

35 - BEING A TEACHER IN OUR CURRENT SOCIETY: SOME REFLECTIONSJUREMA ROSA LOPES¹ELINE DAS FLORES VICTER¹GISELLE FAUR DE CASTRO CATARINO²DILERMANDO MORAES COSTA¹

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INTRODUCTION

The title of this paper "Being a teacher in our current society" leads us to some reflections on teacher education, based on the understanding that it is not disconnected from the historical, social, political and economic contexts of our society. As Freitas (2011) emphasizes, currently, there is a tendency to promote short hands-on courses, which results in an uncritical teachers' formation to face the reality of the schools. Hands-on courses refer to something "practical" and, according to the aforementioned author, "the concept of social practice tends to be reduced to the concept of practical problems that guide the formation of the teacher" (FREITAS, 2011, p. 102).

The aim of this study is to reflect upon what it means to be a teacher in our current society, considering as our empirical research field the Lions Club public school, located in the city of Teresopolis, in Rio de Janeiro State. The universe of the participants is formed by twelve teachers, and in this paper we have considered the speech extracts of three school teachers - two of them are gym teachers and one is a Portuguese/writing teacher. Data were collected from the production of a written text based on the following question: what does it mean to be a teacher in our current society?

We understand teaching as an action which takes place in a process that requires constant decision making from the teacher, who has the role of mediating and articulating multiple elements in order to achieve the goals outlined (THERRIEN, 2002). Therefore, the conditions – aspects that influence the teaching activity, such as the resources, the students, the school infrastructure, the school board, among others – and the broader context, which the teacher is part of, play a major role in their professional development.

The goals outlined by the teacher are adjusted and readjusted throughout their professional life from the choices that are made and are reconsidered. Obviously, the teacher's experience, knowledge and beliefs, the commitment to the job, the representations about the students change over time, resulting in new conditions for professional development.

Thus, in the first part of this reflection, we make brief considerations about the new job configuration. Then, from the teachers' narratives, we discuss the results and the analysis on what it means to be a teacher in our current society.

We conclude that the current context of our society is directly anchored in the principles of flexibility and of precariousness and that the obstacles arising out of these principles can be dealt with and can be understood as starting points for new pathways to teaching, although the changes result in implications for teacher education.

CONSIDERATIONS ON NEW WORK CONFIGURATIONS

Discussing new work configurations firstly requires comprehending what configurations mean. Based on Elias (1994), configuration can be understood through a moving image of interdependent subjects on a dance floor, or in a school, or in a classroom, and we can also imagine states, cities, families and capitalist systems; anyway, configuration refers to people's protrait in a given space and time.

Interdependent relations form a network that is in constant change, where the subjects change themselves and change others, creating a dynamic of influences and adjustments. They are connections supported by many subjects and reformulated all the time, independently of their extension and number of those involved.

In the new configuration of the capital, the principle of "flexibility" requires an agile worker who is also open to change (SENNETT, 2014); in this sense, teacher education relates to a far greater direction of awareness than the obvious, affecting the whole route of the subject in formation, which is part of a larger network, for instance, the society itself. Since small configurations change, like in dance, sometimes slower, sometimes faster, gradually, it also happens to the larger configurations which we call society.

Such society can no longer be seen as a space with specific cultures, in isolation, but as a world made up of complex cultures that hybridize from interactions:

These global cultural changes are creating a rapid social change – but also, almost to the same extent, serious cultural shifts. [...] The result of the cultural mix, or syncretism, crossing old borders, may not be the obliteration of the old by the new, but the creation of some hybrid alternatives, synthesizing elements of both, but not reducible to any of them (HALL, 1997, p.4-5).

Thus, currently, as the consequences of the cultural and also the scientific revolutions, the theoretical advancements and the acknowledged technological progress, it is possible to see another world: that of complex systems, governed by its own rules. The complexity of this world generates new ways of thinking about the relationship between simple and complex and about the development of knowledge. As Casanova (2006) asserts, the impact of the "new scientific revolution" changes profoundly intellectual work of the humanities, the sciences, and the arts, forcing to redetermine

[...] a new general knowledge and new forms of specialized culture with intersections and limited fields, which break up with the traditional borders of the educational system and the scientific and humanistic research, as well as that of thinking and doing in arts and in politics (CASANOVA, 2006, p. 9).

In the context of this new world, teacher education and, consequently, teaching itself is also permeated by the process of globalization:

[...] on contemporary school education the importance of teaching knowledge in perspective of social transformation is reduced, teacher education becomes a mechanism of precariousness of school education and educational work (ALMEIDA et

al., 2013, p. 6973).

The precariousness of school education nowadays can be understood, according to Sennett (2014), as one of the consequences of the principle of flexibility of the work that, with the introduction of new technologies, has made the job easy, superficial and illegible. Not disconsidering the different ways in which teacher education takes place, we can state, similarly, that many licentiate degree students carry out their research through technology, usually searching for abstracts, papers of easy comprehension, with inaccurate theoretical underpinning. We understand that immediacy is valued and what gives meaning and right to people is neglected, as Sennett (2014) argues.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A TEACHER?

We believe that being a teacher is not something anyone can do anywhere. Being a teacher entails knowing how to relate content and didactics, how to work collaboratively together with other professionals and students, aiming at their learning and critical formation in order to live and to be in the world. Being a teacher today also implies to acknowledge the continuous processes of change and innovation associated with the political and economic contexts in which the school is seen, usually as a company and the students being treated as customers.

From Mészáros' perspective (2005), education has become an instrument that provides knowledge and the necessary workforce for the productive machinery of the capitalist system, besides conveying "a framework of values that legitimizes the dominant interests" (MÉSZÁROS, 2005, p. 15). Hence, rather than an instrument for emancipation, education is a mechanism that contributes to the reproduction of the current system.

Flexibility, a principle of new work arrangement, has required more and more professional qualifications for future teachers to enter the job market. As Marinho Junior et al. (2013, p. 8) suggest, the idea of a "super teacher", in which this professional must master all contents and at the same time not absorb any of them", resulting in an emptiness of knowledge.

This reflection brings up the methods and the techniques of teaching, underlying the practical matter, based on a technical perspective, and oriented to the course. In this sense, the teacher must know everything and, at the same time, must know nothing, valuing practice over theory, based on technical competence, an apolitical one, able to co-opt more and more teachers onto this great gear called capital. In the process, critical reflection and critical action are not at stake, but the need of a system that values the individuality of those who show a better performance to do a job and "to get ahead with it" (COAN et al., 2013).

Konder (2006), while considering school as a battlefield, explains that, in the same way, it can reveal conservative habits, leading its subjects to strengthen critical perspectives, stimulating dissatisfaction, concerns and encouraging the development of the ability to question. That is to say, we can either form servants or citizens.

Freire (1996) points out that education is a form of intervention in the world, which implies the reproduction of the dominant ideology, but if it is imbued with a critical view, it also contributes to unmasking this ideology. According to this author: "neither reproducing nor just unmasking the dominant ideology" (emphasis added by the author, p. 98). Such contradiction is inherent to the dialectic of the educational process.

RESULTS: LISTENING TO WHAT THE TEACHERS SAY

We bring to our reflection the narratives of high school teachers from a public school, on what it means to be a teacher today:

It has been really difficult to be a teacher nowadays! We do not have decent wages, there is little respect from the students, it often lacks resources and materials to teach. Teaching is very rewarding, despite difficult, but the fight goes on! The conclusion is that, no matter what, I am proud of being a teacher (teacher 1- gym teacher).

The statement "it has been really difficult to be a teacher nowadays! [...] it often lacks resources and materials to teach" leads us to consider the precariousness such as Bauman (2008) points out. Precariousness, according to the cited author, is one of the techniques of social control. Sennett (2014) adds that precariousness is one of the consequences of the principle of work flexibility. Upon highlighting and acknowledging that "we do not have decent wages, there is little respect from the students, the teacher refers to a situation they have no control over. We understand that their livelihood and their social position are not in their hands (BAUMAN, 2008). Still, upon stating that "teaching is very rewarding, despite difficult", in contrast to the uncertain future as they had mentioned before, teaching as a source of pleasure leads us to reflect upon the many possibilities of human formation; in that, considering the micro space, "teaching" may increase the possibility to reduce or to eliminate some sorts of behaviors. It may well be the reason why the teacher says: "I am proud of being a teacher"; since this feeling opposed to failure may avoid and, at the same time, accept that reality. Making our future consistent and working on valuable things in ourselves is a possibility to transform "failures" in success (SENNETT, 2014).

According to another participant, being a teacher:

[...] feels like walking a tightrope (the participant laughs) trying to pursue a vocation I discovered with other teachers I have had in my life. It does not matter to whom, but the reason why you have decided to teach. You learn a lot more than the students. That true democracy is being modest to listen to all sides. It means to stick to one's beliefs. (Teacher 2 - gym teacher).

"Walking a tightrope" refers to the issue of balance/imbalance, security/insecurity, flexibility/stiffness, certainty/uncertainty present on a daily basis, to the extent that they try to "pursue a vocation I discovered with other teachers I have had in my life". As Sennett (2014, p. 144) highlights, "professional life history narrative is about an inner development, which is set by both skill and struggle". This brings us to the idea that the person who pursues a career defines behavior standards and develops a sense of responsibility based on their attitude. It is worth mentioning we understand that it cannot be reduced to teaching itself, since teaching is based on several knowledge built over teacher's lifetime (TARDIF, 2002). According to this author, the notion of knowing has a "broad sense, encompassing knowledge, competencies, abilities (skills) and attitudes, that is to say, what has often been called knowing, knowing how to do and knowing how to be" (p. 255).

The same participant states that "you learn a lot more than the students", which endorses the words by Freire (1996) that there is no teaching without learners, since we learn at the same time we teach and sometimes even more. In the process of teaching and learning, teachers are qualified, requalified and may even transform their practice. We understand that teacher education is neither limited to a given college degree nor to the four walls of a classroom. In this sense, short hands-on courses can be questioned since social practices have been reduced to concrete issues that guide the education of the teacher.

"Listening to both sides", referring to democracy, can be interpreted as a force of disagreement and change, and, in this process, the dialogue is required. As Bauman (2008) points out, a democratic society is generally recognized in their constant complaints on being not democratic enough, maybe that is why the teacher says it is necessary to "stick to one's beliefs".

Being a teacher implies reviewing the strategies together with the students; similarly, another teacher stated that teaching is:

One of the most subversive acts possible. Teaching is about proposing changes, it means to expose the rest of the world and to invite students to want more than what they already have. Teaching kids and teenagers often means racing against time to persuade the students to choose to study harder instead of being seduced by the temptations of underemployment or of drug dealing. (Teacher 3- Portuguese/ writing teacher).

"Teaching is about proposing changes, it means to expose the rest of the world and to invite students to want more than what they already have", that is to say, this teacher believes that, through the school education, the student can change their perspective regarding the future. It seems that the teacher, in their narrative, mentions the need to put together intellectual knowledge and social reality as a strategy to subvert the conditions imposed to students from public schools nowadays.

"[...] persuade the students to choose to study harder instead of being seduced by the temptations". As Rezende et al. (2011) emphasize, we can note in the teacher's narrative some tension between a practice "that endorses the absence of quality, characterized by the lack of mobilization and commitment, and another one which arises as a militant for the quality, despite the school, the salary, the working conditions" (REZENDE et al., 2011, p. 284). This leads us to believe and to analyze teacher education as a stimulus to fight so as to establish new relational patterns into the practice and in working relations (IMBERNÓN, 2011).

CONCLUSIONS

Considering the current context of our society, being a teacher nowadays is directly anchored in the principles of flexibility and of precariousness, which internally bring up the imbalance, the insecurity, the ambivalence, that is to say, the elements that often promote instability and failure, demanding constant reinvention from the teacher. Such understanding reflects and refracts new organisation of work configurations that require an increasingly flexible and creative educator, capable of coping with rapid changes in their work environment.

We cannot fail to mention the criticisms and obstacles faced by teachers, such as low wages, lack of respect from the students, lack of structure and resources. These aspects, inside the school, are often turned into motivation with possibilities to change such obstacles in sources of success.

The perspective towards constant changes results in profound implications regarding teacher education. It is not enough to master the contents and didactics; it is fundamental to go beyond pedagogical content knowledge, creating new possibilities to give meaning and significance to the content taught and to engage students in this education perspective.

Finally, teaching is highlighted insofar as this practice is included in the act of learning, and directly related to structuring knowledge in teacher education.

KEYWORDS: Teacher education. Being a teacher. Current society.

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BEING A TEACHER IN OUR CURRENT SOCIETY: SOME REFLECTIONS

The aim of this study is to reflect on what it means to be a teacher in our current society. We discuss, as our theoretical framework, Sennett's and Bauman's ideas regarding the principles of flexibility and of precariousness. The empirical research field for this study is the Lions Club public school, located in the city of Teresopolis, in Rio de Janeiro State. We have considered the speech extracts of three school teachers. Data were collected from the production of a written text based on the following question: what does it mean to be a teacher in our current society? The results show the need of teachers to constantly reinvent themselves, to be creative and to be capable of coping with the rapid changes in their work environment. We conclude that teaching is highlighted insofar as this act is included in the act of learning, and directly related to structuring knowledge in teacher education.

KEYWORDS: Teacher education. Being a teacher. Current society.

ÊTRE PROFESSEUR AUJOURD'HUI DANS NOTRE SOCIÉTÉ: UN RÉFLEXION

Le but de cette étude est de réfléchir à ce qu'est un enseignant dans la société d'aujourd'hui. Nous présentons dans notre cadre théorique les idées de Sennett et Bauman qui font référence aux principes de flexibilité et de précarité du travail. Le domaine d'étude empirique est l'École d'État des Lions clubs, située dans la ville de Teresópolis, à Rio de Janeiro / au Brésil. Nous apportons à la réflexion des extraits des déclarations de trois professeurs de lycée. Les données, recueillies à partir de la production textuelle, étaient basées sur la question suivante: Qu'est-ce que c'est qu'être un enseignant dans notre société aujourd'hui? Les résultats montrent la nécessité pour les enseignants de se réinventer en permanence, d'être créatifs et capables de faire face aux changements rapides de leur environnement de travail. Nous concluons que l'action d'enseignement prend de l'importance dans la mesure où l'acte d'enseignement est inséré dans l'acte d'apprentissage et directement lié à la structuration des connaissances dans la formation des enseignants.

MOTS-CLÉS: Formation des enseignants. Être un enseignant. Société actuelle.

SER PROFESOR HOY EN NUESTRA SOCIEDAD: UNA REFLEXIÓN

El objetivo del presente estudio es reflexionar sobre lo que es ser profesor en la sociedad actual. Traemos, em nuestro referencial teórico, las ideas de Sennett y Bauman que apuntan los principios de flexibilidad y de la precariedad del trabajo. El campo empírico del estudio es el Colegio Estadual Lions Club, ubicado en la ciudad de Teresópolis en Río de Janeiro. Traemos para la reflexión fragmentos de las palabras de três profesores de la Enseñanza Media. Los datos, recogidos a partir de producción textual, tuvieron como base la siguiente pregunta: ¿Qué es ser profesor hoy en nuestra sociedad? Los resultados muestran la necesidad de que los profesores se reinventar constantemente, de ser creativos y capaces de manejar los rápidos cambios en su ambiente de trabajo. Concluimos que la acción de enseñar gana realce el la medida en que el de acto enseñar está inserto en el acto de aprender y directamente relacionados a los saberes estructurantes en la formación de profesores.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Formación del Profesor. Ser profesor. Sociedad Actual.

SER PROFESSOR HOJE EM NOSSA SOCIEDADE: UMA REFLEXÃO

O objetivo do presente estudo é refletir sobre o que é ser professor na sociedade atual. Trazemos, em nosso referencial teórico, as ideias de Sennett e Bauman que apontam os princípios de flexibilidade e da precariedade do trabalho. O campo empírico do estudo é o Colégio Estadual Lions Club, localizado na cidade de Teresópolis no Rio de Janeiro. Trazemos para a reflexão fragmentos das falas de três professores do Ensino Médio. Os dados, coletados a partir de produção textual, tiveram como base a seguinte pergunta: O que é ser professor hoje em nossa sociedade? Os resultados mostram a necessidade dos professores se reinventarem constantemente, de serem criativos e capazes de lidarem com as rápidas mudanças em seu ambiente de trabalho. Concluimos que a ação de ensinar ganha realce na medida em que o de ato ensinar está inserido no ato de aprender e diretamente relacionados aos saberes estruturantes na formação de professores.

PALAVRAS CHAVE: Formação do Professor. Ser Professor. Sociedade Atual.