

Other articles

Knowledge and practice: an experience analysing the cultural dimensions of the teaching activity

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ABSTRACT:

Through the application of a method of analysing oral sources in education research, specifically in the field of teacher education, this study¹ follows on from a path that has been paved by authors in the attempt to construct alternatives to understand the teaching activity, placing the educators themselves at the centre of the stage in the act of narrating the experiences. In this text we focus on the following question: in narrating their professional activity, how does the teacher rank the different areas of knowledge acquired in their teaching practice? What do they believe provides them with better tools: their family, university, ongoing academic training or the actual practical experience of the day-to-day running of the school? The text is split into four sections. Section one describes the origin of the problem, section two outlines the theoretical-methodological backup, the third section describes the structure of the narratives, and in the last section the conclusions are presented.

KEYWORDS:

Teacher Education, Teaching experience, Cultural aspects, Oral sources.

CULTURAL TRAINING AND THE TEACHING PROFESSION: THE CONSTRUCTION OF OUR PROBLEM

The approach of this text is based on the work proposal presented at an event in the education field (Silva & Penna, 2007), where we investigated how teachers translated their life experiences in their teaching practice.

The methodology included semi-structured interviews, using hermeneutic resources and discourse analysis, enabling clarifications about the connections between private and professional life, the ties between everyday culture and school culture, as well as the relations established by the social actors between their experience of the past and the present.

In truth, our study, which goes far beyond criticising or trying to establish new enlightenment about questions of methodology with oral sources and teacher education, showed the need for a new reflection, in order to focus on the knowledge borne out of experience that is implemented, giving special emphasis to the cultural aspects and practices in the teaching act.

In relation to our option to use interviews, the proliferation of research which includes them as a methodology in the Education area can be proven by the bibliographical review carried out by a group of researchers of the Faculty of Education of São Paulo University, looking at the period from 1985 to 2003 (Bueno *et al.*, 2006, p. 387). The review was based essentially on information contained in the Capes bank of theses, which shows the polysemy of terms, focuses and theoretical approaches.

Knowledge of the criticism, ambiguities and weaknesses that constitute studies underpinned by oral sources methodology (life stories, structured or semi-structured interviews, topics, etc.) does not discourage their use. Quite the contrary, we share the opinion of Nóvoa (2000, p. 25), who registers the *belief* in their

innovative potential, given that “through life stories one can go on to draw up *new* proposals with regard to teacher education and the teaching profession”.

Hence, in our approach to the problem we bring together the activities necessary to attain an Accord of Technical Cooperation signed between the La Salle University Centre and the Municipal Council of the city of Canoas. The aim of the Accord is to carry out research in the neighbourhoods of the city and the Master’s lessons in Education in the teaching institution where we work, integrating into the research the pupils of the module called “Languages of Memory”. This module involves shared teaching, discussion of reading methods and understanding the different forms of triggering memory, with the emphasis on oral sources and photography.

As such, facing up to the challenge of, once again, testing the possibilities of the qualitative methodology that we have developed (Silva & Penna, 2006, 2007), we focused on the following question: in narrating their professional activity, how does the teacher rank the different areas of knowledge acquired in their life in the teaching practice? What do they think provides them with the better tools: the family, university, ongoing academic training or the actual practical experience of the daily school life? Therefore, at the same time as exploring the practical exercising of the methodological proposal of analysis of oral sources we use the specific problem presented as a strategy for constructing reflection in the field of teacher education.

FACING UP TO THE CHALLENGE: CONSTRUCTING THE METHOD

To lend meaning to our enquiries and in order to contribute to the discussion of the problem, we carried out two semi-structured interviews with teachers from a

public school located in the neighbourhood of Fátima, in the municipality of Canoas, chosen by the signatories of the Accord who would be researched, selecting two interviews with teachers who have teaching, management and school supervision experience².

In the classroom, together with the students of the master's degree module, we drew up the guiding questions for the interview, as well as preparing ourselves for the intersubjectivity inherent in the whole interview, studying and discussing the most pressing issues with regard to the mechanisms that govern the representations and memory, as well as the analysis method of the narratives.

We based our analysis on the assumption that in the social construction of memory a group works intensely in conjunction. There is a tendency to create coherent models of narration and interpretation of the facts, authentic "discourse universes" and "meaning universes", which lend the base material its own historical form, a consecrated version of the events. In other words, the point of view of the group constructs and seeks to establish its image for History.

This memory, at the same time unites and multiplies, and is the basic element to enable the individual to situate himself in the world and tell himself and others who he is. In other words, memory provides the building blocks of a self-image.

Given that we interviewed teachers who work in schools, we detected this reality as an active part of the narrative. While the statements are, at the same time, individual and collective experiences, they involve aspects not only of living in a certain time and society, but also of being part of an institution, with all the complexity this variable involves.

We consider, within the confines of this text, the concept of institution in its broadest sense, taking into account its essential characteristics, which are, structured somewhat historically, those that exist in society to satisfy the needs, presenting longevity in time and with variable functions (Araújo, 2003).

We also believe that the idea of institution only makes sense and its role is only properly fulfilled owing to the effort made by the group that runs it and gives it life, perpetuating some meanings and renewing others with the arrival of new members. This dynamic can be learned, in part, through the narratives of the actors themselves by organising their memories of differentiated, contradictory or complementary trajectories (Penna & Graebin, 2004).

To understand a given dynamic in the narratives of people who at the moment of the interview still work in the institution, relating in one way or another the issues tackled, we use the concept of *face*³, created by Goffman in the 1970s, and complemented by Brown and Levinson (cited in Galembeck, 1997). The concept establishes a distinction between the *positive face* (what the listener displays to obtain approval or recognition) and *negative*

face ("territory" that the listener wants to preserve or see preserved).

Likewise, the notion of culture in our method acquired a central and strategic role, given that we view culture(s) as symbolic systems that operate based on experienced human existentialism, endowing life with meaning and significances, i.e. symbolic systems that enable the construction of dynamic realities in which man is humanised and becomes singular. Or as Denys Cuche says (2002, p. 143) culture "is a historical production, i.e. it is a construction that writes itself in history and more precisely in the history of the relations of the social groups among one another".

We base the research on the assumption that the social space is populated by individuals who understand it and represent in it, as, according to Stuart Hall (2003), the subject always talks from a specific historical and cultural position. Therefore, the whole system of representations, regardless of their focus, can be associated to a cultural framework, through which we adopt certain positions and we narrate something.

These assumptions suggest that words and expressions change meaning according to the positions adopted by those who utter them, acquiring their meaning in reference to the cultural framework in which these positions are embedded, decentralising the notion of subject and centralising the problem in the systems of representation.

Working the interpretation of the narratives in this perspective assumes that the discourses do not reveal themselves immediately. They require a method of analysis that unveils the connections and relations established between experience, memory and narrative, seeking out resources to understand the interview beyond the simple intuitions, surpassing the illusion of transparency (Bardin, 1995, p. 9).

We recognise and value, through a hermeneutic-based reading, that our analysis always involved our subjectivity, albeit controlled by the explanation of the method. The starting point adopted was the methodology described and applied by researchers in the area of Education — in this case the work undertaken by Szymanski, Almeida and Prandini (2002), adapting it and articulating it to the aforementioned cultural frameworks.

Applying the methodology, in Description I the choice was made for an interview that incorporated the cultural framework of the speaker, from which she would construct her way of seeing reality in a broad sense. Afterwards, in Description II, extracts from the report are related to the professional trajectory, in order to highlight the vision of the practising teacher in its multiple aspects, as well as the teaching tools used in this practice, with an initial description. This led to the start of a reflection, carrying out the intra-descriptive work, based on readings and re-readings of the reference text (narrative). Description II was re-written, in the interpretative

sense, based on the selection of the items that came to the fore, referred to as units of meaning, relating them to the cultural framework, calling them Description III, which comprises the summary.

1ST INTERVIEW — INTERVIEW DATA

INTERVIEWEE 1: C.E.M.

Personal and professional data: Female, married, one daughter, age around 40 years. Primary school teacher, Kindergarten course from the Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC). Taught how to read and write. Afterwards did a Pedagogy course in a private university, on Fridays and Saturdays, graduating in 2003. Currently a State teacher, a vice-director of one class and educational supervisor of another.

INTERVIEWEE 2: N.J.C.R.

Personal and professional data: Female, married, two daughters, age around 40 years. Graduate in literature and post-graduate in Clinical and Institutional Psychopedagogy. Currently a State teacher, and a headmistress for the third time in school.

DESCRIPTION I

CULTURAL FRAMEWORK

C.E.M.

Vision of the family and youth today: “When I was eleven years old I already did the cooking, my brothers worked outside the house and my mother was a member of staff here. I always say, my father’s a soldier, with a set time for everything. [...] I think that there is a lack of time for the children. [...] My father was a soldier, he had a set time for lunch and for dinner. Today children eat with the plate in their hands, watching TV. Mothers don’t have the time to warm up the food, so they don’t eat hot food. I’ve got some girls in the 7th grade who get to playtime with a biscuit, milk with *Nescau*, or with juice. I’ve got some who eat like that, and the staff say: C. look at that one there, thin, thin, thin! She eats nothing but biscuits. Ah no! (imitating the voice of the girl), my mum left a bit of food, my brother ate it all and there was nothing left for me. Or: Ah! I was lazy, I woke up and was going to make a *Miojo* (pasta dish) but I didn’t. So I came without having lunch. (ending her girl’s voice) But it’s not because she doesn’t have food, you see, I think that the family is not taking care of this aspect, a lack of commitment, don’t you think? Teach your daughter to cook. My mother was a school dinner lady and my father was a soldier at the time. [...] It was in this school, my sister was a secretary here, my other sister gave lessons at nursery school, that’s why I say I have a lot going for me, you know, when I started to do supervision at ULBRA I said to my sister: “I’m not going to spend my whole life giving lessons, I want more, because I was brought up in this school, I studied here up to the 8th grade, so I have lots and lots of love.”

STUDYING THE NARRATIVES: THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE INTERPRETATION

Giving an example, citing a conversation with a mother: “You say — your son was tired, he fell asleep in the lesson — Ah, but I don’t know what time he went to sleep. [...] he’s got a television in his bedroom. He watches films until late. She comments: He’s got no limits, you know! It’s because they work hard, they end up giving everything to their son.”

N.J.C.R.

Vision of the family and youth today: “Society is very cruel. Today violence is very prevalent, and it’s very difficult to work with the breakdown of the family, which is what worries us most and what causes problems in the school. [...] We show a lot of love to the pupils, we speak a lot to them and that’s when we find out that they lack a foundation. The lack of a structure in the family damages ninety percent of our work in the school.”

Example: “When we call the pupil in to talk to him or call in the mother or father, the mother and the father usually don’t have time; they find it difficult to come to school. When you get to talk to them they say: Ah, I don’t know what more I can do, I have no more authority, I leave it up to you, you can try. They pass on the family responsibilities to us.”

DESCRIPTION II

CULTURAL ASPECTS AND PRACTICES IN THE TEACHING ACT

How the teacher describes the school she works at:

“It’s a school that is not one of the poorest in terms of its socio-economic level. Only a few of the pupils need extra help. [...] It is medium and even high-class. Our pupils even have mobile phones, MP3 players.”

“It has a shantytown. Social housing was set up so the bus passes by. Well, as soon as the shantytown opened, you could see it was really poor people. They came on foot, by bicycle from there. [...] So what happens is the schools from the region there, in Rio Branco, come because they have no vacancies there and they end up here.”

“When we start, we call them up and start individualised work with the pupil. We call them in and talk to them a lot.”

Example: “I had a case on Friday, of a pupil who came from there. Of course his life is already like that, oh, it’s not his father who looks after him, it’s an uncle who got hold of him to bring him up, who comes from inland, so he already comes from a life well... a curriculum well, you know. He began to fall out with everyone else in the class, it actually started in the playground. The kid was in the 6th year, he was 16 years old and he started to look at the girls from the 7th, 8th years,

and, you know, one day I'm in the playground and I heard a quarrel and said: what's going on? They said: — Ah, it's that guy who wants to start a fight. I separated them [...] I called him over and said: Look here, our school was never a school where fighting was allowed. The teachers sit down here, drink a coffee, they don't go running around. [...] If you don't like it — our school doesn't need you, it's not a private school that needs the fees to pay the teachers — you're here because we want you to be here. We don't want you here to do this. So if you want to stay, you have to learn to like the school. If you can't adapt in the playground to the others, the teachers, you have to look for a school where you feel good. Just looking at him would get him going. [...] We spent two months disciplining him, we talked to him and told him what he was responsible for. And he didn't stay here."

The departure of the pupil: "He went away. Nobody expelled him. We don't expel anyone, you see; [...] We talk the family round to realising that the pupil is not adapting to the school, that the climate is not good. We manage, by phone, to talk to another school — do you have a vacancy for the 6th grade?"

N. J. C. R.

"There's no difference in social class, we are all very similar in terms of social class, there are few exceptions. Really people have a very wide range in the first year, when they start, they come from schools like Rio Branco, here from the neighbourhood, from the other side of Niterói, from that Vila Fernandes, [...] and the first year is really very difficult. Until we show them the rules we have here, until you show the pupil that here in Guarani it's like this and there where they come from it's different. We don't discuss the merit of each school, but here this is how it works, you start at 7.40 am and leave at midday. There are rules, it's difficult, [...] and there are a lot who leave, you know? Who don't want to stick to the rules and end up leaving."

CULTURAL TRAINING AND PRACTICAL TEACHING

Theoretical knowledge acquired at university or through ongoing training

C. E. M.

"I think that it helped a lot. [...] Of course the theory helps a whole load. We work in line with a lot of theories."

"We have to renew our knowledge, I think you have to read a lot. I read a lot, we watch the news, things like that."

"We don't have time here in the school, because the courses are always during the week [...] you know that the state school is difficult, there is no replacement teacher."

"One which I never miss, that I always take part in is the Guidance that ULBRA gives every year."

N. J. C. R.

"My post-graduation is helping me much more than my degree training. Because my post-graduation made me change

the way I look at things a lot, understand people better and try and help them more than before; especially as in Psychopedagogy we work a lot on the relationship with others, to get to the essence of it."

"The public network offers something, seminars, meetings... this year a lot is happening. People are trying to organise things so our colleagues can go to the meetings, but it's difficult because whenever a colleague goes we are left without a teacher; therefore, we have to fill in, but we can't always arrange a free teacher to do this."

Knowledge acquired in the teaching practice and the difficulties of putting it into practice

C. E. M.

"We worked with teachers from the municipality of Porto Alegre, teachers from Gravataí, teachers from inland. Because 500 years ago a lot of people came to Brazil from all over the place, from the beach, from Tramandaí... That's where you see the reality of each municipality. [...] There each one arrives, reads and says, ah, but my school is like this, but mine is not like that..."

"When I left ULBRA, I left fresh as a daisy, you know, thinking that all would be roses. I arrived and we had a technique. [...] We are going full steam ahead with the programme and the time comes when obstacles appear, and you start to see that it's not as you thought."

N. J. C. R.

"The transversal themes and this concern lessened a lot, there was this concern but it's not so easy to put into practice. Very often a course of action is defined, a guiding principle, a theme, you know? But putting it into practice was not easy in the workplace."

Valuing teamwork

C. E. M.

"I think the team is everything. It's the heart of the school. [...]. We are very united and that helps us achieve things."

"A while ago, when I left here in the 8th grade, I was a primary school teacher and I did a whole load of things, the school began to fall apart and this assistant management and management saved it, you know? It would have been a school for crazy people, for criminals."

N. J. C. R.

"We have teachers here in school who work like this, making the pupils think and helping them be creative in what they are doing. Others are more traditional, the book, the chalk, the blackboard and let's go! And here in the school we have a lot of these two well defined lines of thinking by the teachers who work in order to get the pupil to think, create, read books, trying to get him to refine his knowledge and others who believe it is all there in place."

“Guarani, when I came here, had four hundred and something pupils, it was a small school and had only the basic schooling level. Hence, in the management carried out by my other colleague, who was the head — I was here assistant — we managed, with the aid of some parents, to get middle school up and running. The school was growing, was improving, Guarani grew. [...] I saw the school grow, I helped it improve, we have this affection, don’t we?”

Private life: The family cultural heritage and leisure activities

C. E. M.

“We go out a lot at night. We have a German group, we do Italian and German dances, the *chopp*. I’ve been the organiser, for ten years now; on the 20 October, we have the meeting to organise the German dance. So, every fortnight, from March to October, which is the month of the dance, we meet — there are 15 couples.”

N. J. C. R.

“We are fifty or so people and have more than one thousand pupils to look after and it’s difficult to stop thinking, but really I try to separate things. Weekend, separate things, family and home is not so difficult, but we go out a lot, travel.”

“I’m part of the Gaucho Traditions Centre, which is from the neighbourhood here.”

How does the teacher see her teaching practice

C. E. M.

“I treat them better than my own children, when I talk to them. Sometimes I spend two hours talking to each one of them and they say: teacher, I can’t talk like this to my own mother.”

“You have to love what you do and be prepared to love the profession [...] My life is more inside this school than in my house. If I don’t love what I do and if I don’t feel good where I work, I’m not going to be productive, I won’t do anything.”

N. J. C. R.

“The knowledge part gets pushed into the background. We try much more to work on the emotional side of the pupil, the education of the pupil, than the knowledge itself, although we try to teach that.”

“In the public school we have this aim of involving the pupils, which I don’t see in the private school; the management

here involves and gets to know its pupils and in private school it’s difficult for the head to involve himself and get to know the pupils.”

DESCRIPTION III

UNITS OF MEANING

The role of the family

Absent parents, children without limits and consumers.

Vision of public school

The school does not depend on the students to survive. Only those who adapt will be accommodated there.

Despite the difficulties, the public school teacher, overcoming hardship, motivated by affection (love), manages to provide an almost individualised service to the pupil, in contrast to the private school.

Inclusion and integration

The school does not include, it only integrates individuals who follow the previously established rules.

The role of cultural refinement

The list of leisure activities is no different to any other kind of professional.

Reading, going to the theatre, cinema, exhibitions, seminars, concerts, etc. are not part of their preferences that they describe as leisure.

How do their experiences of family life, university and work at school come together to construct their visions as educators

- a) The theory is necessary, but the knowledge that truly guides them is defined by the experience acquired throughout the teaching career.
- b) The teacher should stay up to date by reading or through the media (which is more important, and the kind of texts that should be read are not specified).
- c) Compartmentalised leisure. Outside the teaching environment they do not seek cultural activities that diversify or amplify the knowledge that can be used in teaching (e.g. reflecting on how a theatre play or film can be integrated into the activity).
- d) The teachers, at times, speak to their pupils in a way that their family should, pushing concerns about technical knowledge to the background.

CONSTRUCTING THE CONCLUSION

It is impossible to exhaust the possibilities afforded by the statements in a single article, even if extracting only the parts related to our goal. Therefore, in abandoning the quest to unveil all the meanings incorporated in the

statements, we discuss some aspects that lead us to construct some ideas about what we heard, transcribed and discussed.

The critical research cannot ignore that the speakers had a vested interest in the statements they provided to the researchers: they decided what to remember, what

History to relate, what to cut out, what to assemble, what to forget. In working with the individual one can gather his statement but one cannot dominate the process of production of his thinking, which involves internal mechanisms, both physical and psychological.

One has to point out, initially, that the people interviewed are still contracted to the institution, and are aware of the possible positive or negative effects of their statements. This issue must be taken into account by somebody who wants to look into the recent segment of the Institutional History. However, the risk of a certain toning down of the facts and relations, either subconsciously or purposely, does not invalidate the statements, as long as care is taken to analyse them in the light of this variable: affective and professional involvement, beyond the organisation of a memory immersed in places, people, relations and facts that generate it.

To understand a given dynamic in the narratives of people who still work in the institutions at the time of the interview, in one way or another relating them to the questions asked, as mentioned in the item in which we described the methodology, we took into consideration the *face* concept. We started from the assumption that, based on the general framework of face-to-face interaction, in which spoken texts are produced, the fact that one person comes into contact with another constitutes a breach of a pre-existing social balance, and therefore represents a virtual threat to the public self-image constructed by the participants in the conversation.

The particular circumstances in which the interviews are carried out led to the permanent need to save *face*, given that the people still worked in the institution that served as the support for reporting their experience.

Based on this circumstance, we now explore the aspects summarised in description III, extracting the details that can help to understand and frame the problem of the narrative(s).

Firstly, we highlight the categorical affirmation that the school does not depend on the students, along with the excerpts of the statements that describe situations which show that only pupils who adapt will remain there. In reality, in criticising the modern lifestyle: consumerism, absent parents owing to excessive work to sustain this very consumerism, the speakers, paradoxically, place the public school in the same logic that leads us, metaphorically, to allude to the place occupied by the modern and contemporary shopping centres in relation to the city: "(...) the shopping centre has an indifferent relation with the city around it: this city is always an external space, in the form of a racing track flanked by *favelas*, the main avenue, suburban neighbourhood or pedestrian street" (Sarilo, 2004, p. 16).

Hence, in this allusion the school would be a kind of shopping centre in relation to its external space — the community. The same community which is profusely

cited as a challenge to the educators to include it in the practices and actions carried out by the school institution. Indeed, if the school does not depend on the students coming from this external space, what would be the purpose of the school in locating itself in a given region or community? A simple strategic point to assemble an architecture with supposed pedagogical functions? If this was the case, the pedagogical actions would find meaning in what target public, if not that that outside of it?

However much one observes, equally, this school autonomy in relation to its exterior, it has historically proven to be contradictory in the teachers' discourses. Perhaps here we even find the relationship that is championed as so necessary in the construction of pedagogical goals that articulate relations with their exterior, with the community, in other words with the families of the students. Why aspire to foster a relationship with the exterior if in truth an effort is made for the school to keep its regimented distance from this same space? This is a wish that does not match the discourse revealed in the words of the speakers. Where do these ties start to break down, which suffocate and distance the school and the community?

Without attempting to exhaust these questions, others arise such as for example, the understanding about the acts to include and integrate derived from the fact that it is necessary, according to the narratives, that the student adapts to the school, its rules, its standards. Inclusion in the school space is understood as the radical change in the perspective of the educational task, not limiting itself to encompassing only the pupils who have some kind of physical or mental shortfall, but also dimensions that involve issues of a social, cultural, ethnic or economic nature, just to name a few, so as to achieve success as regards the learning provided by the school institution (Mantoan, 2003).

For this to happen, the school has to construct adaptation and accommodation strategies for the different pupils, valuing and allowing them to contribute towards helping the institution to mature and enhance its educational action. From this point of view, there is an inversion in the conception that the student should adapt to the school institution, whereby it is instead the institution that should seek alternatives to work with different pupils. Even so, the notion of integration, if applied in this context, ends up not being appropriate, given that the school remains rigid in sticking to its predefined rules and regulations, and the best thing the "foreign" (new) student can do is to adapt to it.

Two categories devised by Lévi-Strauss (1996) have become relevant again, contributing towards the understanding of this problem. The first is linked to the anthropophagic attitude that seeks in the process of assimilating the foreigner, the alternative to insertion and integration into the community. From this perspective,

the foreigner allows himself to be “devoured” and tries to transform his acts to blend into the instituted practices and standards in the receiving society/community. The second, anthropoemic, takes place when the resistance or difficulties do not permit the insertion, do not allow the “devouring” process to occur, and is subsequently expelled, or as is said in modern terms, the pupil is “invited” to find a place where he feels better and can adapt more successfully. This can even be done with the help of the (school) community itself which channels him away, far from them, or in the literal sense of the Lévi-Strauss category, the foreigner is “vomited”, expelled.

In relation to the role of cultural refinement, although we know the limitations inherent to any working method, and in this case, in the use of oral sources in research into education, and specifically in the universe of teacher education, some characteristics are observed that call for more careful analysis. As such, in seeking to link the issue of inclusion to the cultural instruction of the teacher, the starting point is the finding that the list of leisure activities undertaken reported by the teachers interviewed did not set them apart from any other professional category — reading, going to theatres, cinema, exhibitions, seminars, concerts, etc. — were not on their lists of preferences. Two lines of thinking come to the fore to understand this observation. On the one hand, the cultural practices within the scope of an official perspective of cultural manifestations and productions; on the other, the very notion of culture as a concept that serves as the basis for the vision about the everyday options of the educators. Without attempting to be prescriptive, we believe it may be productive, considering the role of the teacher in educating the younger generations and the valuing of classical production and recognition of the importance of the traditions of a people, for educators to reflect on the scarcity of the different cultural practices. The idea here is to find a way of articulating and valuing these cultural practices without creating a process of establishing hierarchies that puts person one on a higher level than another, but to align and acknowledge both in accordance with what Cuéllar (1997, p. 109) describes as the “strengthening of the identity of the group and the social and community organisation; the production of cultural energy; overcoming inferiority complexes and alienation; education and raising awareness; encouragement of creativity and innovation; stimulus of the democratic discourse and social mediation”.

The second line of thinking forces up to take up the notion of culture. To do so, in an effort to be concise, without wanting to underestimate the complexity of the

debate that has been raging for over a century concerning this notion, we cling to two perspectives. In the first, culture is seen as an instrumental function in the process of development, and is therefore transformed into a consumption good, or even, simply as a means to lever development. In a second, the notion of culture, without excluding its contribution to the development of societies, gains emphasis and value in itself, conferring a meaning to our existence, therefore development is thought of as an important element for the cultural growth of a community (Cuéllar, 1997).

Finally, analysing how teachers bring together their experiences of family life, university and work at school to construct their vision of educators, we highlight that in their points of view the theory taught at university is necessary, but the knowledge that truly guides them is defined by the experience acquired throughout their teaching career. The assumption of experience usurping the academic training and the contributions of the theoretical world is borne out in the narratives. It is stressed, however, that the contributions are not rejected, but the emphasis is placed firmly on the experience that is forged in the field about the teaching action. This affirmation is constantly present in the narratives of the educators. Likewise in another study (Silva & Penna, 2007) this aspect was found in an even more accentuated form. Underlying this, recent studies have corroborated this emphasis on experience right from the process of the initial training onwards with students taking pedagogy courses, where the request for work that involves practice and enables the accumulation of experience is anticipated by the appropriation of the theoretical knowledge (Bukowitz, 2003; Lelis, 2001; Silva, 2007; Teixeira & Cuyabano, 2004).

What is at stake is the resumption of the discussion about what role theory occupies for the transformation of social practices, especially educational practices. Hidden in this is the idea that theory does not manage to bring about change, but rather contributes towards a better understanding of the problems experienced in everyday life in practice, which in turn will lead to an effective and gradual change in the actions, therefore establishing a correlation between the two of them (Lelis, 2001).

As well as this reflexive essay triggered by the narratives described in this project, other aspects emerge in a more concealed form which merit being followed up, such as the question of the assumption by the teacher of what roles should be fulfilled by the family, or, deriving from the same question, the resumption of the discussion about the processes of professionalisation of the teaching act.

ENDNOTES

1. This study was carried out with the support of the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development — Brazil.

2. We advocate transparency in the use of oral sources. As such, the interviews in their entirety are available at the Historical Archive and the La Salle Museum, which turns them from statements into historical sources. The research is ongoing, hence the selection of the two interviews used in this project prioritised the longest-serving primary school educators, who also carry out management roles. The analysis carried out is restricted to the data obtained from the two interviews used.

3. Goffman names *face* the social expression of the individual's identity, and calls representation processes (face-work) the procedures to neutralize threats (real or potential) to the individual in social interaction, or to restore face when having lost status.

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