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Teaching: What is Constant and What is not Consolidated in The Social Representation

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Abstract

This paper uses a dimensional and structural analysis of representations to discuss how teachers' work is envisaged by a group of students of higher education who are studying to become teachers. Resulting from the research that was conducted there is a representation of teacher as a professional of education and knowledge and of teaching as a profession in which the instructional component is the permanent and core element whereas non-teaching activities are perceived as something which is not consolidated, except for the purpose of reinforcing the stable traits. The contents and the structure of such a representation question not only the role of training in terms of innovation but also the conditions under which changes are implemented.

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1. Introduction

1.1. The teacher: a profession undergoing change

Over the last decades the terms in which the teaching profession is exercised have undergone a major change. Additionally, the mission of the school is becoming increasingly extensive and complex. Teachers' work, traditionally perceived in terms of teaching hours (Maroy, 2006), has changed to include several non-teaching activities such as managing and administrative activities among others. Two core ideas mentioned by Maroy seem to be confirmed by the present situation. On the one hand, the feeling that teachers are losing their sense of autonomy and that the working conditions are deteriorating, as seen in the "intensification, diversification and

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complexification" of teacher's work (more actual working hours, an increasingly complex and difficult management process, diversification of roles and tasks at school). On the other hand, the confirmation that the proposals of reformers are not always welcomed by teachers, stalling attitudes and behaviours which have long been catalogued as "resistance" to change.

1.2. Objectives of the paper

The aim of this paper is to uncover the way future teachers foresee teachers' work by addressing their representations. These representations are considered crucial for the interpretation and outline of the professional activity of teachers and for their role in guiding and supporting teacher action. In order to attain this objective the paper was structured around three different axes: Teacher's work as social construction, the specific dimensions of teachers' work and, finally, the changes that have occurred as a result of the consolidation of the concept of "school for the masses" Two activities took place simultaneously: on the one hand, the identification of the elements included in the representations of teachers' work, which define its specific nature, as well as of the way they are organised; on the other hand, the questioning of the influence that the scientific contents conveyed by academic training has in the representations of these future teachers, of the orientation towards action seen in these representations and of the understanding of the specific characteristics that underlie the building of their professional identity.

2. Methodology

2.1. Definition and characterisation of the sample

The subjects of the research were selected based on the direct relationship that the members of the research team had with their students. The subjects were 96 individuals who attended undergraduate degrees in Teaching. Almost all were enrolled in the second academic year and most of them were women. The subjects attended the following courses: Childhood Education, Basic education (1st Cycle), Biology and Geology Education, Mathematics Education and Music Education.

2.2. Outline of the research

In this research paper there is a *descriptive concern* with the content of the representations, starting from its roots in the tradition developed by Denise Jodelet (2005), and resorting to the Central Nucleus Theory, originally used by Abric (2008). The aim is to know what is included in the representations that future teachers have of teachers' work using two approaches: a dimensional approach, which includes the contents of the representation, its understanding as a "structured field of meanings, knowledge and information (Arruda, 2002, p. 140) and a structural approach, which focuses on the search for "elementary structures that are the core of the representation system around which it is organised" (Arruda, 2002, p. 140). Such an approach allows one to know the contents and the structure of the representation, while enabling the analysis of the processes underlying its formation, of its intrinsic logic and its possible transformation based on the discourse or the behaviour of the subjects (Sá, 1998). Throughout the paper an *extensive characterization* of the representations prevailed and one sought information in the behaviour and discourse of the participants.

2.3. Information collection and processing

Two instruments were used in the collection of the data used: the survey questionnaire and evocation/word association. The questionnaire embodied the dimensional component of the analysis and focused on how the subjects envisaged the factors that influence the learning of their future students, the motivation for teaching, their family and friends' opinion regarding their career choice and the job which is closest to that of a teacher. The "free evocation technique" was developed according to the framework of the Central Nucleus Theory. The goal was to capture the structure of the social representations in the said nucleus. Initially, the individuals were asked to come up

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