waste of the time I'd be spending out of home. But it's not! You just stand to gain. (Alexandra).

Learning with the other, putting theoretical knowledge in practice.

I've been learning with other teachers, I like to listen to other people speaking, I learn a lot. I'll write down what I can do: 'Wow, that worked for that person, for that group, it might work for me, too.' Maybe a difficulty with a child, or with the class in general and the teacher did it and it worked, so I'll take it with me to try and do it, too, I'm not like, 'I'm not doing it because someone else's done it'; no, I like to share. Did it work? I'll try it, too. And always thinking about the theoretical background, trying to put into practice the theoretical knowledge along with day-by-day knowledge. (Fernanda).

In the continuing education trajectory, as Alarcão (2008) well indicates, the object of reflection is everything that relates to the teacher's action during the educational act: educational contents, methods and goals, knowledge and factors related to learning, evaluation processes, the teacher's reason of being. Or, as Josso (2010b, p. 63) well highlights, "one of the goals of continuing education should be to expand autonomy capacities and, therefore, initiative and creativity".

At the interviews, the teachers gave us good hints on what the continuing education offered by the Department of Education should be like: a place to share what they know; they do not want recipes; they believe that organizers of meetings (such as pedagogical seminars) should better probe what attending teachers will present; organizers should mix theory and practice together; at talking circles, the exchange of experiences is very helpful; they like the novelties that are presented; they say teacher education is a place for thinking and reflecting, and for experiencing theory in practice. They also want more occasions for study and want these to approach everyday questions, in dialogue with the bibliography of the area; among others, planning and routine in early childhood education should always be an integral part of the studies.

Interviewees' references to the National Curriculum Guidelines for Early Childhood Education (DCNEI), a document that should guide the formulation of pedagogical proposals across the country, indicate clear knowledge of the legal parameters for Early Childhood Education curriculum, but also that those guidelines are still not incorporated into everyday practice. Overcoming the difficulties involved in translating those principles into actual practice requires studying, they say. Space for continuing education could guarantee the time for this.

Teacher education course: talking about everyday life in dialogue with the authors. The Early Childhood Education Coordination Office has always sought to bring the theoretical part. It's not just about going there, doing the conversation circle and talking about day by day, talking about myself. But about myself backed by an author. Then it's more complicated. I'm not just talking about myself, I'm relying on an author who's strengthening my thought. Theorists were brought as a support for us, and we'd read, a time for the texts. There's a time for us to talk about the class, a time to present our work, expose to the class the work we did, either on video or pictures. (Fernanda).

Studying is part of teachers' work.

You need the planning in order to be a quality teacher. One part of the valuing of teaching is understanding that study, planning and assessment are part of your job. What I want for my students, I need to improve. (Juliana).

Space for studying.

The main part that hasn't yet been solved, is actually study, directed study, because many, and that includes me, study to pass the public exam and then forget about DCNEI. You have to be always reading, a specific study, aimed to improve your practice. I struggle with adding some areas into my practice. Courses could dedicate some time to that study. (Alexandra).

We need to read more!

The thing about the course that really helps me is that you're studying hard, trying to read. I need to read more. There's not enough time. I want to understand everyday issues, routine organization, and for that I need to have time. So I can read, study, draw my own conclusions, start writing about experience. How can I write if I don't do any reading? I just won't! (Fernanda).

Teacher education: opening your eyes.

At the course, everyone was after some pedagogical support, looking to specialize, to get qualifications, to make their practice more meaningful. And a more theoretical basis, too, so it won't be just about care. Man, you go to early childhood education and people say you just play around! But you play because it is in your theoretical sources, you play because that's the way of socializing [...] So the course I attended at the municipal department, it was pretty much in that direction, opening my eyes to things I had already studied but had forgotten. When you're in practice you don't have much time to go back to theory. This course time is important for teacher education so you can get this theoretical return. (Maicon).

We opened this article by speaking of advances and achievements in the field of early childhood education, of new concepts indicating the need for new practices so that the rights established were guaranteed. In the context of pedagogical proposals developed in early childhood education institutions, the necessity to listen to children and pay attention to their ways of being, interacting and expressing their relations with the surrounding world, underlining their condition as culture-producing subjects, also imposed the necessity to create opportunities for teacher learning in this field.

In the last narrative above, the teacher highlights an issue that is central to teaching practice in early childhood education today: recognizing playing as childhood's main activity. As the DCNEI (BRASIL, 2009) explains, playing is defined as one of the structuring areas of pedagogical proposals in early childhood education. However, as the narrative itself indicates, playing is not so easily understood. To unravel its meanings and importance to children in their process of signification of the world, a theoretical approach is necessary.

The educational narratives presented in this study reinforce the following perspective: the necessity is admitted, the desire to study is made explicit, the questions pervading this new time in teaching for early childhood education are evidenced. Based on what has been proposed by the Education Department in the municipality where they teach, weaknesses are recognized. In the dialogue established, what is reaffirmed, as pointed out by Ostetto (2011), is this: if, on the one hand, listening to children is a presupposition for the pedagogical practice of the present, on the other hand, listening to teachers about their own education processes and proposing spaces for sharing and embracing their learning, doubts, desires and hopes, thus revealing what they know and what they do, is essential.

Final considerations: teacher education must embrace teachers' voices

Throughout our study, we indicated studies and investigations on teacher education which corroborate the importance of narrating experiences, of sharing what teachers know

and do, of thinking about practice, of telling stories lived in the profession. Narratives enable the intertwining of the lives of the narrator and the listener who, in sharing stories, can both reinterpret and recreate them according to their own ways of thinking, feeling, and acting. This indication and perspective, we find, is powerful for teacher education.

From the teachers' voices taken in dialogues in the course of our study, accounts woven in their narrative reflection indicate the importance of continuing education proposals, since they bring an undeniable contribution to pedagogical practice. Analyzed as a whole, the narratives provide significant recommendations to (re)think and found the formulation of public policies for teacher professional qualification. We agree that:

[...] it is necessary to overcome the idea of a "deficit" to be compensated, both for the children and for the teachers who work with them: to the contrary, there is plural knowledge, as well as different ways to think about reality. Paying attention to teachers' knowledge and values, based on their social horizon, and paying attention to their ethnicity, life story and work history, is the simplicity about a teacher education proposal and that is also where its strength and possibility of success are. (KRAMER, 2005, p. 225).

Teacher education will be more meaningful if it welcomes the person of the teacher: sharing knowledge and actions, listening to and being heard, studying, expanding views and possibilities, are wishes of teachers that can become guidelines for the formulation of meaningful teacher education proposals. In order to cultivate pedagogical practices in early childhood education that respect the fundamental rights of children and guarantee all the legal achievements and conceptual advances in this field, listening to teachers' voices and educational needs can make a difference.

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