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## Professional Development of Novice Special Education Teachers

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**ABSTRACT – Professional Development of Novice Special Education Teachers.** The professional development of novice teachers in the profession and in special education is poorly understood, despite its relevance to the improvement of teaching. This study analyzes the challenges faced by such teachers with a view to understanding their professional development. The participants in the research were teachers of classrooms equipped with multifunctional resources (SRM) in state schools. The research follows a critical-dialectic approach and a qualitative focus. The results indicate deficiencies in the professional development of novices, who experience difficulties related to teaching and bureaucracy, despite having specific training in the area. They also feel alienated in the schools and seek alternatives to fill existing gaps related to their professional practice.

**Keywords: Professional Development. Novice Teachers. Special Education. Classroom with Multifunctional Resources.**

**RESUMO – Desenvolvimento Profissional de Docentes Iniciais na Educação Especial.** O desenvolvimento profissional de docentes iniciantes na profissão e na educação especial é pouco compreendido, mesmo sendo ele relevante para a prática docente e sua melhoria. Neste estudo analisam-se os desafios vivenciados por esses professores, tendo em vista compreender seu desenvolvimento profissional. Participaram da pesquisa professores de Salas de Recursos Multifuncionais (SRM) de escolas estaduais. A pesquisa tem abordagem crítico-dialética e enfoque qualitativo. Os resultados indicam fragilidades no desenvolvimento profissional dos iniciantes, que sentem dificuldades relacionadas à prática pedagógica e à burocracia, mesmo tendo formação específica na área. Sentem-se também estranhos à escola e buscam alternativas para suprir as lacunas existentes em relação à prática profissional. **Palavras-chave: Desenvolvimento Profissional. Professores Iniciantes. Educação Especial. Sala de Recursos Multifuncionais.**

## Introduction

The professional development of teachers is a dynamic process of growth in the exercise of teaching activities, related also to the process of improving the school and students' learning. In this sense, advocating the professional development of teachers means recognizing the importance of their continuing education to meet the demands of the profession and achieve progress in education.

Studies on the professional development of teachers have highlighted the importance of the first five years of teaching (Imbernón, 1998), when teachers are at the beginning of their careers. As indicated in the literature, the foundations of future teaching action are established in these first years, hence the relevance of distinct monitoring and training for these teachers (Imbernón, 1998; Marcelo, 1999).

In Brazil, research has shown progress in training initiatives geared towards novice teachers. However, as these are still occasional advances, effective policies are needed to address the specificities of these teachers to enhance their learning and professional development (André, 2012).

Among Brazilian studies, Roveda et al. (2014) highlighted the difficulties faced by novice faculty in higher education related to both human and structural aspects of their work. André et al. (2014), in turn, stressed the challenges of establishing teaching as a profession and drew attention to the need of offering pedagogical, affective and cognitive support to teachers at the beginning of their careers.

Therefore, considering the importance of the first years of professional practice, one must acknowledge the lack of studies addressing the professional development of novice teachers in Brazilian special education, an important factor for the advancement of policies in the area.

Given that Brazil has a policy in place for inclusive education, especially with regard to the inclusion of special education students<sup>1</sup> (Brasil, 2008), who started attending mainstream basic education schools with the other students, knowledge is needed of the professional development of novice teachers in Specialized Educational Assistance (SEA) in these schools.

One must consider that SEA teachers, whose work supports school inclusion, face a complex reality involving multiple requirements. However, according to Castro and Vaz (2015), objective conditions to enable this process are not always in place.

In addition, according to data from the 2013 School Census Technical Summary of the Brazilian National Institute of Educational Studies and Research (Inep), in the period 2007-2013, enrollment of special education students in mainstream classrooms in the Brazilian public education system rose from 285,923 to 609,839 (Instituto..., 2014). These figures underscore the demand for special education teachers to work with part of these students in SEA and also the importance of the professional development of these teachers, novices in particular.

Few Brazilian publications address the subject of novice teachers in this educational segment. One study in this area was carried out by Marquezine, Leonessa and Busto (2013). The authors researched data to support the reformulation of a specialization course offered by a public higher education institution. The study focused on the main difficulties encountered in working with students with disabilities, according to teachers who graduated from the course.

The participants of the research, considered novices, had to be working with these students in “[...] special and mainstream schools and other services” with no distinction (Marquezine; Leonessa; Busto, 2013, p. 703). Overall results were obtained by the researchers from the participants’ different working conditions; however, the study does not detail the criteria used to define the teachers as novices, other than having graduated from the course. The difficulties reported by more than half of them were lack of knowledge of the disability and of how to deal with students’ inappropriate behavior, pointed out by 80% and 54% of the teachers, respectively.

Basurto López (2012), in an investigation on novice teachers in special education in Mexico, showed that the teachers faced a different reality compared to that experienced during their training in that country.

The author concluded that the socialization of the novices happened on a daily basis, but also as a strategy associated with communication aiming at their integration with the mainstream education teachers, since they have to intervene in the learning process “[...] of students with special educational needs” (Basurto López, 2012, p. 4). She further concluded that they feel rejected to a certain extent by the other teachers. For Basurto López (2012, p. 3) “[...] on entering the mainstream school, the novice specialists encounter established ways of life and customs, which they inherit and to which they add to their own”.

This process was described by the author as “[...] the struggle for space [...]” (Basurto López, 2012, p. 4), since she concluded that the arrival of special education teachers to collaborate with mainstream education is perceived as invasive by the other teachers.

In the light of these reflections, this paper proposes to explain the challenges experienced by teachers starting out in the profession and in SEA in order to understand aspects of their professional development. The novice teachers work in classrooms with multifunction resources (SRM)<sup>2</sup> of public schools that offer the second stage of elementary education (6<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> grade). The paper first introduces theoretical considerations on the professional development of teachers and on novice teachers and then goes on to analyze and discuss the empirical data, concluding with final remarks on the research.

## Professional Development of Teachers and Novice Teachers

Classic studies by Jordell (1987) on the influences on novice teachers pointed to the importance of personal and structural factors in their teaching activities. The author discusses how the novices' theoretical assumptions and practice are mainly influenced by the school setting, bearing on their learning and professional development.

In studying such influences and drawing on research by Lundgren (1977 apud Jordell, 1987) and Clark and Peterson (1986 apud Jordell 1987), Jordell (1987) concluded that structural influences on teachers, involving their working conditions at classroom, school and social levels, are more significant than personal influences.

Regarding personal influences, Jordell (1987) found that those involving people with whom the novices interact, especially colleagues, students, school staff and parents, are more important for their practice and socialization than those outside the school.

Concerning structural inflows, the author found that:

As a result of their work, teachers will develop theories/ beliefs and a specific classroom behavior. This is partly due to the influence of the students. But the structural frameworks in which teaching takes place – time, resources, curriculum, textbooks, number of students, and so on – have greater influence (Jordell, 1987, p. 175).

According to Jordell (1987) structural aspects such as number of students, time, resources, create difficulties for novices. Such aspects stem from the social and institutional structure and relate to factors such as school rules and objectives, and therefore shape the teaching.

The author also concluded that, based on what they experience, novices develop survival and coping strategies as part of their theories and beliefs. Such strategies are applied to classroom teaching, planning and decision making (Jordell, 1987). Professional development, therefore, is a complex process that, in terms of improving professional performance, relates to issues at once individual, collective and contextual, linked to a broad education and school project.

The effective professional development of novice teachers requires differentiated support from the upper administration levels of the education system and schools, as well as greater awareness of teachers of their own needs, in order to overcome them.

The induction period, according to Marcelo (1999), even when it follows initial education, is substantially different from continuing education. Vaillant and Marcelo (2012, p. 125) consider it “[...] a stage in which doubts, uncertainties, anxiety about starting in the profession build up and coexist in conflict.” Due to the dominance of such aspects, according to the authors, support and specific programs should not be restricted to “[...] occasional and spontaneous activities” (Vaillant; Marcelo, 2012, p. 126).

Therefore, considering that learning to teach is an ongoing process, the induction period is crucial to strengthening this process (Marcelo, 1999). The doubts of novice teachers arise as they teach, since they experience unfamiliar situations. It is up to the teachers, right from these initial years, to start reflecting on and conducting the teaching-learning process more independently, even if it does occur in a reality with socio-historical characteristics that influence their action.

It should be emphasized, however, that valuing this period does not mean neglecting the need for a well-grounded initial education, or minimizing the importance of continuing education throughout the professional career. It means understanding its relevance in this context, which demands investment and a favorable structure to meet specific needs.

When discussing the induction period of novice special education teachers, one must consider that the training of such teachers is controversial. For Michels (2011), it has often followed the medical-psychological model, which is based on biology and focuses on learning specific resources and techniques related to disabilities, without due observance of the pedagogical aspects of students' schooling. According to the author, that might indicate that inclusion does not presuppose "[...] the appropriation of school knowledge by students with disabilities" (Michels, 2011, p. 11).

Garcia (2013), in a review of studies on teacher education in the context of special education policies from 2001 to 2010, also concluded that there is a lack of pedagogical debate and reflection on the work of teachers in this area, highlighting, like Michels (2011), that the training of such teachers is "[...] lacking in theoretical framework and pedagogical content...", thus being compromised (Garcia, 2013, p. 116). And once teacher training is compromised, so is professional development.

## Research Methodology

The epistemological basis of this study – of a critical-dialectic approach (Castoriadis, 1985; Thompson, 1981) – is theory as an expression of practice (Martins, 2004). It is understood that subjects undertake actions amid existing contradictions, resulting in ways of thinking, theories and contents. Theory, therefore, does not result from reality unless it is practiced, and knowledge is produced through social relationships and institutions.

The research, which was approved by the Ethics Committee on Research involving human beings<sup>3</sup>, has a qualitative focus (Triviños, 1987) and involved teachers working in classrooms with multifunctional resources (SRM) of public schools offering the second stage of elementary education (6<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> grade), belonging to a Núcleo Regional of Education (NRE – Regional Education Department) of the state of Paraná.

In the first stage of the research, understood as an exploratory stage, contact was established with the specific sector of the NRE to

identify the teachers working in SRM. The data collected showed that the NRE included eleven municipalities, which in the second half of 2012 had 86 SRM distributed in 57 state schools. The total number of teachers working in these classrooms was 78. This survey took place in June-August 2012.

Based on this data – the names of 78 teachers and 57 schools – a further survey was carried out, since the NRE did not have information about the teachers' length of experience in teaching and special education, which was needed to identify the novices.

Therefore, the 78 teachers were contacted by phone in their schools and informed about the research (previously authorized by the NRE) and the need to identify the length of professional experience of all SRM teachers. At that moment they were informed that, if they agreed, a questionnaire would be sent via e-mail to verify such information. All 78 teachers were willing to take part in this stage. This process was delayed for various difficulties: finding the teachers in the schools, the teachers' availability to answer the phone and delay in returning the identification questionnaires to the researcher. This survey was carried out in August-November 2012.

The second phase, the most effective one of the research, started with the systematization of the 78 questionnaires, when it was verified that six teachers (7.7% of the total) were new to the profession and special education, being eligible for the study.

The six teachers were contacted again in their schools by telephone to schedule a feasible date for the formal presentation of the study, considering the need to conduct a semi-structured interview to learn aspects of the professional development of those teachers. Of the six teachers, five agreed to take part in the research (83.3% of the novices) and signed the informed consent form at the meeting with the researcher. These teachers belonged to three municipalities linked to the NRE.

Among the participants, four were aged 26 to 40 and one was over 40 years old. As for length of professional experience, the five teachers had been teaching in SRM for less than a year. Regarding experience in mainstream education, two teachers had been working for two years, two for three years and one teacher for five years. All of them had a teaching degree (physical education, education and Portuguese/Spanish) and specialization in special education.

The research data were gathered in December 2012 and underwent content analysis (Bardin, 2004). The teachers, four female and one male, are randomly identified in the text as I1, I2, I3, I4 and I5 (novices 1 to 5).

## **Data Analysis and Discussion**

Based on the empirical data, four lines of analysis were established: the novices' teaching activities in SEA, teacher training, alterna-

tive action taken by the novices and professional relationships within the school.

## **Novices' Teaching Activities in SEA**

Starting to teach in SRM proved to be a period of intense challenges for the novices. In this study, challenges are considered as situations that teachers must overcome and which put in doubt their professional possibilities at a given moment in their career. The five participants reported the period as being marked by doubts, fear of making mistakes and despair, highlighting perceptions such as "[...] I was scared I couldn't handle it" (I2), "[...] the first days here were quite daunting, [...], I was lost (I4), or "[...] I may have made mistakes I didn't realize..." (I5).

The reports suggest that the novices experienced the sense of survival, as demonstrated by Huberman (1995). According to the author, this is due to the discrepancy between what was conceived in their initial education and the actual concrete situation, forcing teachers to survive the reality in different ways.

The sense of survival is related to the poor support offered by the school and the state education department, represented by the NRE, to these teachers. Some statements make this clear:

[...] it's like you fall into the job, you're completely on your own [...] (I1).

[...] choose a school and trust in God [...] (I3).

[...] we were simply thrown into the school (I4).

[...] the NRE sends you and the rest is up to you [...], they don't help us much, they aren't tolerant (I5).

The teachers' views reveal elements that coincide with what is demonstrated in studies in the area, which suggest that to minimize or avoid the sense of survival, favoring the professional development of teachers, the induction period requires careful attention to teachers, a supporting attitude by the school and higher educational bodies, since a negative experience can trigger the desire to abandon the profession (Nono; Mizukami, 2006) and compromise the effectiveness of present and future educational action.

As verified in the data, situations generating adverse feelings are mainly related to the development of teaching activities for special education students and the bureaucracy involved in the work.

Regarding the former, one of the participants reported difficulty in knowing "[...] what is right and what is wrong [...]" in terms of teaching, in terms of making them really learn [...]" (I3). That reveals the need for caution when considering the possibilities of novice teachers in special education, especially as undergraduate studies<sup>4</sup> are often not geared towards meeting the educational needs of special education students, creating limitations for teachers.



Regarding bureaucratic activities, all teachers expressed doubt and insecurity:

[...] the problem is the paperwork, the reports we have to fill out the whole time (I1).

My lack of knowledge. Knowledge of the bureaucratic side [...]. Of the resources classroom, it was all the paperwork, the school should or must find a different way [...] so that this doesn't happen [...] (I5).

These activities were related by the teachers to the evaluation process of students for entry in SRM and later to reports on their learning. The five mentioned the filling out of paperwork and documents and the organization of reports, activities they were unfamiliar with, as can be verified below:

[...] then I despaired. I thought: 'I'm going to the NRE' [...]. Not once or twice, I said: '(I put my hands on my head and said), for God's sake, [...]. If you don't tell me what I have to do in that classroom [...] I won't go any more [...]'. Then the [...] got all that paperwork and showed me: Annex 1, Annex 2, Annex 3, Annex 4, Annex 5, Annex 6. My God, I looked at all that and I thought: 'Jesus!' And that's how it was, she explained a little [...] but you get there and say: 'Wow, what now?' The reality is different (I5).

According to the reports, the teachers were unaware of the existing demands when they started teaching in SRM and sought guidance with the NRE. However, this contact was mostly by phone and depended on the availability of those responsible for the special education sector, as seen in the excerpts:

[...] I'm still figuring things out. Sometimes I'm dealing with the report, filling in something, and I have doubts, so I call the NRE for guidance (I1).

[...] everything I've needed, [...] I call them and they tell me everything. [...] But regarding how to work with the students, that I've never called asking about. (I4).

I went to the NRE, I tried there with the [...], she helped me, but not much, she just gave me an overview, and she said she would help more, told me to go back, I went back about two, three or four times and didn't find her (I5).

The statements indicate the lack of systematic time/space to instruct novices so that, in a learning process, they are able to problematize and understand teaching in SRM as whole. The conditions reported show that the learning process of teaching is compromised, as teachers are subject to intuitive procedures and short-sighted answers that are limited in their possibility of fostering an understanding of teaching and its foundations. In addition, attention should be paid to novice teachers being subjected to comments that also disregarded this condition:

[...] when I have a lot of difficulty, I go to the NRE and inquire in the special education department. I call, I ask... I'm insistent, like I called these past days: 'You again? Give me a break.' I said: 'No, but it's only a doubt, it has nothing to do with the students, only the paperwork' [...] (I2).

What is observed is that the way the teacher's doubt was handled questioned her capacity for professional learning, precisely because the professional stage she was in and the insecurities arising from it were disregarded.

The findings of the research show other aspects that seem to interfere directly in the learning process of the novices in SEA. One of them refers to the inadequacy of the physical space and another to working with curriculum content in SRM.

The inadequate physical space of the resources classroom was highlighted by three of the five teachers, who pointed out that it is often shared with other spaces in the school:

[...] lack of a room, a building, an exclusive room for the resources classroom [...] (I1).

We don't have a room of our own [...] it is shared with the teachers' lounge, library, computer room, [...], bookshelves that are no longer used or are still used by other teachers, and we are there. [...] we don't even have a physical space [...] (I3).

My classroom is this size, from the wall here [...] and from here to there, this small square. It fits two desks, [...] and I thought: "What now? [...]" (I5).

Due to the lack of adequate space, one of the teachers reported working with students also in the library and outdoors (I1). Despite being a relevant initiative at specific moments, it doesn't make much sense in terms of meeting certain objectives of student learning, being motivated by the need to improvise.

As for mainstream teachers asking them to work with different contents in the resources classroom, the teachers reported that they try to meet the different requests:

It's like this one, it caught me by surprise, the rule of three, I learned that a long time ago. So I studied it the night before, to see how I could explain it to him [...] (I2).

So we end up sitting down and explaining the content, and helping, what can we do? (I4).

One notes that it is unfeasible for SRM teachers to work with content of the second stage of elementary education, either because it is incompatible with their training, which generates insecurity, or because it does not relate to the objectives of this classroom. One of the teachers addressed this issue, stating: "[...] I'm not trained to work with 6<sup>th</sup> grade-9<sup>th</sup> grade content, I don't have the necessary training for that" (I1). It is observed, then, that the teachers end up adopting a passive attitude regarding the situation.

These findings indicate that the school has poor knowledge of the SRM proposal and its relevance for school inclusion, since allocating it a small or improvised space or asking teachers to do remedial work may be signs of the underestimation of its importance compared to other school activities.

In view of the above, it seems urgent to reflect on SRM in the context of mainstream education, even though one might assume such reflection already happens at the education system level. These classrooms require greater attention and monitoring, especially when their teachers are novices, since, as is often seen, they do not have the necessary theoretical and practical grounding to cope with unusual situations. Disregarding such demands negatively influences the learning process of novice special education teachers and, consequently, their professional development.

## Teacher Training

Teacher training is essential to the teaching-learning process, especially regarding the professional development of teachers. In this study, teacher training is addressed in relation to the teaching-learning process of special education students.

Vaillant and Marcelo (2012) understand that in teacher education, it is the individual who activates and ultimately enables his or her training. However, they emphasize that collaboration and exchange favor learning that leads to personal and professional improvement.

Regarding the teachers investigated, despite their responsibility in inclusive education (Brasil, 2008) and their condition of novices, there are important difficulties related to their training, especially considering that the work of special education teachers involves tasks such as identifying and implementing action to remedy or minimize specific difficulties of students, organizing schedules, monitoring the practicality of what is proposed for the students' schooling, guiding mainstream education teachers and families, mastering assistive technology (AT), among other relevant responsibilities (Brasil, 2009) that require solid professional knowledge.

In the case of the study participants, all of them have specialization degrees in special education, one of the conditions<sup>5</sup> required for working in SRM in the researched state education system. However, one cannot overlook the fact that the five teachers considered their training inadequate for being essentially theoretical, which compromises the offer of teaching that meets students' needs. The quotes below exemplify this:

I think there should be internships, the graduate course I did had no internships. So, it may be more difficult this way, studying only the theory [...] (I1).

I think there should be at least some practice [...] (I2).

Also related to this aspect, three of the five teachers reported the specialization course as being brief or superficial, which also compromised their training. The teachers described the course as "weak" (I2), "superficial" (I3) and "fast" (I4).

For the participants, the specialization course is essential for working in SRM, since none of them has a specific graduate degree in special education, as is sometimes the case<sup>6</sup> in Brazil, which is usually done later in continuing education. In this sense, lacking a theoretical-practical approach in their education, the teachers feel professionally impaired. It is noteworthy that CNE/CES Resolution No. 01/2007, which establishes rules for the operation of specialization courses in Brazil, makes no mention to the relationship between theory and practice in these courses, merely defining, in the fifth chapter, that they have "...a minimum of 360 hours [...]" (Brasil, 2007, p. 1).

The participants in this study have teaching degrees in physical education (I1, I5), Portuguese/Spanish (I4, I3) and education (I2). This diverse educational background reveals the vagueness of what is deemed necessary for a special education teacher. Such lack of definition is also observed in the National Policy for the area (Brasil, 2008, p. 11), which broadly states that "[...] to work in special education, teachers must acquire, in their initial and continuing education, general knowledge in teaching and specific knowledge in the area." Without clearly defining what is needed for such training, it is left to the education systems to decide on the requirements for special education teachers, resulting in multiple and fragile possibilities.

Garcia (2010) warned against the imprecise training for the area, indicating that in the last twenty years approximately, special education teachers have held bachelor degrees in education, with specific qualification in special education or different disabilities. According to the author, these qualification courses were discontinued in 2006, and training is now focused on graduate courses. As verified in this study, however, the contribution of such training is limited, compromising the professional development of novice teachers.

Regarding teacher training, it is interesting to note how the two teachers with degrees in physical education established a relationship between their training and teaching in SRM. One of them reported making adaptations (I1) and the other stated that the degree afforded greater openness to working in this area (I5).

One of the teachers with a degree in Portuguese/Spanish underscored the fragility of her training stating that she graduated "[...] with many shortcomings in practice" (I3). Another, with a degree in education, reported the need to be better prepared to work in SEA to achieve better results in students' learning (I2). She also pointed out that she would like "[...] to be better prepared, more than now" (I2).

One cannot help but notice in the gathered data that although the SRM in which the teachers work (Type I)<sup>7</sup> receives students in the second stage of elementary education and that they have been trained to teach at this level of education in specific areas, neither their initial education nor their continuing education at specialization level were adequate for teaching in SEA. This is worrying, for although the legislation defines that teachers must have general knowledge in teaching

and specific knowledge in special education (Brasil, 2009), such training levels are insufficient.

The dissociation between theory and practice limits the novices' teaching action, since this was the most emphasized aspect regarding specialization. As this was their most specific training to work in the area, their didactic and pedagogical development in special education was therefore limited (Bolívar, 2002), compromising their professional growth.

As for in-service continuing training, the teachers stressed its inconsistency. Regarding training provided by the school, although they reported having weekly planning time, paradoxically, they did not consider this as a training activity that afforded review, reflection and reassessment of teaching, which suggests a low level of systematization of that time, which should include the participation of the school's administration team.

As for the NRE, the data indicate lack of involvement with teaching issues. The novices stated:

[...] No, nothing related to teaching, to classroom practice. We have their support for anything we need, but no teaching support, not that I've seen [...] (I1).

In terms of teaching, no. I struggle a lot. Naturally, it's my first year [...]. This year I struggled a lot [...] sometimes you call them, 'Do you have this information?' 'I'll check [...] I'll call you back later!' And that later never came [...] (I3).

The negative impact of the poor continuing education of novices is also seen in the teachers' disapproval concerning the work to be done in SRM and the lack of reflection on their duties in this classroom. They stated:

They say the resources room is for more hands-on activities, but some things cannot be done that way. So, unfortunately, you have to make them write! (I2).

And, according to S. [experienced teacher], 'They want you to work with games' (I4).

Because it can't be a repetition of the mainstream classroom, that's what they say (I4).

The teachers did not reveal themselves to be protagonists of their teaching action (as novices), but as receivers of outside proposals with limited understanding of the reasons behind them.

It is also worth noting that they apprehended intuitively the SRM working proposal. This came from observing the teaching materials as well examining activities performed by previous teachers. One of the novices stated:

So when I walked into the resources classroom, the first thing I saw was games. So I said, 'This is my starting point' (I1).

And then I started examining the work of teachers from last year and previous years, and seeing what they had done as well (I1).

Understanding of the proposal also came from guidance by an experienced teacher about work in SRM. One of the teachers said he sought out a friend, who explained: "Look, there are the games, we work like this, like that." Even so, he said he thought: "Oh, my God, but with games? Will students learn through games? [...] I don't believe it, games? She's kidding me!" (I4).

Of the five participants, only one contacted the NRE requesting the SRM operating rules, out of the need to understand its proposal. He stressed: "When I entered the resources classroom, soon after I called the NRE, [...] and said: 'I want all the information, rules, features, everything,' I called and asked" (I3).

It is thus seen that most teachers did not seek the SRM state regulations, which suggests little concern about them. One of the novices confirmed this: "I didn't even think of this regulations thing, I'm hearing it from you now, [...]" (I5).

Other training activities, linked to the NRE, were reported by the teachers. Two of them said they attended a meeting, not exactly a training session with the other teachers, when they started in SRM. The meeting was not exclusive for novices, as seen in the following statement:

When I started there was this meeting [...] to introduce us. It was a month later. It was very brief, [...] and they talked a little, ah, I can't even remember exactly, [...] about the report, [...] that sometimes it's a medical report, sometimes it's psychological, but it was quick, a meeting with the whole teaching staff, [...]. So it was not something specific, [...] (I4).

The meeting was described by the novices as brief, to address general issues about the resources classroom, which apparently contributed little to their professional practice and learning. It is worth noting, however, that the teachers did not necessarily start in SRM on the same date, as it depended on when they were officially summoned to take over the position. That can be a complicating factor for the effectiveness of training activities with novices, especially as there is no specific training policy in place.

The limited contribution of this action is confirmed in the following statement:

I came to work. I had no guidance before taking over the position. Then, when classes started, there was a little training just to give us some information, not teaching training (I1).

Two other initiatives related to SRM were reported by the participants. One was a specific distance course, informed by two teachers:

There was, [...] a month ago, I think [...] a distance training, [...], but it was only theory, [...]. About the resources classroom. It was to know [...] all areas of disabilities. [...] all those eligible for the resources class-

room. [...] sometimes they asked us to write in the journal [...] something we did in the classroom that had a good result, [...]. Then we wrote the journal, describing activities, too (I1).

And then this recent course, it was about two months of online course, I think. That one was good. [...]. It's the one with a forum. Exchanging ideas with colleagues... It addressed [...] the understanding of, [...] dyslexia, students with motor problems, then there was always an activity involving the school [...] (I4).

Given the specificity of the training activity, both teachers showed that, to some extent, the course contributed to their training, and although one of them stated that the course was theoretical, it related to practical situations they had previously experienced and to the intention of socializing such practices. However, it is not possible to understand the reasoning process that led to professional development.

The second initiative reported was on-site and addressed the use of technology, according to the participant:

Training in action:

Training courses, specific for special education. So much so that we had one on technology, which is one of the areas I struggled with (I2).

Training in Action is related to a continuing education proposal of the State Department of Education, with themes either previously determined or chosen by the schools from a predefined list. It is held in both half-year periods and each theme has specific materials<sup>8</sup>. Interestingly enough, only one teacher mentioned it, which raises questions about its effective contribution to novices.

According to this study, there are major difficulties in the initial and continuing training of novice teachers in SRM. This contributes to a limited expectation of the professional development of those teachers, inasmuch as there is no evidence of systematic learning processes that favor such development, which may additionally restrict the contribution of novices to school inclusion.

## Alternatives Actions by Novices

To meet the demands of professional practice in SEA, the novice teachers undertook various actions, highlighting their needs. All of them sought to discuss relevant issues with more experienced SRM or special education teachers, to support their decisions. One said: “[...] I always go and observe, talk to the teachers to see how they work, to see if what I’m doing is [...]” (I1).

The importance of experienced teachers for novices has been reported by authors who analyze this professional stage (Marcelo, 1999; André, 2012). Consequently, the role of such teachers as counselors has been highlighted, since it allows more structured interaction with a view to advance the learning of novices. This is therefore a possibility to be considered in the context of special education in inclusive schools, albeit demanding a structure to be implemented.



Another action undertaken by all teachers was using the internet to search for solutions to different situations. They stated, for example:

I write 'special education' and then insert in brackets – in Google – the problem the student has [...], whatever is helpful you use, what isn't you discard (I2).

I [...] search the internet, I see an activity, 'Ah, why the confusion happens.' Like this student of mine, who confuses b and d. Sometimes it's a very traditional activity, [...] filling in gaps [...]. It's quite interesting, there's a blog ... (I4).

The novices used the internet in different ways, ranging from blogs<sup>9</sup> and sites with activity banks to videos and games for students. The internet is an interesting resource nowadays and the teachers considered it a feasible tool. However, it must be used with caution. Considering the doubts mentioned above and the way they were solved with this resource, teachers run the risk of using it pragmatically. That will happen if they fail to understand teaching from the perspective of theory, problematization and exchange with other teachers in the area, not perceiving it as a social practice in which teachers, students and knowledge are involved in a complex process.

Underscoring the need for such care is the fact that only two of the five teachers mentioned resorting to academic bibliography, in search results, for example, expressing concern with the origin and content of the materials. One of them said: "I search in Google for past papers or articles. [...]. Because there are some things [...] that are simply thrown online and have no basis at all [...]" (I1).

Besides the internet, teachers also mentioned researching in books. But that also requires caution when considering the professional development of teachers, as four participants reduced their search to textbooks with activity models, as seen in these two examples:

I also consult textbooks, [...] from first to fifth grade, [...], looking for writing prompts, math activities, contextualized problems (I1).

It's a [...] small collection, of that teacher's, by the way. So, when I went there, I looked over that material, [...] made various photocopies, for the whole year, almost [...] (I5).

The alternatives used by the novices evidence their needs concerning teaching in SEA and the fragility of the support offered by the school administration team and the NRE to which they are linked. The teachers met the demands of professional practice, although not always in ways that were most suitable for their professional development, since, in the case of this study, most novices based their teaching on improvisation and actions with poor theoretical grounding.

## Professional Relations within the School

As previously stated, for Jordell (1987), personal relationships within the school are more important for the professional development of novice teachers than those outside it.



The results show that the teachers established interactions with colleagues and with students and their families, and that those with colleagues and students had the greatest impact on their professional learning. It should be noted, however, that in the case of the five participants, the relationship with students is based on a concept of help and protection, despite the concern with their learning, as shown in the following statements:

So I think it's a little like wanting to be a mother, and there is so much affection, [...] they have so much love to give, it seems I've known them for years, [...] (I2).

Since always, for that reason, for having this ability [...] to help others [...] (I3).

This evidences the persisting need to overcome educational models based on "care and charity" (Ferreira; Guimarães, 2003, p. 93) that have long been present in special education and which, in this case, limit the professional development of novices by inhibiting the construction of professional action based on pedagogical knowledge.

Another finding of this study shows a good initial reception of the five teachers by the school administration team when taking over as SRM teachers. However, it was observed that for four of these teachers, the positive welcome was related to their previous work in schools as teachers in other areas (physical education, adult education and Spanish), and therefore was not exclusively linked to their arrival as special education teachers.

It is also worth noting that although this initial reception was viewed as positive, once work got underway in SRM, the relationship with the administration team and teaching staff was not always favorable, as all five novices perceived unfriendliness in the behavior of other teachers. One of the participants sensed prying glances and concern that SRM had few students (I4). Another pointed out that the teachers teased them as with physical education teachers, saying: "They just let students play" (I1). That might be why one of the participants feels isolated and states: "[...] It seems like I'm not in tune with the school" (I5).

The data reveal the teachers' resentment, possibly caused by the sense of isolation (I5) and the feeling of distrust in their work (I1, I4) as SRM teachers. That compromises their professional development insofar as it interferes with the building of their identity as teachers, due to a negative perception of how their peers view them (Moita, 1995).

One of the teachers further stated:

It's different, because you get there and the teaching staff is already formed, there are teachers that she [the educator] already knows, and I'm not much of a talker, I talk, [...] but mostly I keep to myself (I2).

This confirms Basurto López's conclusion (2012) that special education novices arriving in a mainstream school have to find their own space. What makes it harder is that they do not feel part of the school, possibly because of their link with special education, which has histori-

cally been kept apart from mainstream education (Ferreira, Guimarães, 2003).

Another finding that stands out regarding the curiosity of school teachers towards SEA is the conclusion of four participants that the school knows little about the work done in SRM, especially the teaching staff and the administration team. As a result, the novices consider cooperative action or support by the school unfeasible, as seen in the following examples:

Because the school didn't give me any structure, they don't know. For them it's new (I2).

They always say, 'Ah, it's a new thing, I'm also getting to know it, trying to understand' (I4).

The perception of the school's lack of knowledge about SEA is confirmed also by the fact that the novices turned to the schools' educators and principals mainly to solve bureaucratic issues or incidents involving students and parents. All of them reported doing so, illustrated in the following statement:

She helped me a lot at first, [...], more to show me where to find this, find that [...]. If by any chance they are missing classes, she helps [...], sends a note, calls the parents, summons the parents to the school [...] (I1).

The reported activity of educators and principals regarding these teachers is limited to addressing incidences. There is no mention of their participation in in-service teacher training or in the development of collective work to reflect on teaching and learning issues, which, as is known, despite the difficulties, is the responsibility of the administration team (Franco, 2008).

The limited knowledge of schools about SEA demands the attention of higher levels of educational management, since, as already mentioned, novices need support for their professional development and schools need to have greater interaction with special education.

This highlights the importance of the NRE in providing continuing education, whether for the school as a whole or, especially, for novice special education teachers, through moments of reflection and study. This situation evidences the urgent need of public policies for teachers at the beginning of their professional career, as indicated by André (2012), in this case to meet the specific needs of novices in SEA.

Another aspect that affects the professional development of novices was mentioned by four participants and concerns setting up initiatives of collective work with the other school teachers. They reported difficulties to schedule meetings with most of the teachers of subjects taken by SEA students, and, in some cases, with the educator of the period in which those students attend mainstream education, since SEA happens in the opposite period. In one of the statements it was reported:

[...] the resources classroom teacher should work 40 hours a week, [...] because then [...] I could do the mediation, I could talk to the morning

period teachers, because if you only come in the afternoon, in the opposite period, you have no contact with the morning period teachers... (I5)

Still concerning this aspect, two teachers mentioned meeting with mainstream education teachers during their working hours as teachers of other areas (I1, I4), in an improvised fashion. Moreover, two teachers said they come to school at a different time on their own accord, even if they have no other work to do (I2, I3), as exemplified by the following statement:

Yes, but sometimes I go there in the morning. [...]. I try to go in the morning at least once every 20 days to check how they are doing (I3).

Therefore, it was noted that the novices were worried about the development of work in SRM due to the difficulty of meeting with the mainstream classroom teachers, since this is an essential aspect of the work. This kind of difficulty generates improvisation and limits better structured processes of exchange and study among teachers, affecting also joint planning for the professional growth of teachers and the comprehensive development of students in special education.

## Final Remarks

This study proposed to show the challenges experienced by novice teachers in the profession and in specialized educational assistance, considering their professional development.

The data indicated that novices have major difficulties related to their practice. These difficulties concern limited knowledge about the work to be done in SRM and also its practical application. They also relate to the bureaucratic aspects involved in its operation.

These elements triggered doubts and fear of making mistakes in novice teachers, besides feelings of despair. This relates to the lack of support to these teachers by both the school and the NRE, and also poor specialized training. The initiatives taken by the NRE and the school are deficient and did not favor the professional development of novices due to lack of training and advisory activities, which led to restricted professional learning, linked to the pragmatic search of options to overcome the challenges.

Important barriers were mentioned by the novices, such as incompatible schedules for interaction with mainstream education teachers, little involvement of the administration team with their work, lack of assistance, the school's poor knowledge about SRM and their scant understanding of the existing bureaucracy.

Based on these results, it is concluded that the multiple challenges experienced by novices led to short-sighted and improvised processes to solve existing demands. Survival and copying strategies were the most prevalent for solving situations of professional practice. The results indicated that despite having specialization degrees, they still need assistance from the school and higher management levels.

Moreover, there is the possibility of providing distance assistance (non-exclusive) in a structured, well-grounded and interactive way, as a collaboration network (Vaillant; Marcelo, 2012). This may be one of the possible alternatives at the education system level, since novices seek to minimize their doubts using the internet indiscriminately.

As the expression of practice, the professional development of the novice teachers who part in the study seems to be limited, requiring the review of the existing demands in SRM, which, in the current format, pose a paradox to the novices who ultimately do not favor school inclusion.

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## Notes

1 Educandos com deficiência, transtornos globais do desenvolvimento e altas habilidades/superdotação (Brasil, 2008). According to Araújo and Neto (2014, p. 14), in the DSM-5, global development disorders “[...] have been absorbed into a single diagnosis, Autism Spectrum Disorder.” Alongside intellectual disability, they are part of Neurodevelopmental Disorders (Araújo; Neto, 2014).

In Paraná, according to CEE/CP Resolution no. 2/2016, specialized educational assistance is also guaranteed to students with specific functional disorders, considered in the document as “[...] those presenting learning disorders such as dysgraphia, dysorthographia, dyslexia, dyscalculia or attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, among others” (Paraná, 2016, p. 8).

2 SRMs provide SAE and have specific equipment, teaching material and furniture to cater for the needs of special students (Brazil, 2011).

3 CAAE: 01693612.6.0000.0105.

4 CNE Res. 1/2002 generally stated that teacher training for basic education should provide “[...] knowledge about the specifics of students with special educational needs [...]” (Brasil, 2002, p. 3). Currently, CNE Res. 2/2015 briefly states that initial teacher training at university level should provide content related to “[...] special education [...]” (Brasil, 2015, p. 12) that fosters awareness of diversity and respect for differences related to “[...] special needs [...]” (Brasil, 2015, p. 8).

5 Entry in the state education system has demanded specific training through different possibilities: degree in additional studies, mid-level specialization, specialization in special education, graduate degree in special education, adapted physical education.

6 Garcia (2010) recorded two undergraduate special education courses in the country, an older one, at the Federal University of Santa Maria, and a more recent one, at the Federal University of São Carlos (UFSCar). Currently these courses are also offered in other higher education institutions.

7 Type II resources classrooms are destined for students with visual impairment and Type I for students with other disabilities. CEE/CP Resolution no. 2/2016 (Paraná, 2016) provides for multifunctional resources classrooms for intellec-

tual disabilities, global development disorders, specific functional disorders; hearing impairment; visual impairment; and high abilities or giftedness.

8 More details at: <<http://www.educadores.diaadia.pr.gov.br/modules/conteudo/conteudo.php?conteudo=1341>>. Access: 16 October 2015.

9 On the use of blogs by special education teachers see the work by Rios (2014) available online from the Brazilian National Observatory for Special Education (ONEESP).

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